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INCLUSIVE EFL INSTRUCTION IN RURAL NEPAL USING ICT: STORIES OF BASIC-LEVEL TEACHERS

*Rajan Kumar Kandel*¹ , *Resham Bahadur Bista*^{2*} 

¹*Surkhet Multiple Campus, TU, Surkhet*

²*Graduate School of Humanities and Social Science, Mid-West University, Nepal*

**Corresponding Author: resham.bista@mu.edu.np*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the perceptions and experiences of basic-level English teachers (BLETs) regarding the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for students' inclusion in EFL instruction in remote schools of Nepal. This study adopted a narrative inquiry approach to elicit the stories of four committed English teachers of remote schools in the Karnali Province, Nepal. The data were collected through interviews and classroom observations using semi-structured interview guidelines and a classroom observation protocol. The study revealed that BLETs use ICT as a tool for maintaining students' autonomous and inclusive participation in EFL classes. Their ICT tools integrated teaching created an equitable teaching and learning environment, even in resource-constrained settings. Additionally, findings indicated that the use of ICT in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom strengthened inclusivity related to personal, social, gender, ethnic, and (dis)ability variability of the learners in their classes. The study contributes to understanding ICT-supported inclusive practices in resource-constrained EFL contexts.

Keywords: Digital tools, English as a foreign language, inclusivity, persons with disabilities, students' motivation

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary educational practices focus on inclusion and motivation for all learners in learning globally. Inclusion, in this study, refers

to the “practice of ensuring that all learners, regardless of their background or abilities, are provided with equal opportunities to learn and participate in the classroom community” (Elmahdi *et al.*, 2024, p. 128). It provides equal opportunities for all students regardless of their gender, race, colour, social ranking, socio-economic status, personality, physical appearance, disability, medical needs, or special needs. Inclusion, in education, emphasizes the need for accessible learning environments without othering and discrimination that accommodate diverse learners (United Nations, 2006). Additionally, it also recognizes the role of positive discrimination in addressing structural inequalities among students. Therefore, inclusive education adopts teaching methods and materials to meet the needs of diverse students, promoting a sense of belonging and community within the classroom (UNICEF, 2025).

Inclusivity engages all students in the process of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) despite the diversity. It enables students to concentrate on learning and actively engage in classroom participation, which later leads to cumulative learning of educational results. This also enables all the students to feel valued and appreciated among their friends. Therefore, inclusivity enables the reduction of the students’ burden and learning limitations related to the acquisition of the English language skills and structures in a natural way. Moreover, inclusivity encourages the well-informed readiness and willingness to increase the acquisition and development of knowledge on the part of the students, which is internally driven through the students’ own interests or externally through certain rewards (Ushioda, 2011). There are numerous techniques for teachers to motivate students into the classroom for the English language acquisition. ICT application in the classroom is a very important tool in the process of motivation, and active engagement and involvement of the students across different cultural backgrounds and learning attitudes. The ICT tools, such as web resources, applications, learning platforms, and digitally tailored tools for personal and collaborative learning, enhance inclusive education through individualized and collective learning (Elmahdi *et al.*, 2024).

Integration of ICT in EFL Instruction

ICT has now become a part of everyday life and thus woven the fabric of language learning, as mentioned by Naqvi and Al Mahrooqi (2016). It is extensively used in the arena of English language teaching and learning. Within the framework of inclusive EFL pedagogy, the role

of ICT in teaching and learning is evolving, where learners' technological skills may at times exceed those of educators, leading to beneficial role changes (Powell & Powell, 2016). ICTs improve the engagement of learners and assist all students to participate at their own level in mixed-ability heterogeneous classrooms. It also supports the diverse cognitive and physical needs of students. Rank *et al.* (2011) claim that ICT helps the learners to analyze the language, respond, compose, create, interpret, present, transform, communicate, collaborate, engage, inspire, and entertain through the use of a wide range of technology in and outside the classroom. Following Crystal (2006), the internet has transformed the traditional ways of learning and teaching languages through the use of virtual augmentation, social media, instant messaging, blogging, and other computer-mediated communication.

At present, many of the teachers and the students use social media for personal, social, or academic purposes. They can also be brought for teaching and learning. Just by using social media alone, the teachers can present the content more effectively to the students. In the words of Allam and Elyas, “teachers around the world understand the impact of social media and the numerous advantages they can bring to the EFL classroom, especially the reading and writing skills” (2016, p. 7). The students may learn without even noticing that they are learning if social media and technological tools are used for academic and instructional purposes. Modern trends of instruction demand the utilization of advanced apparatus or innovative tools such as computers, smartphones, projectors, interactive whiteboards, language-learning applications, multimedia content, and internet-based platforms to make teaching more effective. ICT in education has grown into an absolute necessity, as it enables interactive learning, broadens access to authentic language resources, and increases learner engagement, particularly in EFL classrooms (Kandel, 2025).

In the Nepalese context, the use of ICT is emerging in the field of teaching and learning. The government policies also vividly articulate the use of ICT in education to ensure education quality. This has been taken as a way to liberate conventional teaching methods and techniques for ensuring learner-focused, interactive teaching. We can easily notice that the policy of “the government of Nepal emphasizes the need to develop ICT competencies and suggests the use of ICT will transform traditional models of teaching to ones that are student-centred” (Rana *et al.*, 2018, p. 149). The schools and the classrooms are being made ICT-friendly slowly

and gradually in this line. It enables educators to perform more vividly and motivate students in active and engaged learning through multimodal exercises. Consequently, the use also allows students to share their insights and tackle difficult learning issues through a self-guided learning approach.

Although “ICTs and the internet are only physical tools, which themselves cannot bring any changes or benefits to students, teachers, and communities at large” (Kandel, 2014, p. 33), it should be used in the classroom appropriately by teachers and engage students properly. ICT instruments are the tools in the hands of teachers and students to use for academic and social benefit, regardless of their limitations. Researchers suggest that “ICT equipment needs to be maintained and that teachers must help each other in managing the challenges ICT brings into the classroom” (Postholm, 2007, p. 597). It implies that the operational gap extends beyond teachers’ peers or their classmates. Expert mentoring, peer collaborations, self-regulated learning, and the insights obtained from reflective learning provide them opportunities to use ICT for teaching and learning (Kandel & Raskoti, 2025). Subsequently, ICT-integrated teaching and learning improve EFL instruction through individualized, autonomous, interactive and inclusive contributions across diverse learners in different classroom settings.

The use of ICT in the classroom encourages independent learning, enabling learners to think critically despite a short list of disadvantages, such as it demands a large expenditure, it makes users mechanical and robotic, misguides with inappropriate content, is a source of distraction and a waste of time. Its wrong use may also lead to cheating, cyberbullying, and disconnecting the users from the real-world social affairs. In pedagogic contexts, Shatri (2020) noted that while ICT offers numerous advantages, it also comes with certain disadvantages, such as a lack of concentration in class and a significant loss of time. Despite the abundant benefits and opportunities of ICT-integrated teaching and learning, users should be aware that its negative consequences must be scrutinized and avoided or at least reduced to a minimum. However, studies report that the use of ICT in EFL instruction has revolutionized teaching and learning models. ICT use has promoted cooperation and positive competition among the students, and it has enabled them to learn even from their own mistakes and positive competition with their friends (Kandel, 2014, 2015, 2023). Even though the need for ICT in instruction has been acknowledged in the policy and

practice levels, its effective usage has been influenced by various obstacles and snags.

Advantages like frequent communication with the teachers, peers, and parents pave better guidance and encouragement for the students. In a way, this has been an essential tool to know, recall, and learn about anything, including the learners' school or even family history. In this regard, Postholm mentions, "situations may arise that exceed the possibilities ICT offers, as when the pupil wanted to find information about his grandmother" (2007, p. 597). Besides this, ICT can bring fun to the EFL classroom, and students are exposed to a huge amount of information that anyone cannot have imagined otherwise. Teachers are nowadays much inclined to the use of the internet and ICT for teaching and learning purposes, even when they have not acquired the substantial skills to operate them

Use of ICT Tools for Promoting Students' Inclusion

ICT-integration in EFL classrooms is crucial in enhancing students' motivation and fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments. It also helps reduce learning barriers of students with disabilities by using learning tools such as screen readers, subtitles, and online resources. Various studies have been conducted to explore how ICT tools promote inclusion and motivation in EFL instruction. As mentioned by Rizqi *et al.* (2025), ICT-integrated teaching enhances student motivation through interactively engaging learning activities. Students showed greater interest and participation in learning activities when ICT tools were incorporated into the teaching and learning. Similarly, studies claim that the use of ICT enhances EFL students' motivation and makes learning easier (Genç & Aydin, 2010; Kandel, 2023). In some specific circumstances, for instance, female EFL students became more motivated to use ICT than their male friends in the Arabian context while learning English (Alakrash & Razak, 2019). In a similar vein, in the Iranian EFL context, the study of Kalanzadeh *et al.* (2014) identified students' positive attitude toward the integration of ICT tools for their multimodal and comprehensible learning. The study also revealed a strong connection between language-learning motivation and the use of technology. The study of Kreutz and Rhodin (2016) also highlighted the role of ICT in enhancing students' learning experiences through technology-mediated learning practices because it heightened students' satisfaction and preserved emotional well-being and pedagogical ease.

Additionally, ICT promotes inclusivity in the classroom, as it supports the hesitant, reluctant, and shy students, especially from disadvantaged groups, to participate in classroom activities. For instance, research has revealed that “Female students have the highest level of utilization of ICT facilities compared to male students in tertiary institutions in Ondo State” (Victor & Bolanle, 2017, p. 2375), while it is the other way round in day-to-day interaction in the classroom. ICT can also facilitate the students to participate in the shared events and sports, and other extracurricular activities inside and outside the classroom (even school) premises. Similarly, Mejía-Salazar *et al.*'s (2023) findings revealed that ICT is seen as a powerful tool for transforming education and fostering gender inclusion in the classroom. Female students of her study highly valued the use of ICT in the learning process. They believed that ICT provides relevant information and enhances the learning experience. Moreover, Riga and Malafantis (2024) highlighted the benefits of using educational videos to support inclusive education, which helped students with special needs, along with other students, in developing their communicative competence. Moreover, they also mentioned that videos related to education are powerful pedagogical tools for meaningful learning.

The use of ICT in education is also prioritized by Nepal's national policies. However, studies to explore the issues in remote areas of Nepal regarding learners' inclusion and engagement are limited, although the lack of infrastructure, ICT training and practice in rural schools is highly acknowledged. Nepali primary-level education has experienced insufficient teacher training and substantial ICT support in rural primary schools (Rana *et al.*, 2018). Nevertheless, the potential of ICT to provide inclusive and engaging learning opportunities is largely underexplored. Against this backdrop, this study aims to fill these gaps. It focuses on the impact of ICT integration on EFL instruction in Nepal's remote basic schools as experienced by the teachers. It also examines the benefits and challenges of its use in promoting an inclusive and participatory learning environment in EFL instruction.

Research Questions

This study has addressed the following research questions:

R1: How do basic-level English teachers foster inclusion across personal, social, gender, and disability dimensions in the classrooms?

R2: In what ways does the integration of ICT facilitate inclusive pedagogical practices in rural EFL classrooms?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a narrative enquiry as a research design to draw basic-level English teachers' (BLETs') personal stories for bringing inclusive instruction using ICT. In this regard, narrative inquiry employed storytelling and story construction as means to explore, interpret, and shed light on the teachers' lived experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Consoli & Darnault, 2025). It provided researchers with a rich framework to investigate BLETs' experience of using ICT for students' inclusion in EFL classes through their narrated stories (Mertova & Webster, 2019). Four BLETs were purposively selected as participants, including one male and three female teachers aged 30-40 years from four schools. They had five to fifteen years of teaching experience in basic schools in Karnali province of Nepal. They taught English from grades three to eight. In narrative inquiry, a small number of participants is sufficient for data collection because it emphasizes in-depth and rich data through in-depth interviews and observation and contextual interpretation rather than generalizability (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2024; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Consoli & Darnault, 2025). The selection of four participants in this study enabled in-depth analysis of their individual accounts while also presenting diverse perspectives on inclusive pedagogy using ICT in their schools (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). The use of multiple cycles of in-depth interviewing and classroom observation was used to create narrative data. The teachers' narratives were built and reconstructed from recording interviews, transcribing, analyzing the interview transcripts and observation notes and interpreting the data (McCormack, 2004). The data in this study were based on the first author's M.Phil. thesis in English Education at Nepal Open University (Kandel, 2023).

Data Collection Tools and Analysis Procedure

For the data collection, semi-structured interviews and classroom observation were used as the main tools for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived stories and personal experiences. These tools provided direction to assist the researcher in constructing, co-constructing, and reconstructing the BLETs' lived subjective experiences. As Richards (2003) explains, interviews are more than information retrieval; they are a means to access the depth and multi-layered meanings of a phenomenon

through conversational exchange. Further data were also collected through classroom observations. Each BLET's class was observed three times, and using Cohen *et al.* (2018) social situation observation framework, primary data were collected. The observations captured student participation, movement, and teaching strategies which also served to corroborate the narratives obtained during the interviews.

Data were analyzed with a three-stage technique: initial coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Gupta, 2023; Strauss, 1990; Zairul, 2025). In the initial coding stage, we analyzed the interview transcripts and observation field notes to capture how BLETs employed various pedagogical uses of ICT to promote inclusion and motivate students. Initial codes were initially assigned based on the language and wording of the BLETs such as the use of videos for engagement, technology-augmented supportive peer collaboration, and accessibility through subtitles. In the axial coding stage, we clustered open codes according to the patterns of one or multiple relationships around a theme of conditions, actions, and outcomes, such as ICT as a motivational tool, ICT-mediated participation, and teacher adaptability

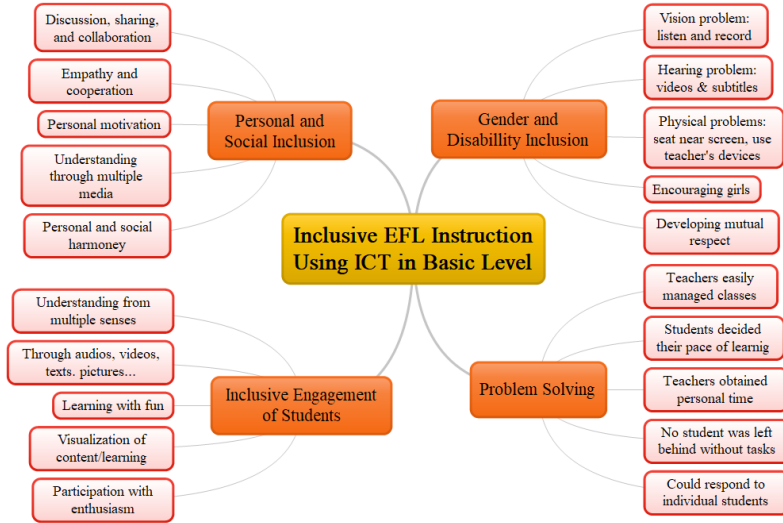
The final themes were completed through constant comparison and reflection over several iterations and data sources (Morgan & Nica, 2020). We reexamined the preliminary themes by referring to the transcripts and observation notes to determine whether they adequately covered the empirical data. Themes were consolidated when there were overlaps. Themes were revised or removed when they became superficial. The analysis achieved saturation when there were no new themes to represent the participants' experiences, and when themes were adequately and fully developed (Neale, 2016). The thematic map of the study is presented in Figure 1.

As illustrated in Figure 1 the thematic map illustrates how the BLETs practised inclusion in EFL instruction. Personal and social inclusion included empathy, collaboration, and social cohesion through interaction and multimodal learning. Gender and disability inclusion consisted of the devoted practices and assistive technologies (subtitles, hearing aids, teacher devices) that encourage participation of girls and learners with disabilities. The inclusion of the students is an indication of ICT to construct a learning experience that is delightful, multisensory, and participatory, thus generous. Last, problem-solving incorporates how ICT gave EFL teachers the tools

necessary to help students of diverse classrooms, for addressing students' individual learning needs and assuring that each student is accounted for in the learning to avoid any sort of exclusion.

Figure 1

Thematic map of the study



Ethical Consideration and Researcher Positionality

Ethical approval for the study was garnered from the Social Science and Educational Research Ethics Committee (SSEREC), Nepal Open University. During the collection of data, all ethical principles were upheld. Notifications of the ethical protocols were sent to the heads of the institutions and the study participants, including details and were subsequently provided with a printed sheet to declare their voluntary participation with signatures. Audio recordings of the interviews were done with the participants' approval, and they were reminded of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time. Pseudonyms were used for all participants and the institutions they represented, arbitrarily, to protect their identities. Accountability was demonstrated through data transparency and member checks, wherein participants were provided the study transcripts for their approval. We preserved various roles during the study: insiders, outsiders, and in between, while collecting and interpreting data (Goundar,

2025) strategically. In the meantime, we also followed the American Psychological Association (2020) publication manual to ensure ethical conduct in the study and the guidelines of Qin (2016), Creswell and Creswell (2018), and Cohen *et al.* (2018) to build rapport, facilitate open dialogue, and interpret data accurately. This set of structures of ethical planning and positionality helped us navigate the study within the stipulated design.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Qualitative research relies primarily on credibility, dependability, and confirmability to build trust. In this study, trust was built by following discipline and exemplifying rigor in all steps of the research process from data collection to finalizing the manuscript. Building credibility was achieved by the informal interactions and meetings the researcher held with the BLETs before the interviews and classroom observations. In addition, triangulation was performed by gathering data from the interviews and observations. Member checking was performed by the participant BLETs on the interview transcripts. A peer researcher (second author) and the supervisor of the study examined the research process to corroborate dependability and confirmability. The participant experiences reported in the interviews and observed in the classrooms were compared to verify consistency between them. Accuracy of the data was achieved through a number of iteration processes with the participants to ensure that the reconstructed experiences were true to their original meanings and intent (Naeem *et al.*, 2023). Finally, interview findings and notes of observations were triangulated by direct comparison (Lim, 2025).

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

BLETs were asked to discuss their experiences pertaining to the use of ICT to achieve greater inclusion among students in their classes. Saanvi, a teacher from Jyoti Primary School, was quite specific about the use of ICT to include all types of students in their classrooms. She also stressed the need of similar inclusion in school activities in students' homes by their parents. In addition, Kadambini, an English teacher from Samata Basic School, was specific about the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms with the use of ICT integration. In specific, she focused on the inclusion of hearing-impaired students in their classrooms. Similar to them, Maalini, an English teacher from Gurukul Secondary School, highlighted the significance of using ICT to include students in their classrooms. She emphasized audiovisual methods such as cartoons and videos, which proved

to be helpful in including students from diverse backgrounds. David, an English teacher from Bheri Secondary School shared a similar view about students' inclusion in EFL classrooms with their personal and context-specific aspects. Their stories reflected the ways of using ICT to promote students' inclusion in unique ways in remote areas of Nepal.

Personal or Individual Inclusion

As the finding of the study highlighted, teachers used ICT to induce personal or individual inclusion of the students in EFL teaching and learning practices. They used various ICT tools, such as mobile devices, for the inclusion of students in the EFL classes. These tools reformed the personal behaviors of students who were shy to speak and actively engaged in the classes. In this regard, David stated, "My students do not know much English. They are shy and do not speak in class. But they speak when I give a mobile for recording". Similarly, Maalini added, "They come near to me to see videos. They smile and come nearer. I can understand their feelings". Many other instances in the subsequent themes below also depict the instances of personal and individualized addresses of the teachers to ensure inclusive, even-handed, and all interactive activities in their respective classrooms.

Social Inclusion

Additionally, digital technologies supported students to become sociable together, creating equal opportunities for collaboration that transcended social differences. As Kadambini shared: "All students sit together. Share their tasks. Watch on the screen. Help each other when listening, watching, or recording. One person holds a mobile other speaks. ICT brought them together more. Earlier, they worked separately, now together". The incorporation of ICT allowed students to engage them in collective tasks equally. As stated by Saanvi, "Their families are different. They say stories together, looking at the pictures or muted videos. It strengthened their bonds. Dalit, Janajati, others, no matter". Maalini also had a similar experience regarding the equity in learning progress of students after using the ICT tools in class. She stated: "All Magar, Tharu, and Nepali students learnt English more easily than earlier". The inclusion of diverse student backgrounds, such as Dalit, Janajati, and others, further strengthened their social bonds. ICT fostered these types of social cohesion, which created a space where cooperation and mutual support thrive.

Gender Inclusion

ICT also brought significant change in gender dynamics in EFL classrooms. An important aspect of gender inclusion emerged after the use of mobile devices in the classroom. In this issue, Kadambini noted a significant change in female students' participation when mobile devices were used. She highlighted, "Girls do not speak much in my class. When I give mobile, they speak to record answer. I play it. Other students clap. It raised their voice". The boys also supported and praised the girls' contributions, demonstrating a shift toward more equitable classroom interactions. Kadambini added, "Girl activities are more in ICT used classes. They speak, share, and collaborate. Boys also praise girls' tasks and cooperation". ICT tools created a culture of mutual respect and reinforced gender equality in the classroom.

Disability Inclusion

Additionally, technology was also beneficial for students with disabilities for their equal inclusion in the classroom. For instance, students with vision problems were able to listen to audio recordings, repeat and play back lessons, while those with hearing impairments benefited from videos with subtitles. In this regard, Maalini stated, "It is very helpful for them. Vision problem students listen to audio. Repeat. record, play back and listen. Hearing problem students watch videos, animated stories and lessons, subtitles sometimes in English, sometimes in Nepali or their home language". Similarly, Saanvi shared her experience: "It is easier for physical problems students also. They sit near screen, friends, and we [teachers] bring mobiles, microphones, recorders near to them. They feel warm to click the words for meaning". This adaptive use of technology in teaching provided an equal opportunity for students with physical disabilities to interact with learning materials.

Inclusive for Transformative Engagement of Students

ICT enhances the active engagement of students in the class. Aligning with this issue, BLET's reflection revealed the transformative role of ICT in enhancing student inclusion in the classroom. They employed the technology in the classroom to support inclusivity in students' learning engagement. David highlighted the importance of ICT for student equal engagement:

Yes, we can use ICT to engage the students. We (silence) um... um... we can play video songs um... and other audio of lessons for the students to engage in the class. Umm... yes, I encourage them. Umm... I encourage reluctant students to learn. I manage them to sit on the in front bench. I tell them to do better. I give them for their work. I support their work.

Similarly, Saanvi shared, “Once I started using ICT in teaching, they learned from their multiple senses. It helped me motivate and involve all types of students in class discussions.” Regarding the significance of ICT, Kadambini clarified:

If we describe them something it doesn’t remain in their mind for a long time. If they learn with the help of ICT, they visualize it in their mind. Once I taught the students about a lady pilot in class three, playing a video. Students were inspired and knew ladies could also be pilots. Girls were encouraged more. So, teaching through ICT makes learning long-lasting. The students recall it for long, and learning becomes durable.

Their observation reflected that students are interested in engaging with mobile devices in the classroom equally. As Maalini shared, “The students like to play on mobile. The children observe that the teacher has a mobile in her hand or not. There I show video and in audio they listen to animal sounds and learn pronunciation”. The students’ attention towards mobile highlights their strong attraction to mobile technology. Maalini’s act of using videos and audio in class to teach animal sounds and pronunciation reflected a significant role of ICT in the equal learning process of students. For students, the mobile becomes a bridge between entertainment and learning, creating an equal opportunity for all in the classes.

On the other hand, David presented a logistical view of using ICT. He highlighted the management of resources and the involvement of external stakeholders, such as parents, in using ICT in inclusive teaching. He added:

For positive learning of students, we have to manage ICT subject teachers and manage teaching materials for children. I have to even request parents for supporting their children’s study through making help in operating mobile, radio, and TV. My students are using ICT for communication. Some students talk with me in messenger. They are small. So, they are not using it for advanced learning purposes now.

As stated by David, parental involvement facilitates effective ICT-based learning, especially for younger students who may not be as familiar with

the technology. The collaboration between parents and teachers is essential to ensure that students have the right guidance and support in navigating ICT tools. Then, it is easy to create equal opportunity for all in the classes.

Moreover, students themselves became active contributors to the learning process by sharing their work through ICT tools. Regarding the active use of ICT in sharing students' work, David stated, "Sometimes, they also share their work in videos, audios, pictures, drawings, and worksheets on my messenger from their parents' mobiles. I share it with all the students in class. It is very interesting. Also motivates others. Everyone likes showing in class with others". This practice of sharing students' work through their parents' mobiles to teachers encouraged others to engage more actively in their studies.

ICT for Resolving Classroom Problems

The classroom observation records revealed the effective management of ICT tools by teachers in remote basic schools of Nepal in less sophisticated classroom settings. Kadambini's classroom, for instance, had a large area with computers (some of them were out of use), tables, and chairs at the back of the room covering half of the space. At the front half, there were a few cushions on a warm carpet. The students sat in orderly rows on the cushions on the carpet. The project banner and the whiteboard were fixed on the wall at the front center. The teacher sat at the back of the students with a laptop for projection. It helped the teacher to notice students' activities while the students listened and watched the teacher and the project banner, and did the activities assigned. Students were brought to this room for the use of ICT because other classes (and their usual classes) were not well equipped for ICT use; even the electricity supply was not available in all the rooms. In this context, Kadambini created an inclusive environment strategically. She sat herself behind the students and projected lessons at the front. She observed every student's participation in the class. She provided equal access to digital resources and ensured active involvement of all students. She fostered a sense of belonging and shared learning in a resource-constrained setting.

Similarly, the first author witnessed how Maalini created an inclusive learning environment despite her personal and practical challenges. The classroom observation, for instance, showed that Maalini entered the class with her baby. While she was teaching, the baby started to cry. She stood up and shook her to soothe her baby, but she could not. She had to go

out of the class to breastfeed the baby to soothe and calm him down the baby. She told the students to briefly describe the dog after watching its picture on the computer screen during her absence from the class. Despite her absence, students tried their best, engaged and were motivated in the classwork due to the ICT. Otherwise, they could have made noise and may not have completed the task/classwork the teacher assigned. She came out after five minutes. She listened to the answer of the students, telling them to read under the same conditions. As she was then presenting the lesson on the screen for the second time, she could not continue it further because of the power cut. She stopped the lesson and started asking a few questions about the picture. The first author enquired about her problem outside the class and knew that her 21-month-old baby had been sick for the last three to four days. She did not have anyone to babysit her at her home. Most often, other female teachers babysat at their respective leisure, so she did not bring the baby to the class in the earlier observed periods. This scene made us realize the female teacher's adaptability, empathy, and thoughtful use of technology fostered inclusivity in classroom. She managed her teaching effectively, inspiring her students to cooperate, show empathy, and take responsibility for their learning. At the same time, she also balanced her role as a mother.

In David's classroom, ICT continues to play a vital part in the student-inclusive learning process. First, the pupils listened to the text at various speeds and viewed the text in magnified, highlighted, and color differentiated fonts on the screen. Then, they loudly repeated in unison when the text was played at regular speed. The question-answer session between the teacher and the students allowed teachers to ask comprehension questions, word meaning, pronunciation, and sentence structure. He also conducted different types of drills and provided feedback to student queries. The pictures, textual definition of the words, and illustrative audio and visual (textual) examples helped students understand meanings through the built-in multimodal dictionary of the ReadToMe software. They read the text while it was played without sound. The learners could also read the highlighted words as they appeared larger than the normal font. By using these multiple modalities in learning, David was able to create an inclusive learning environment where all his students could engage actively. His teaching strategy was all about making his classroom an environment where learning occurred through effective technology-supported instruction.

During the classroom observations, it was evident that when teachers used ICT tools creatively in the classroom, it facilitated an inclusive, participatory, and motivational learning environment even in classrooms with limited resources. Students enjoyed learning with the use of ICT tools and resources. Consequently, the BLETs were in a position to provide an inclusive learning classroom. However, English teachers faced challenges in managing familial, parental (as a nursing mother, for example) and instructor responsibilities amid the infrastructural constraints in rural schools of Nepal.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that ICT tools support in making an inclusive learning environment in EFL teaching in remote schools of Nepal. The learners enjoyed learning through ICT tools such as mobile phones and multimedia. As discussed in the experiences of BLETs, all learners actively and equally contribute to the class because of the support of ICT tools. This supports the findings of Rizqi *et al.* (2025), which stated that the integration of ICT in the EFL teaching process increased learners' motivation to an extent that they enjoy the class, as the interaction would be fun. Similarly, Hodovanets and Lehan (2025) also clarified the importance of "ICT tools to create a dynamic and participatory learning environment and fostering motivation and knowledge retention" (p. 407).

In addition, findings of this study showed that BLETs play a significant role in promoting gender inclusion through the use of ICT. The ICT-integrated classes make female students more confident and interactive, who were once hesitant to participate in the classes. This finding relates to the findings of Mejía-Salazar *et al.* (2023). In their findings, ICT tools are useful to promote gender equality by creating equal space for all in the classroom. As their finding further stated, ICT promotes an inclusive learning environment where both male and female students can participate actively. Besides improving access to education, ICT creates equal opportunities and intersectional inclusion of all students in the classroom, contributing to gender, racial, disability, and other diversity inclusion for equal learning practices. However, the teachers' efforts were central to ensuring a sustainable, inclusive environment in the classroom. Moreover, the study's findings revealed the BLETs' sensitivity in the inclusion of students with disabilities in the classrooms. They provided equal access to vision and hearing-impaired students through the use of audio, video,

textual, and interactive tasks that were not possible through traditional teaching practice. This finding mirrors Bjekić *et al.* (2014), who found that ICT has been a supportive tool for students with special needs in the classroom. However, the success of such inclusion in the classes depends on the teacher's active facilitation, coordination, and adaptive strategies (Kandel, 2024, 2025). ICT alone cannot ensure inclusivity unless teachers creatively integrate it into their pedagogy to accommodate individual differences.

Moreover, the results of the study reflected that BLETs can build better parental connections with the schools and students' learning. Their use of ICT increased student engagement with parents through phone calls and social media. Their effective implementation of ICT has prompted parental engagement in learning using digital tools. This supports the findings of Eyeyien *et al.* (2024), who found that the role of ICT increases the effectiveness of the learning environment. They also exhibited the implementation of ICT in reducing students' learning gaps. Moreover, their finding supported that ICT increases participants' accessibility within the learning environment and enables the creation of an inclusive learning environment in the classroom. Furthermore, the use of ICT in EFL instruction augments educational accessibility by reducing natural and constructed barriers for students and strengthening familial involvement in identifying students' learning requirements (Kandel & Raskoti, 2025; Kurniawan *et al.*, 2024). However, despite the continuous efforts by the BLETs, the practical implementation of ICT faces limitations like the lack of ICT infrastructure, poor connectivity, and poor electricity, as mentioned by Afzal *et al.* (2024) and Khan and Kuddus (2020). Their findings identified the major limitations in the implementation of the EFL sessions using ICT, such as weak network connectivity, substandard infrastructure, inadequate training and limited time allocation for the effective implementation of ICT-based sessions. However, since the implementation of ICT has created powerful positive impacts on education, the participants have recognized the impacts created by the effectiveness of ICT (Raskoti & Kandel, 2025; Zhao, 2024) on inclusive learning in the EFL setting. This allows the learners to have active participation in the classroom activities and study together cooperatively instead of studying collectively in the classroom.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study looked into EFL rural classrooms in Nepal and examined the impact and role of BLETs on the integration of personal, social, gender, and disability-related inclusivity through the use and application of technology. As the study indicated, BLETs play important roles in creating inclusive learning and teaching environments despite infrastructural and connectivity issues. Their encouragement and persistent efforts to involve students in interactive learning promote gender equity. The use of ICT helps teachers communicate with students and parents, which strengthens parental partnerships in education. They also expand learning opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities, through technology-integrated multi-semiotic modes of communication, such as written, aural, visual, gestural, and verbal interactions. The study also highlights BLETs' reflective learning through the use of digital tools to resolve problems and employ adaptive pedagogy, inducing cooperation and empathy among students. Such supportive and interactive learning engagement facilitates meaningful inclusion even in resource-constrained EFL classes. The innovative and creative practices of teachers in using digital tools resolve unequal student involvement opportunities, such as selective student participation and representation by dominant students in classroom discussions. Subsequently, it transforms students' EFL learning experiences toward equity in active student engagement, which also facilitates students who experience limited interaction opportunities. Therefore, the use of ICT contributes significantly to reflective, context-sensitive, creative and critical learning among diverse learners in an EFL class. The study concludes that meaningful inclusion is possible in rural classrooms even with limited resources, through EFL teachers' ICT-integrated innovative teaching practices.

This study provides educational foundations for inclusion in EFL teaching and learning practices by integrating teachers' lived narrative experiences of using ICT in EFL pedagogy in rural contexts. It emphasizes and advocates for the need and importance of teacher agency to utilize their innovative practices and to change and transform their practices to achieve inclusive teaching and learning in EFL. Collaborative efforts between educators, schools, and policymakers are needed to maintain inclusive

ICT initiatives. Educators need to practice flexible and reflexive pedagogy, while schools should promote inclusive cultures, and policymakers need to provide sustainable ICT digital infrastructures and continuous ICT training. The involvement of parents and the community is also very important as it broadens the scope of inclusive practices outside the classrooms.

The scope of the study is limited by the small sample size and the focus on basic-level schools in the Karnali province, which may hardly reflect the findings in other contexts. Future studies may consider empirical, mixed-method, and other quantitative approaches to determine the intersections of ICT integration on inclusive access and learning outcomes in the varied EFL contexts. Ultimately, to promote equitable and quality education in EFL classrooms, the digital inclusiveness of teachers as facilitators has to be prioritized.

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