

Strategies of Teaching English in the Nepalese Hinterlands: A Context-Sensitive Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

The article deals with teaching English in Nepal's hinterlands and the main problem is the teachers' ability to resolve teaching and learning challenges emanating from remote locations, limited resources, and the inapplicability of the national educational agenda. The article aims to contribute to the field by identifying teaching practices that help in responding to the unique demands of the context and by recommending ways in which teachers can use their resources to meet pedagogical objectives. The authors rely on sociocultural theories, translanguaging, and critical pedagogy to conceptualize the adaptation of the national curriculum at local levels. The article discusses the teachers' use of resources and strategies to overcome the limitations of the remote location and the restrictive assessment culture. It concludes by arguing that teacher education needs to be bottom-up and that there is a need to develop frameworks that connect teachers' practices and problems in remote locations with those of the larger education system.

Keywords: Challenges; Critical pedagogy; English language teaching; Hinterlands; Rural education; Socio-cultural theory; Translanguaging

Introduction

English holds a major but contentious place in Nepal's school curriculum, which covers a wide range of topics intended to fulfill both local and national needs. Although it must coexist with many regional languages, the language opens doors to higher education, employment, and social mobility (Bista, 2019). Poor infrastructure, socioeconomic isolation, and a lack of competent teachers and resources make teaching English in isolated, rural locations particularly difficult (Giri & Sharma, 2020). Classroom practice usually relies on local languages or extensive code-switching—strategies that assist learning but challenge standardized English assessment—because national language regulations frequently fail to reflect local linguistic realities and resource limits and learner autonomy (Poudel, 2018; Bista, 2019; Jora, 2020). The importance of indigenous languages in education is further reinforced in these hinterlands—mountainous, outlying communities—by multi-age courses and scarce resources.

Geographical isolation, multilingual classrooms, limited resources, exam-oriented curricula, big class numbers, and a lack of technology are some of the unique obstacles that make it challenging to use communicative ways when teaching English in Nepal's rural locations. Because textbooks and high-stakes tests limit practice, many teachers are stuck with grammar-focused instruction, even though some are adjusting by employing task-based, reflective, and context-sensitive approaches. By incorporating students' native tongues and community knowledge, creating locally relevant assignments, and utilizing reasonably priced resources, a pragmatic, context-aware approach balances national aspirations with local realities. Therefore, this study looks at how rural English teachers modify communicative, task-based, and technology-assisted approaches for low-resource, multi-age classrooms, records the

coping and reflective techniques they employ to maintain motivation, and attempts to create useful, theoretically grounded teaching models.

English in Nepal's Rural Schooling Context

English in Nepal's rural schools has a complex role which serves as a symbol for social mobility but also highlights ongoing educational inequality. Introduced as a language of the elite, English is now a required subject in schools. Rural community schools still deal with significant barriers to providing effective learning opportunities. Research on rural English classrooms shows challenges like teachers lacking proficiency, limited knowledge of the curriculum, insufficient teaching materials, and poor infrastructure. These issues hinder the use of interactive teaching methods and skill-based instruction (Kadel, 2024; Wagle, 2012). Additionally, Timsina (2021) argues that large class sizes, heavy administrative tasks, and little professional training make schools depending on traditional teaching methods that focusing on memorization.

The ecology of languages in the rural schooling system is highly diverse, with many students using local languages and Nepali alongside English. The voices of teachers working in rural areas reveal that they experience pressure from parents and from the central educational authorities, and that they view English teaching as a challenge and an opportunity (NELTA Forum, 2022). Recent studies on English teaching and learning in rural Nepal propose the enhancement of the competencies of rural teachers and the development of context-appropriate pedagogical strategies, such as translanguaging and localized tasks, and materials. Due to all this, recent studies suggest that there is a need to support rural teachers' professional development in ways that promote pedagogical approaches that take advantage of ecological and cultural specificities such as students' multilingualism and provide them with appropriate tasks which can help students make connections to their own life and manage learning materials in local languages to improve and make learning more equitable for students.

Language-in-Education Policy and Rural Schools

Nepal's education policy advocates for mother-tongue and multilingual schooling, but despite the constitutional basis and pilot curricula, it appears that language practices in rural schools are rather limited and primarily use Nepali and English for teaching and learning (Lopchan, 2025). National policy analysis and empirical studies indicate that local authorities and school administrators instrumentalize language education policy through appeals to globalization, commercialization, and social inclusion, resulting in a top-down approach to language education policy implementation that disregards local languages and minority languages and their role in education, with negative consequences for education for linguistic minorities (Skutnabb Kangas & Mohanty, 2009; Poudel, 2023).

Analysis at the school level reveals that headteachers, teachers, and parents negotiate or reinterpret the language education policy, advancing English and Nepali languages for teaching and learning. At the institutional level, the headteachers adopt an anti-MTL position, arguing that it would give students an unfair advantage in the examinations and the job market. The adoption of the EMI policy as a means of accelerating the modernization of education with

inadequate resources may exacerbate inequalities and create additional difficulties for teachers in terms of competencies. It is argued that the findings reported contribute to addressing the need for research to inform more context-sensitive and coproduced language education policies, taking into account the need to develop teachers' multilingual literacy and meet the demands of English and Nepali languages (Weinberg, 2018).

Rural Educational Realities in Nepal

Rural Nepal is characterized by significant gaps in education, which contribute to the existing divide between urban and rural areas. The hilly and mountainous topography makes it difficult for children to access permanent and proper educational institutions (UNICEF, as cited in Dawadi, 2024; Ministry of Education, 2024). Moreover, frequent teacher absences, shortage of proficient English medium teachers, teaching multiple grades, lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials, and insufficient basic competencies contribute to high drop-out rates and poor academic performance (Kandel, 2025; First Steps Himalaya, 2023). The occurrence of child labor, domestic duties, seasonal migration, and early marriage, especially among girls, and limits children's attendance and progress (World Bank, as cited in Dawadi, 2024; Paudel, 2021). Although Kathmandu and other urban centers have private schools with adequate resources and qualified teachers, remote areas experience the closure of educational institutions (Paudel, 2021).

However, rural areas have a wealth of knowledge and oral traditions that can be used to complement the English curriculum. Classroom practices and experiences in the context of Nepal show that teachers often combine textbook knowledge with local stories and practices, such as translanguaging, to make learning more meaningful and accessible to students (Kandel, 2025). Therefore, documenting and developing such innovative practices is a critical step towards contextualizing the English curriculum. The emerging need is to develop localized English curricula that are learner-centered and community-oriented (First Steps Himalaya, 2023). Furthermore, a recent study conducted in the remote municipalities suggests the need to promote local initiatives, municipal leadership, and public-private partnerships in education to promote sustainable and equitable development (Kandel, 2025).

Theoretical Framework

The article is framed by sociocultural theory, context-sensitive pedagogy, and multilingual/translanguaging pedagogy. In the sociocultural theory, learning is mediated, dialogic, mediated through social interaction, mediated by the more knowledgeable other(s) (scaffolding), and mediated by the resources that the learners bring to the learning situation (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Hence, teacher-mediated, negotiated learning processes, and peer collaborative activities using the learners' resources were presumed to facilitate the learning of English in the rural multilingual Nepalese contexts where learning should be viewed as being situated, dialogical, and interactive (Tan, 2014). The concept of translanguaging focuses on utilizing the linguistic resources of the learners for English learning and attitudes towards the English language. The concept of context-sensitive pedagogical theory takes into account the contexts where learning is placed-large class sizes, limited resources, and nation building identity (Farrell, Singh, & Giri, 2019; Shrestha, 2019).

Socio-Cultural Theory of Learning

The socio-cultural theory of learning presented by Vygotsky views education and learning relationships as participatory and dialogic processes where individuals learn through communication with more knowledgeable others using language and other cultural codes (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). The concept of the zone of proximal development, mediation, and scaffolding are key theoretical constructs of the theory that can be used to understand how students learn something new: teachers and peers help learners until they become competent and confident enough with the target skills or knowledge to perform them independently (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). In particular, the process of learning English involves such means as dialogues, communication, and appropriation of verbal and non-verbal codes that enable the students to acquire the language and culture of the English-speaking community (Rogoff, 1990).

Therefore, the socio-cultural theory can be applied to hinterland Nepalese classrooms by acknowledging the importance of participation in learning as emphasized by the interplay of students' and teachers' social interactions to mediate and scaffold learning. Specifically, peers and parents can also become sources of mediation, and teachers can use the local language to communicate and teach English in a way that would allow students to build their ZPDs. Thus, the strategies of relying on local codes and resources, scaffolding, and building reciprocal relationships can help learners of Nepalese hinterland classrooms master the English language through participation in dialogues and communication, and mediation processes inspired by community members' beliefs about learning (Vygotsky, 1986).

Critical Pedagogy and Social Justice

Critical pedagogy focuses on teaching practices that seek to destabilize oppressive social relations and empower oppressed groups of learners to engage in transformative praxis. In regard to the pedagogy of English, this perspective problematizes the instrumentalization of the language as a means to an end, be it employment or other materialistic gains, and encourages teachers to facilitate critical reflection on their own as well as their students' ideologies, assumptions, and realities. In addition, the use of English dominates the media and private institutions, reinforcing such perceptions. A critical pedagogy would ask the teacher to build trust and respect with the students, enabling them to question the status quo and recognize the value of their own cultural codes and languages. Furthermore, when using English as the medium of instruction, the teacher can deconstruct the language and its associated ideologies.

Although conceptually distinct, critical pedagogy and the pedagogy of social justice have a significant amount in common. Both see the practice of teaching and learning as being political, dialogical, and emancipatory, that is, as being geared toward undermining structures of oppression and advancing principles of equity and opportunity (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011; Smyth, 2011). Informed by critical theory, critical pedagogy views schooling, on occasion, as functioning to reproduce oppressive conditions through the perpetuation of social control and calls for critical consciousness-raising and praxis in order that teachers and learners will become emancipatory practitioners that critique and reconstruct their social lives and contexts (McLaren, 2003; Kincheloe, 2008). The pedagogy of social justice also identifies education as

a political practice; nevertheless, its central focus is the principle of access and achievement for all learners, irrespective of race, ethnicity, class, ability, age, sexual orientation, religion or gender and, consequently, it advocates the implementation of anti-oppressive teaching, policy and curriculum practices in order to facilitate equity in our institutions, policies and practice (Bell, 2007; Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). In terms of pedagogical strategy, both frameworks advocate the use of dialogue and praxis, and employ similar pedagogic techniques such as critical literacy, inquiry and discourse to engage teachers and students in the critique of dominant discourses and the deconstruction of unjust power relations (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2003; Bell, 2007).

Translanguaging and Multilingual Education

Translanguaging views bilingual and multilingual speakers' competence as an integrated whole in which speakers navigate languages and language varieties, as well as other semiotic resources, to think, communicate, and learn (García & Lin, 2016). It manifests itself in the pedagogical practice of Nepalese classrooms when the teachers and students use English and other local languages and Nepali varieties interchangeably or simultaneously for discussion or note-taking (García & Wei, 2014). Such translanguaging allows students to achieve a higher degree of comprehension, creativity, engagement, and belonging (Celic & Seltzer, 2012).

Combined with multilingual education, translanguaging enables flexible pedagogies that negotiate home and school languages and lead to achieving competencies in multiple languages and semiotic resources. By appealing to students' translanguaging practices and not shunning them, the instructors in the classrooms can help students actualize the connections between their learning and lived experience, thus helping them overcome barriers to learning and contributing to achieving equitable and language learning (Celic & Seltzer, 2012; UNESCO, 2019).

Challenges in Teaching English in the Nepalese Hinterlands

The quality of education, as well as English language learning, in the Nepalese hinterlands is affected by numerous factors. The situation in the Nepalese educational system is complicated by the fact that many schools are located in remote areas, where they are poorly equipped. The staff and teachers do not have the proper qualifications so that they cannot develop interactive lessons about English language and its modern use in the multilingual region. In addition, such schools are characterized by a multi-grade system, poor learning environment, and a lack of learning aids. Another challenge for learners who need to acquire English language skills in a Nepalese context is caused by the fact that many students come from farming families or belong to socially disadvantaged groups. They receive education in bad conditions because it is difficult for them to get to school due to the distance and the necessity to work and face irregular attendance due to the migration process. A significant number of learners drop out of school because of the lack of infrastructure and local resources. Moreover, the curriculum, materials and the educational framework in general are developed in urban contexts, while the majority of learners and teachers have to work within a frame that considers local realities and languages.

Limited Exposure and Practice Opportunities

Limited exposure to the language outside of formal instruction is a major hindrance in language acquisition. For instance, in a remote part of Nepal, students are not exposed much to the English language and have few opportunities to gain proficiency in it. The language is only taught in schools through reading and writing, with very little emphasis on listening and speaking (Marsden & Hawkes, 2023). Therefore, it is understandable that these students can excel in tests but have difficulties conversing in real-life situations because they do not have the language environment that would enhance their proficiency. Teachers can also lack the confidence to speak English because of several reasons, including studying at institutions where they are taught in Nepali, limited opportunities to advance their English skills, heavy workloads that reduce their time to engage in interactive exercises, and a focus on lecture-centered pedagogy that prepares them to teach other subjects in school (Gurung, 2023; Singh, 2025).

Exposure to linguistic input and opportunities for interaction with native data are crucial for language acquisition, and the lack of such opportunities for students contributes to the issue. These students have limited exposure to the language, both inside and outside the classroom, which reduces their chances of practicing the language fluently and conversationally while still developing a sense of confidence and fearlessness (Marsden & Hawkes, 2023; Rai, 2024; Tharu, 2024). To address the concerns identified in the articles, increasing opportunities for students to practice the language and building up their competence are crucial while also promoting the need for proficiency beyond lecturing exams by encouraging exposure to the resources and the language as a skill worth learning (Gurung, 2023).

Exam-Oriented and Textbook-Driven Pedagogy

Research on the pedagogy of teaching English in rural Nepal is dominated by the view that exam-oriented practices limit learning. The tendency toward examination culture discourages teachers from exploring possibilities of listening and speaking, and they only assign textbook material, diagrams, and rule-based grammar and essay frameworks for students to memorize and repeat. In addition, the pedagogy of English is largely dictated by centralized textbooks, which can make learning material less relatable and limit opportunities for engagement, especially in rural areas. Teachers report that adapting remote textbook materials for students who speak local dialects and live in mountainous areas is challenging.

The pedagogy of English language teaching (ELT) in Nepal is primarily examination-oriented, emphasizing memorization and reducing opportunities for developing communicative proficiency. Exam-oriented practices have a powerful “washback effect” on teaching, compelling instructors to focus on items likely to appear in tests, particularly in Asia, where English is taught in school settings, and the school system exerts “tremendous influence” over ELT pedagogy (British Council, 2022). Because school-based assessments in Nepal rarely test oral skills and concentrate on grammar rules and reading, listening and writing practices are given insufficient attention in ELT (Madhesh Province Education Directorate, 2024). Similarly, opportunities for creative writing and advanced level of reading competency are limited since these skills are not routinely evaluated (Karki, 2021). As a result, instructors

resort to extensive lecture-and-practice based teaching and emphasize accuracy over actual language use: students learn English only at a superficial level that does not translate into proficiency.

Textbook-based instruction complements the exam-oriented approach by promoting rote learning and discouraging teacher engagement with the subject. It assumes that the textbook is the core of ELT and that the only way to teach English is to follow it closely (British Council, 2022). In practice, this approach to teaching English limits opportunities for interaction, particularly for students in remote communities who have little exposure to the language outside the classroom (Sharma, 2025). For instance, English books, which are often imported or published centrally, contain distant and irrelevant material and provide practice in reading and writing exam answers, which makes learning difficult for rural students. Additionally, in areas with multiple grade levels and few resources, relying on a single textbook limits the teacher's capacity to develop other teaching resources and practices, such as inclusive and creative classroom activities (García-Martínez, 2017). Overall, exam-oriented and textbook-based pedagogy constrain instructors' ability to adopt learner-centered practices and develop students' communicative proficiency in English.

Under-Resourced Schools and Professional Isolation

Exam-oriented and textbook-based English Language Teaching (ELT) practices in Nepal impose a heavy washback effect on classroom practices, restricting them to grammar, reading, and written essay production while neglecting listening and speaking (British Council, 2022; Madhesh Province Education Directorate, 2024; Karki, 2021). The centrally produced irrelevant English textbooks promote rote learning and limit teacher agency; hence, teachers practice the lecture-and-practice method, which leads students to achieve a superficial command of the English language (García-Martínez, 2017).

The lack of resources in the hinterland and teachers' isolation undermine effective ELT practices. Inadequate school infrastructure, libraries, audiovisual resources, and technological equipment, as well as the multi-grade system and the lack of electricity and the internet, hinder interactive, oral, and visually rich ELT activities and encourage the use of the single textbook-based chalk-and-talk method (Singh, 2025; Gurung, 2023). Teachers' professional isolation and the resultant lack of professional development opportunities discourage them from adopting learner-centered and contextualized pedagogies and materials to promote equitable and proficient English language learning among rural students (Rai, 2024; Tharu, 2024).

Socio-Economic and Linguistic Inequities

Socio-economic disparities prevent many Nepalese children from accessing mainstream education and supplementary resources to gain proficiency in the English language. It also discourages those from vulnerable groups from enrolling themselves in schools because the latter has to rely on seasonal labor, unpaid domestic work, and migration for livelihood (Gurung, 2025). Weaker sections of society, including subsistence farmers, are economically incapable of facilitating early childhood education, purchasing study materials, and getting their wards involved in co-curricular activities resulting in irregular attendance, lower levels

of proficiency, and poorer results compared to their more privileged counterparts. Conversely, the latter enrolls their children in private English schools which stratifies society according to wealth and promotes economic inequality by restricting access to quality education (Koirala, 2025; Gurung, 2025; Broken Chalk, 2024).

The education system creates linguistic disparities by favoring Nepali and English languages at the expense of others and adopting exclusionary mother-tongue policies that hinder code-switching between the former and other regional languages. This discourages students from expressing themselves freely in class and undermines their confidence to communicate in their mother tongue, resulting in negative perceptions towards indigenous languages and poor performance (Poudel, 2022; Education University of Hong Kong, 2025). Language ideologies and policies that promote bilingualism and English medium instructions negatively affect speakers of ethnic languages (Dalit, Madheshi) and minority groups by presenting discriminatory attitudes and restricting resources required for achieving proficiency in the English language. Students whose mother tongue is not English have to rely on limited proficiency in Nepali to learn English resulting in unequal opportunities and outcome among students from vulnerable groups and those from privileged backgrounds (Broken Chalk, 2024).

Context Responsive Strategies for Teaching English Coursework

Context responsive strategies for teaching English focus on meeting the demands of the learner, school, and community by being flexible and responsive to specific learning needs. Instead of developing a model of best practices, context responsiveness calls for understanding the situation and choosing the most suitable options (Vinlove, 2005; British Council, 2026). For hinterland contexts, context responsiveness could mean using locally available material, and translanguaging and code-switching to promote understanding and engagement, and involving learners directly in constructing meaning through lower tech and easily implemented activities and discussions. Context responsive practices seek to meet learner needs within constraints of the resource and community context and recognize the importance locally.

Context responsive teaching practices require teachers to grapple with issues of national curriculum and assessments as well as national and school-level language policies and their pedagogical implications while at the same time taking responsibility for choosing the most appropriate options for their learners. Teachers in Nepal have talked about coping strategies such as focusing on teaching words that learners need most and recycling these words, using personal devices as projectors for showing videos, using project work and group work, and other strategies to engage their students (Singh, 2024). Teacher education programs that take contextual responsiveness seriously need to begin with exploring the concept of ‘understanding my context’ and provide illustrations of strategies for teaching large classes, using local resources, leveraging translanguaging and other pedagogy for building learning and addressing gender gaps. Context responsiveness demands critical interrogation of policy by teachers and a constant questioning of whether their professional choices are contextually appropriate.

Leveraging Local Knowledge and Community Resources

Using local resources and knowledge, as well as regional livelihoods, in English language teaching practices is grounded in socio-cultural theory because students engage input that is related to their realities and thus able to practice new words, expressions, and grammar in contexts (Freire, 2000; Hornberger, 2002). Teachers can design exercises and readings that use local heroes, history, agriculture, traditions, geography, speech patterns, and other features to make sense of the foreign language and its structures so that students can relate the new language to their own lives, overcoming the decontextualization and exoticism of the foreign content; local texts and adapted readings help make sense of classes' activities and relate them too real-life.

These approaches are likely to be successful if the schools develop long-term collaborative relationships with the community, understanding them as equal partners, and engaging them in educational planning and policy-making processes to respond to the specific needs of the community (Bryk et al., 2010). Consultations with teachers, administrators, and community members, as well as their involvement in the research and development activities, can help generate sustainable and context-specific approaches to literacy, legal-literacy, and language education that take into account the empowerment values and principles, as well as respond to the language-specific and socio-legal needs of the community (Hornberger, 2002; Smith, 2012).

Task-Based and Project-Oriented Pedagogy

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) views communication as goal-directed behavior where meaning is negotiated by parties engaged in purposeful activities such as planning a local event, discussing handicrafts, or designing health and environment leaflets. These activities form the basis for planning and assessment, and they encourage interaction, exchange, and autonomy even in contexts of resource constraints (Ellis, 2003; Long, 2015). Short tasks create relevance for learning English in hinterland communities and focus on meaning as a priority concern which reflects a socio-cultural approach to language learning (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004).

The project-based learning design takes the project as a central point. It involves participants working collaboratively on a larger product or performance which can be a community English newspaper or a bilingual English/local tales' booklet. These involve considerable negotiation of content and product and reflect constructivist approaches to learning, and classroom interaction (Beckett & Slater, 2005; Stoller, 2006; Thomas, 2000; Jora, 2022). The two approaches are learner-centered, focus on interaction, and can be practical in resource-constrained hinterland communities. Task-oriented activities focus on language while projects involve longer-term collaborative work which reflects broader curriculum concerns than language learning alone (Thomas, 2000; Beckett & Slater, 2005).

Strategic Translanguaging in the Classroom

Translating strategies enable teachers and students to use more than one language to ensure that there is a better grasp of the subject matter and to promote active participation. For

instance, concepts may be taught in English and then discussed in Nepali or the students' native language and progressively introduced in English or alternatively, students could write their thoughts individually in their preferred language and then regroup to share and rebuild their ideas in English, thus enabling them to recognize strengths and reducing their fears of expressing themselves in English (Lippi-Green, 2012; García & Wei, 2014). The pedagogical term translanguageing refers to strategically deploying students' linguistic repertoires for particular pedagogical ends; it is a pedagogical-hygienic approach that aims to foster comprehension, negotiation of meaning, and multilingual empowerment while also cultivating belonging and positive attitudes by enabling students to use their linguistic resources; translanguageing has been shown to yield better learning outcomes for bilingual and multilingual students (García & Kleyn, 2016; Celic & Seltzer, 2011; WIDA, 2025).

Translanguageing practices could include using word walls in multiple languages, exploring cognates, holding reading circles in various languages, keeping multilingual journals, and creating glossaries as ways to build awareness of their home-language and English linguistic resources (Celic & Seltzer, 2011). For translanguageing to take place, objectives have to be established, a collaborative classroom environment must be cultivated, curricular coherence should be maintained, and administrative approval needs to be acquired since translanguageing could promote content comprehension, higher-order thinking skills, and prepare students for a multilingual world (García & Kleyn, 2016; García & Wei, 2014).

Developing Listening and Speaking Through Low Cost Means

Listening and speaking, which remote means of English language teaching (ELT) are less focused on, can be successfully facilitated even with limited resources by raising opportunities for talk and interaction through pair work, role-plays, storytelling, information-gap activities, and low-tech audiobooks, created by the teacher or the community, and use of radio when available; such strategies make it possible to learn the language by engaging with the target data, making use of existing audio and video resources, including those found online for free. Additionally, practice can be gained through exposing oneself to short podcasts, songs, or news bulletins, focusing on their general meaning, specific vocabulary, intonation, and words typical of the register, keeping a vocabulary journal, and following extensive listening principles.

Practicing speaking with limited resources is mostly about generating opportunities for interaction by engaging in role-plays, pair work, small-group discussions, prompted by issues in the news or local concerns, taking turns, peer teaching, and working on projects (Edutopia, 2023). Additionally, learners may record themselves delivering a monologue or 'shadow' a model speaker on their phones to practice pronunciation and fluency or develop teacher-designed speaking tasks suitable for large classes. Overall, maximizing the use of community resources, cell phones, radio, and online materials helps get plenty of low-cost practice talking and listening, which is vital for language learning (British Council, 2022).

Contextualizing Grammar and Textbook Content

Grammar is often decontextualized to hinterland learners by means of rule-oriented instruction; rather it should be taught within meaningful texts and tasks related to the learners' context, like

telling personal experiences using the simple past tense, or talking about farming, weather, or hopes and plans using conditionals and mentoring in real life education (Jora, Ingle, & Joshi, 2025; Jora, 2026). Teachers could modify examples given in course books by replacing those not relatable by the learners with tasks more familiar to their context, although it may demand extra effort. The use of contextualized examples and modified tasks will make learning more relevant and effective (Englicious, 2017).

Studies reveal that contextualizing grammar, by first presenting target grammatical constructions within running discourse and subsequently drawing learners' attention to them, enhances grammatical range and accuracy by raising awareness of grammar as resources to realize meaning, not objects to be memorized (Shrum & Glisan, 2000 as cited in CoBaLTT, 2002; Williams-Pinnock, 2021). Similarly, applying the same principle in course books, through short written tasks, such as paraphrasing running discourse, localizing conversations or stories, and creating similar texts, helps to relate grammar to genre, register, and message, making practice both engaging and informative, scaffolding both learner writing and speaking beyond the textbook (Grade University, 2023).

Teacher Professional Learning and Vernacular Pedagogies

Teacher professional learning that is aimed at continuous improvement of one's subject-teaching knowledge and skills needs to include training in vernacular pedagogy, which is concerned with utilizing students' local knowledge and languages for more effective teaching and learning (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Since there is a need to promote multilingualism and maintain language diversity, professional learning can enable teachers to gain the competence needed to develop pedagogical and assessment strategies that satisfy the needs of a majority of students (Borg, 2015).

Recognizing Local Pedagogical Innovations

The findings from the classroom studies of Nepalese teachers are significant, as they "indicate that teachers working in peripheral contexts possess considerable pedagogical knowledge in the form of vernacular pedagogy, manifested in their use of language-specific strategies and approaches, community-responsive methods, multi-grade designs, and flexible use of available resources, often unacknowledged and not utilized beyond individual classrooms or schools" (Yetti et al., 2024). Raising awareness of such pedagogical progress and developing innovative strategies, ideas, and theoretical frameworks at teacher, classroom, and school levels could be key to building more efficient English language teaching pedagogy in the future, making remote teachers' experiences active participants in the process rather than just an object of study, which is currently the case. Such attention to peripheral practice has a basis in its capacity as a source of pedagogical improvement, based on indigenous knowledge, responsive methods, and local languages, advancing both the learner's language proficiency, and their literacy development (UNESCO, 2023).

Institutionalizing vernacular pedagogy with a continuous review process and supportive structures of practitioner communities would allow for maintaining such innovations' integrity while also giving them the recognition and institutional power needed to promote equity both

in ELT-informed practice and research (Brookings Institution, 2019). At the same time, such an approach would highlight the potential of peripheral practices in ELT, shifting the paradigm from “the relative lack of theoretical and conceptual development in Southern contexts in comparison to dominant anglophone methodologies” and establishing it instead as a valid alternative (Yetti et al., 2024).

Building Rural Teacher Networks and Communities of Practice

In hinterland contexts, professional isolation constitutes a significant challenge; therefore, networks and communities of practice should be created, where school clusters can collaborate regularly, conduct peer observations, and share effective pedagogical practices specific to the English subject. Additionally, the local ELT associations and NGOs can provide extensive support to such initiatives through mentorship, workshops, and relevant resources (The Rural Educator, 2018). If possible, online platforms should be used to facilitate communication and collaboration in the form of webinars and digital resources; however, it is essential to note that such tools should be appropriate for the teachers’ physical and technological capabilities. Communities of practice are ideal for such settings since they are formed through members’ interest in a certain area, which can be taught to rural teachers, benefiting not just the professionals but the environment around them (Shirley, 2016).

The intentional design features, such as cohort-based, peer mentoring, leadership development, and ecosystems of learners’ design, have the potential to provide extensive networks of practice that promote long-standing collaborations beyond workshops, enabling practitioners to carry out inquiries on equity-enhancing practices and influence the educational ecosystem (Dudley Flood Centre, 2025; Rural Schools Collaborative, 2025). Such programs usually involve a combination of low-cost and high-impact strategies, such as online conferencing, messaging, shared repositories, and regional gatherings, which can reinforce collaborative learning, boost quality-assured instruction, improve retention rates and rural educator leadership, and build stronger education ecosystems around rural communities (Shirley, 2016).

Reimagining Teacher Education for Hinterland Contexts

Pre-service and in-service teacher education tend to promote generic or urban-specific approaches resulting in teachers ill-prepared for the pedagogical challenges of the hinterlands (White & Corbett, 2014). Preparing teachers for the pedagogical needs of the hinterlands requires transformation and the inclusion of lessons on multi-grade teaching, resource-poor pedagogy, community knowledge building, and translanguaging as well as fieldwork, school-based projects, and reflective portfolios to foster their critical understanding of rural-specific contexts (White & Kline, 2012). Teacher educators must rely on findings in rural ELT studies to destabilize their romanticized or pathological perceptions of the hinterland and become more receptive to the possibilities and constraints of teaching in remote communities instead of viewing such contexts as deficits (Hudson & White, 2019).

Teacher education for ELT in remote communities ought to re-position teachers and the hinterland as equal partners in educational discourse. Such an approach creates room for collaborative approaches, including university-school partnerships, action research, reciprocal

mentoring and coaching, and distance or networked professional development, to promote teacher preparedness and continued development even when physical presence in the hinterland is limited (White & Kline, 2012). Situating the hinterland as a pedagogical epistemology promotes quality education for students in remote areas by encouraging teacher educators to view the educational issues and concerns affecting remote schools not as insurmountable pedagogical problems but as unique insights for fostering professional competencies and preparing future teachers for similar settings.

Role of Technology and Remote Support

Technology and remote support are critical enablers to ensure access to quality education in remote areas by providing alternative modes of instruction such as radios, televisions, online platforms, messaging, and learning management systems which were utilized during the covid-19 outbreak to maintain and enhance teaching and learning, and adopt hybrid models of instruction post pandemic (InjoTel, 2025). For example, remote support provides an avenue for students and teachers in remote areas to access learning materials and resources such as e-books and videos that were inaccessible before. Nonetheless, both national and international evaluations highlight the need to prioritize teacher–student interaction while also being mindful of the most appropriate solutions for different contexts due to limited bandwidth which risks aggravating the learning gap for vulnerable populations (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2025).

Furthermore, remote support facilitates teacher professional learning through online forums while also addressing other constraints such as the lack of teachers in remote areas such as hinterlands during the covid-19 outbreak. The need for remote support for teacher professional learning requires conscious policies and strategies to purposefully promote teacher professional learning alongside student learning via online programs, webinars, and communities of practice. Consultations and surveys conducted revealed that helplines, hotlines, and remote assistance were widely used for training teachers, troubleshooting, and addressing pedagogical and technical issues, especially during the covid-19 outbreak and its immediate aftermath (EdTech Survey, 2021). Additionally, the need for remote support for learning was recognized as a means to maximize two-way interactions to support parents while also being a strategic approach for post-COVID planning to maximize blended approaches to teaching and learning while also addressing equity-related challenges.

Low-Cost Technologies in Rural English Teaching

In hinterlands, technology-enhanced language learning and teaching should promote lower-cost, easily accessible devices such as cellular phones, portable audio players, SD cards, Bluetooth speakers, and community FM radio for maximizing listening opportunities, accessing recorded lectures, and obtaining relevant English content despite the lack of internet access or electricity. Additionally, teachers can provide audio/video files, PDF readers, or downloadable lectures for pre-listening/post-listening and shadowing activities as a means of complementing rather than replacing conventional pedagogy while maintaining teacher agency over instructional design for optimal pedagogical outcomes (Benavides Villacís, 2025).

Frugal and low-tech approaches (offline apps, SMS practice, regional dictionaries, audio packs) can help teachers balance PPP-style lessons and multifunctional devices to continue engaging students in learner-centered, communicative tasks despite the lack of access to cutting-edge technologies and promote educational equity among rural populations (The Usage of PPP Teaching, 2024). This strategy supports providing accessible, flexible, and inclusive educational opportunities to all types of learners while maximizing readily available resources.

Remote Mentoring and Resource Sharing

Remote mentoring has the potential to connect distant English teachers with mentors, peers, and resources through calling, texting, emailing, or other low-bandwidth means to talk about lesson planning, reflect and deliberate on experiences and challenges, and troubleshoot issues, thereby reducing professional isolation (WomenTech Network, 2025). Mentorship programs must have regular, purposeful, and supportive interactions in which mentors are encouraged to be positive, open-minded, and honest to uplift their mentees' confidence and critical reflection capabilities and knowledge towards ICT (Jora & Basnet, 2025).

The exchange of resources is also an integral element of remote mentoring wherein downloadable repositories, shared documents and whiteboards, local hubs, and other low-bandwidth methods enable mentors to share lesson plans, material, and training modules despite the lack of connectivity, and virtual collaboration enhances English teachers' knowledge and abilities, especially in adopting resources-scarce strategies. Remote mentoring programs and resources should be co-designed with the target audience in mind (QMU, 2020; Noyam, 2025).

Policy and Equity Implications

Policy decisions determine who benefits from programs, the distribution of resources, and who makes decisions; therefore, equity must be embedded into policy design, delivery, and assessment to achieve procedural justice and political information (Jora & Joshi, 2025) and distributive justice (Park, 2022; Shen et al., 2023). While social equity remains an administrative objective, it is inconsistently prioritized in policy domains, including education, health, and welfare, and equity analyses highlight the need to reconcile discrimination, burdensome protocols, and limited resources while recognizing equity-related social dimensions (Park, 2022).

Aligning Assessment with Communicative and Critical Goals

So long as the focus in high stakes testing is on rote memorization and sterile, impersonal grammar, teachers will teach to the test; changing policy to encompass listening and speaking tasks, authentic reading tasks, and tasks rooted in rural contexts and multilingual realities can support more communicative pedagogy and help hinterland students feel their voice matters. Policies should embrace context and multiple assessment measures ensuring assessment practices are grounded in a sociocultural approach and reduce the teaching to the test effect.

In order to create test takers who use language effectively and thinking critically, the test design must match our communication centered learning outcomes (Richards & Renandya, 2002). In

a communicative outcome centered course, instructor first defines learning outcomes (eg negotiating meaning, developing critical awareness) and then designs assessment tasks which enact them, i.e. achieve constructive alignment (Biggs, 2014; Nunan, 2004). To promote the development of a critical literacy rather than the memorization of isolated grammar points, rubrics must value discourse competence (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019; Wallace, 2003). Such alignment also ensures positive washback effect (Richards, 2006; Wallace, 2003), with teachers focusing on fostering the capacity of students to critically negotiate and express meaning. By using a range of authentic input and assessing the learning outcome, i.e. roleplays, discussion forums, presentations throughout the semester the course is able to guide the students towards the goals of the course.

Resourcing Rural Schools and Supporting Multilingual Education

Resourcing in terms of physical, material and human resources that support infrastructure, connectivity and attract and maintain good teachers, is the first step to decrease the urban–rural educational disadvantage and allow all students achieve to their maximum capacity. These resources also must include the school’s own unique local linguist ecology, to be fitting. These resources must enable schools to address ‘unpreparedness’ for the academic, social and economic realities of a linguistically and culturally plural and connected society (Corcoran, 2024; Education NSW, 2020).

To support multilingual education it is imperative that we acknowledge students’ existing repertoire of languages and use it, and our pedagogic practice be adaptive to the local context; for instance, use home-language in early childhood, systematically phase in other languages, utilize translanguaging practices in class and create space for cooperative, critical approaches that tap into the student’s languages, fruitful learning and their learning problems (Busch, 2012; Medda-Windischer & Membretti, 2020; Delany-Barmann et al., 2022; Jora, 2025b; Jora, 2025a; Pacific Learning, 2025; Jora & Joshi, 2025).

Conclusion and Recommendations

It was concluded that the teaching of English in the Nepalese hinterlands is a multifaceted and highly intricate matter due to the numerous challenges derived from the imposed centralized policies, the deprivation of resources, and the diverse linguistic landscape in which English is taught as foreign language. Although it is obvious how advantageous this skill can be to the rural population, it appears that at present it is mostly the privileged ones who benefit from the existing system. It was asserted that successful teaching and learning practice in remote areas requires a combination of specific approaches that are grounded in sociocultural perspectives, critical pedagogy, and translanguaging. It was also argued that local teachers are already capitalizing on their linguistic and cultural resources, developing vernacular pedagogy. Thus, it was contended that in order to provide equal educational opportunities to all, there is the need to acknowledge the existing practices and develop them further.

The pedagogy that is contextualized for rural areas needs to center the approach on tasks, based on local resources and livelihoods, employ strategic translanguaging to validate and empower learners, and press on national policy toward an inclusive, communicative assessment with the

emphasis on oral language skills and the extensive acquisition of literacy. Teacher education must be re-contextualized, on-the-job for the school-community nexus for teaching in multi-grades in low-resource environments with school-based practicum accompanied by the development of community and national practice networks. Innovative learner-friendly and affordable technologies require to be up-scaled. Finance and investment must be re-oriented towards equalizing resource provision to rural schools.

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