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Enhancing English Language Teaching through Teacher Professional Development

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Abstract

Enhancing English Language Teaching (ELT) requires well-designed and contextually relevant professional development (PD) for teachers, particularly in developing countries like Nepal. This paper explores the enhancement of English Language Teaching through teacher professional development, drawing upon Self-Determination Theory and Sociocultural Theory as foundational frameworks. It critically reviews theoretical perspectives and recent empirical studies, including those focused on the Nepali ELT context. The paper identifies key characteristics of effective professional development, such as sustained engagement, collaborative inquiry, classroom applicability, and blended learning models. It also examines significant barriers to effective PD, including limited teacher motivation, inadequate resources, and structural or institutional constraints. Special attention is given to the realities of the Nepali education system, offering contextually grounded insights for policymakers, teacher educators, and school leaders. These insights emphasise fostering teacher autonomy, competence, and a sense of professional community to enhance both teaching quality and learner outcomes. By synthesising global best practices with local needs, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how evidence-based PD initiatives can improve ELT in resource-constrained and culturally diverse settings like Nepal.

Keywords: Teacher professional development, english language teaching, sociocultural theory, teacher motivation, blended learning, resource-constrained contexts

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Introduction

Professional development (PD) for English language teachers is increasingly recognised as a vital component in enhancing the quality of teaching and improving learner outcomes across diverse educational settings. In the English Language Teaching (ELT) context, PD equips teachers with the theoretical knowledge, practical strategies, and reflective skills needed to meet ever-evolving pedagogical demands (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Richards & Farrell, 2005). In Nepal, studies have shown that well-structured PD programs can lead to improved classroom practices, enhanced teacher motivation, and more engaging learning experiences for students (Bhandari, 2025; Gautam, 2020). Specifically, PD has helped English teachers transition from traditional, grammar-focused instruction to more interactive and communicative methods aligned with contemporary ELT pedagogy (Poudel, 2022; Shrestha & Gautam, 2022). Furthermore, contextualised PD initiatives have empowered teachers to reflect critically on their practices and to better navigate the challenges of large, multilingual, and under-resourced classrooms (Phyak, 2014). Context-sensitive PD is instrumental not only in enhancing teacher competence but also in fostering sustainable improvements in student learning outcomes.

Despite these promising developments, many PD programs fall short of their intended goals, particularly in low-resource contexts like Nepal. In today's dynamic educational environment—marked by rapid technological changes, globalisation, and increasingly diverse student populations—English teachers are expected to be pedagogically innovative, culturally responsive, and adaptable (Chiu et al., 2021; Saud, 2023). However, the design and implementation of PD initiatives often lack coherence, long-term planning, and meaningful teacher involvement. Many programs are developed by external agencies with little consideration of local classroom realities or teacher input, resulting in generic training sessions that fail to address specific needs or challenges (Cosgun & Savas, 2024). Consequently, teachers struggle to implement new strategies effectively, and PD efforts tend to have limited impact on actual classroom practices, leading to disillusionment and low engagement.

A further challenge lies in the delivery format and sustainability of PD programs. Short-term workshops, one-off seminars, and prescriptive training models are common but largely ineffective, especially in contexts that demand continuous support and adaptation. These formats rarely provide follow-up mechanisms such as peer collaboration, mentoring, or feedback opportunities—key elements necessary for lasting professional growth (Maniam et al., 2025). In ELT specifically, where classroom practices must be responsive to students' linguistic, cultural, and cognitive needs, such fragmented and decontextualised PD often reinforces outdated methodologies rather than encouraging reflective, evidence-based innovation. There is thus a pressing need to reconceptualise PD

as a sustained, context-aware, and teacher-centred process that is embedded in everyday professional practice and supported by school leadership and policy frameworks.

Given these challenges, this paper seeks to explore the essential opportunities of effective PD for English language teachers and identify the major barriers that hinder its success, particularly within the Nepali ELT landscape. Drawing on both global research and local case studies, the study aims to investigate how PD can be strategically designed to promote teacher autonomy, professional competence, and collaborative growth. It also examines structural, motivational, and institutional factors that limit teacher engagement in PD initiatives. By aligning international best practices with the realities of Nepal's diverse and resource-constrained educational contexts, this paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how contextually grounded professional development can transform English language teaching in under-resourced and culturally complex settings.

Literature Review

The concept of effective professional development in English Language Teaching has been shaped by decades of educational research. Scholars broadly agree that effective PD is characterised by a set of core features that ensure meaningful and lasting impact on teacher learning and instructional practice. According to Aamer (2024), these features include a strong focus on subject matter content, active learning opportunities for teachers, coherence with existing curricular and institutional goals, sufficient duration to support deep learning, collective participation that promotes collaboration, and mechanisms that support the transfer of learning into classroom practice. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) further argue that high-quality PD is sustained, job-embedded, and directly linked to teachers' day-to-day work. These characteristics are vital in the ELT field, where teachers often struggle with outdated methodologies, limited training opportunities, and a mismatch between theory and practice. When PD programs address these issues through thoughtfully designed activities, they can significantly enhance both teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

Several professional development frameworks offer structured approaches to teacher learning and growth. One prominent example is the Cambridge English Teaching Framework, which provides a developmental model for ELT professionals across four stages—Foundation, Developing, Proficient, and Expert—based on five core competency areas: language knowledge and awareness, planning and management, learning and the learner, teaching and learning, and professional development (Cambridge Assessment English, 2023). This framework encourages teachers to assess their current abilities and set realistic goals for advancement. It serves not only as a diagnostic tool but also as a guide for planning tailored PD interventions. Such structured frameworks are particularly useful in contexts where teachers may lack mentorship or systematic evaluation, offering

a clear trajectory for growth and professionalisation.

Blended learning models have also emerged as powerful approaches to delivering effective PD, particularly in resource-constrained or geographically dispersed settings. These models combine the flexibility and scalability of online learning with the relational and practical benefits of face-to-face workshops. Research shows that blended PD promotes sustained engagement, accommodates diverse learning preferences, and supports community building among teachers (Alamer et al., 2023; Arifin et al., 2024). In ELT, where teaching practices benefit greatly from peer collaboration and interactive modelling, blended models are especially useful. For instance, teachers may complete asynchronous modules on grammar instruction and then attend in-person workshops to practice applying techniques with colleagues. These models are indeed gaining traction globally and are increasingly being adapted for low-resource contexts like Nepal. As internet access and digital infrastructure slowly expand across the country, blended learning approaches are being explored to bridge geographical gaps and reduce logistical barriers to teacher development (Sapkota, 2020; UNESCO, 2022; Chhetri, 2022). Blended PD offers a flexible, context-responsive strategy that can enhance teacher learning, collaboration, and instructional effectiveness even in challenging educational environments.

Empirical studies from international contexts offer compelling evidence that well-designed professional development significantly enhances both teacher practices and student outcomes. In Panama, De León Sautú et al. (2024) found that a year-long, content-specific PD program in reading instruction led to substantial gains in student performance, outcomes that far exceeded those from short-term workshops, which showed minimal measurable effect. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), through a comprehensive synthesis of research, identified key characteristics of effective PD: sufficient duration, curricular coherence, collective participation, and active learning opportunities. These features enable teachers not only to acquire new knowledge but also to experiment with it in practice and refine their instructional approaches over time. Such evidence highlights the importance of designing PD as a sustained and iterative learning process rather than as isolated events.

These findings are particularly relevant to the context of English language teaching in Nepal, where PD is often delivered through brief, disconnected workshops with little consideration for long-term impact or classroom applicability. While such sessions may check administrative boxes or serve donor-driven agendas, they rarely provide opportunities for reflective practice, peer learning, or contextual adaptation. In contrast, sustained PD models offer teachers the time and support necessary to integrate new methodologies—such as communicative language teaching or inclusive practices—into their routines. They also foster a professional culture that values collaboration

and continuous improvement. Given Nepal's challenges, including large class sizes, multilingual learners, and limited instructional resources, PD must be reconceptualised as a long-term, context-responsive process grounded in teacher agency and ongoing support. Without this shift, the potential of PD to transform ELT practices and improve student outcomes will remain largely unrealised.

Regional studies also support the value of context-sensitive PD initiatives. In Thailand, Poonpon (2021) conducted a study on in-service English teachers who participated in action research-based PD program. The participants reported increased pedagogical content knowledge, improved classroom confidence, and greater willingness to experiment with student-centred approaches. The study highlights the role of reflective inquiry and practitioner-led research in fostering deep, contextually relevant learning. Likewise, a study by Borg and Poudel (2024) in Nepal emphasised that PD must be tailored to the sociocultural realities of teachers' working environments. Generic, externally imposed models often fail to address local needs, whereas contextually grounded PD programs that value teachers' voices tend to be more effective and sustainable.

Despite the expanding global scholarship on effective professional development, there remains a notable gap in understanding how these frameworks function within under-resourced, multilingual, and culturally complex contexts like Nepal. Much of the existing literature, such as that by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), Desimone (2009), and Avalos (2011), draws from well-funded, institutionally structured educational systems in the Global North, where resources, technological access, and institutional support are significantly different from those in countries like Nepal. Transposing such models without critical adaptation risks overlooking the systemic challenges Nepali teachers face, including large class sizes, inadequate teaching materials, limited access to digital technologies, and weak follow-up support mechanisms. Dhungana et al. (2021) and Sharma (2023) have stressed the importance of locally responsive PD that acknowledges these constraints while empowering teachers through sustainable, reflective, and collaborative learning structures. Similarly, Gautam (2020) and Phyak (2014) argue that PD in Nepal must be rooted in sociocultural realities, engaging teachers not merely as recipients of top-down training but as active agents in shaping their professional growth.

Furthermore, recent studies indicate that PD in Nepal often lacks institutional ownership and is heavily driven by individual teacher agency. Lamichhane et al. (2024) and Poudel (2022) observe that many English language teachers in Nepal participate in PD out of personal commitment rather than through structured, school-supported programs. This points to a deeper institutional neglect of teacher development as a systemic priority. While donor-driven initiatives and NGOs have occasionally filled this gap, their interventions are often project-based, short-term, and inconsistent in

scope. Given these conditions, there is a growing consensus among Nepali scholars that PD programs must be context-sensitive, equity-driven, and aligned with both national education goals and grassroots realities (Chhetri, 2022; Gaire, 2023). However, systematic reviews that critically synthesise the existing Nepal-specific literature on ELT professional development remain limited. This paper, therefore, seeks to address this gap by offering a comprehensive, contextually grounded review of PD research in the Nepali ELT landscape, establishing a clear point of departure for rethinking how PD can be made more responsive, sustainable, and impactful in this setting.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in two complementary frameworks: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Sociocultural Theory. Self-Determination Theory, developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), posits that individuals thrive when three innate psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are fulfilled. In the context of teacher professional development (PD), this implies that programs are most effective when PD initiatives promote teacher agency, offer skill-enhancing challenges, and cultivate supportive professional relationships. When PD initiatives are designed to enhance teachers' sense of autonomy (choice in content and mode of learning), competence (mastery through constructive feedback and practice), and relatedness (collaboration and shared goals), they foster deeper engagement and sustained motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). As such, SDT provides a valuable lens for designing PD initiatives that nurture intrinsic motivation and long-term professional growth.

Sociocultural Theory, as proposed by Vygotsky (1978), complements SDT by emphasising the socially constructed nature of learning. According to this theory, knowledge is co-constructed through meaningful interaction within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where support from more knowledgeable peers or mentors scaffolds advancement. In PD settings, this manifests in collaborative learning practices such as peer mentoring, team teaching, lesson study, and professional learning communities. These socially embedded forms of professional learning not only deepen pedagogical content knowledge but also encourage critical reflection and mutual support among teachers. By embedding PD in authentic, dialogic, and interactive contexts, Sociocultural Theory highlights the transformative potential of socially mediated professional learning.

Together, SDT and Sociocultural Theory offer a robust framework for understanding and enhancing professional development in ELT. While SDT focuses on the internal motivational drivers that influence teacher engagement and persistence in PD activities, Sociocultural Theory highlights the external social and cultural contexts that shape learning. Integrating these perspectives allows for a holistic approach to PD

design—one that honours both the individual psychological needs of teachers and the collaborative, contextual nature of pedagogical growth. This theoretical synthesis is especially pertinent to contexts like Nepal, where structural limitations, such as under-resourced schools, centralized decision-making, and limited access to ongoing support, often lead to professional isolation and hinder sustained teacher learning (Phyak, 2014; Gautam, 2020; Bhandari, 2025), making it essential to design PD programs that are both personally empowering and socially enriching.

Research Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative synthesis methodology to examine the features, challenges, and contextual adaptations of professional development in English Language Teaching, with a particular focus on the Nepali context. The research process involved a comprehensive review and thematic analysis of 50 carefully selected relevant sources. These sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, policy documents, government reports, and practitioner-based field studies that provide both global and local perspectives on PD. Databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and NepJOL were systematically searched using keywords including “professional development,” “English language teaching,” “teacher motivation,” “PD in Nepal,” and “sociocultural factors in PD.” The inclusion criteria prioritised empirical and theoretical works that explicitly discussed the structure, implementation, and impact of PD programs. Thematic content analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and insights across three main domains: core features of effective PD, systemic and institutional barriers to PD, and strategies for contextual adaptation in low-resource environments such as Nepal. This approach is grounded in interpretivist research traditions that emphasise educational practices' meaning-making processes and contextual embeddedness. By synthesising diverse evidence, this methodology aims to provide a nuanced and contextually relevant understanding of how PD can be better designed and implemented for ELT practitioners in Nepal and similar settings.

Key Features of Effective ELT PD

A central theme from the analysis is that effective English Language Teaching professional development is characterised by sustained, job-embedded learning opportunities. Unlike traditional one-time workshops, PD initiatives that are spread over an extended period, often across an entire academic year, and embedded within teachers' regular instructional routines result in more meaningful and lasting changes in practice (Yadav & Yadav, 2023). Such approaches often include ongoing mentoring, classroom-based coaching, and structured cycles of observation and feedback, allowing teachers to trial, adapt, and refine their practices over time. Research shows that the iterative nature of sustained PD fosters greater instructional depth and responsiveness to students'

linguistic and cognitive needs (Ramdani et al., 2023; Gaire, 2023). These findings collectively suggest that PD models grounded in long-term engagement and reflective practice are not only more impactful for teacher growth but also central to improving overall student learning outcomes in ELT contexts.

Another defining feature of effective PD is the emphasis on collaborative inquiry through structures such as Professional Learning Communities, lesson study, and peer coaching. These collaborative formats encourage teachers to collectively explore pedagogical challenges, co-construct knowledge, and engage in sustained reflection, thereby enhancing professional agency and instructional coherence (Poudel, 2024; Dewi, 2025). For ELT practitioners, collaboration around lesson planning, material development, and classroom observations can foster shared ownership of learning and improve confidence in implementing innovative strategies. In Nepal, where geographic and institutional isolation often limit collegial support, structured collaboration provides an essential mechanism for professional growth and shared problem-solving (Poudel, 2022). Taken together, these studies highlight collaboration as a transformative force in PD, demonstrating that collective engagement not only mitigates professional isolation but also creates a sustainable culture of continuous improvement in ELT.

Equally critical is the content-specific focus of PD. Research underscores the importance of aligning PD activities with the core instructional content that teachers are expected to deliver, such as communicative grammar instruction, task-based language teaching, assessment for learning, and inclusive classroom strategies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). When PD content is directly tied to classroom realities, teachers are more likely to perceive it as relevant and apply it in meaningful ways. In contrast, generic or theory-heavy PD often fails to bridge the gap between knowledge and classroom practice, particularly in linguistically diverse and under-resourced environments like many regions in Nepal (Gaure, 2023). These findings suggest that contextually grounded and subject-specific PD is indispensable for empowering teachers to make pedagogical decisions that effectively address students' diverse linguistic and cultural needs.

Lastly, the integration of blended delivery models has emerged as a particularly effective strategy for enhancing access, flexibility, and engagement in PD. Blended PD—combining face-to-face sessions with synchronous webinars and asynchronous digital modules—caters to diverse learning preferences and schedules, allowing teachers to learn at their own pace and revisit materials as needed (British Council Nepal, 2021). This approach is especially valuable in rural or geographically dispersed settings, where travel and time constraints often limit participation. In the Nepali ELT context, blended PD models have shown promise in extending professional learning to remote districts, creating sustained digital communities of practice, and reducing the urban-rural divide in PD access (Gautam, 2020). Overall, these four interrelated sub-themes highlight

that effective ELT PD should be sustained, collaborative, content-relevant, and flexibly delivered to ensure meaningful teacher learning and improved student outcomes.

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Challenges to Effective PD

A major challenge to the effectiveness of professional development in English Language Teaching is the issue of sustained teacher motivation and active professional engagement. When PD is perceived as a top-down mandate rather than a meaningful learning opportunity, teachers often engage only superficially, limiting the potential for genuine instructional change (Fakhar et al., 2025). Programs that fail to consider teachers' professional goals, classroom realities, or existing expertise tend to be viewed as irrelevant or burdensome. In contrast, involving teachers in the planning, design, and facilitation of PD initiatives enhances ownership and intrinsic motivation, encouraging deeper engagement and sustained participation (LI & Mohammed, 2025). In contexts like Nepal, where ELT teachers often work in isolation and lack consistent institutional support, recognising teachers as agents of change, rather than passive recipients of training, is essential for creating responsive and empowering PD environments (Sharma, 2023). Collectively, these insights highlight that the sustainability and impact of PD hinge on fostering teacher agency, making motivational support as critical as the pedagogical content itself.

Another significant barrier is the lack of adequate resources and infrastructure, which severely restricts access to quality PD, particularly in rural and remote regions. In many parts of Nepal, challenges such as unreliable electricity, limited internet connectivity, insufficient training budgets, and a shortage of qualified facilitators hinder both the delivery and effectiveness of PD initiatives (Panthee, 2023). Teachers working in mountainous districts often must travel long distances to attend workshops, incurring personal costs and sacrificing instructional time. Furthermore, the digital divide exacerbates disparities between urban and rural educators, especially as PD increasingly incorporates blended or online formats. Without targeted investments in infrastructure, technology, and local capacity-building, many teachers remain excluded from meaningful professional learning opportunities.

A third, closely related issue concerns institutional and systemic constraints that limit the integration of PD into school culture. Rigid timetables, heavy teaching loads, and hierarchical organisational structures often prevent teachers from participating in

sustained professional learning or collaborating meaningfully with peers (Ramchand, 2025). School leaders may prioritise exam preparation and administrative tasks over teacher development, further marginalising PD activities. In such environments, PD is often viewed as an extra responsibility rather than an integral part of the teaching profession. To address this, school leadership can adopt more flexible policies, allocate time within the academic schedule for collaborative learning, and foster a culture that values continuous improvement and reflective practice (Pham et al., 2024). Overcoming these institutional barriers is critical to ensuring that PD becomes a sustained and supportive process rather than a disconnected or compliance-oriented event.

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Contextual Insights: Nepali ELT

In Nepal, several national-level initiatives have sought to strengthen English Language Teaching through structured professional development programs. One notable example is the British Council's ELT Empowerment Programme, which blends ten days of face-to-face training with five days of in-class mentoring. This model has shown promising outcomes, particularly in enhancing teachers' methodological awareness, confidence, and classroom practices (British Council Nepal, 2023). The inclusion of mentoring as a follow-up mechanism addresses the well-documented gap between training and classroom implementation, offering teachers personalised support in real-time contexts. Moreover, the program aligns with global best practices in PD by incorporating sustained engagement and active learning components (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). However, while such initiatives are promising, their scalability and sustainability across diverse educational regions remain a key concern.

Despite national-level initiatives aimed at improving teacher professional development, substantial regional disparities continue to affect both the provision and the impact of PD across Nepal. Remote and mountainous districts, particularly in the Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces, face persistent logistical and infrastructural barriers that hinder teachers' consistent participation in PD programs (Sah, 2015). Community-based schools in Sudurpaschim, for instance, often operate with limited access to trained facilitators, irregular monitoring, and scarce opportunities for peer collaboration due to poor road connectivity and limited technological infrastructure (Neupane & Bhatt, 2023; Saud, 2023). Teachers in these regions frequently report professional isolation and insufficient institutional support, which restricts the practical application of PD learnings. Although some decentralised and donor-supported models have attempted to reach

rural educators, these efforts remain fragmented and unsystematic (Poudel, 2022). The literature suggests that addressing such disparities requires greater attention to context-specific barriers and locally adaptable PD frameworks that can respond to the unique challenges of geographically marginalised regions like Sudurpaschim.

Cultural dynamics also play a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of PD in Nepal. Traditional values that emphasise hierarchy and deference to authority may inhibit open dialogue, peer critique, and collaborative problem-solving—essential components of reflective professional learning (Acharya, 2025). In group settings, junior teachers may hesitate to express differing opinions or challenge senior colleagues, limiting the depth of pedagogical discussions. Therefore, PD programs must be culturally responsive, embedding trust-building activities and norm-setting practices that foster psychological safety and mutual respect among participants. By creating inclusive and non-hierarchical learning spaces, PD designers can encourage more authentic collaboration, empowering teachers to share, question, and innovate in their practice. Such culturally grounded strategies are vital for ensuring that PD initiatives are not only effective but also socially and contextually sustainable.

Discussions

The insights emerging from this review reinforce a consistent global understanding that professional development in English Language Teaching is most impactful when it is sustained, contextually grounded, and directly relevant to teachers' professional realities. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), effective PD nurtures intrinsic motivation by supporting teachers' autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In international contexts such as Finland, Singapore, and Canada, teacher-led inquiry, mentoring, and collaborative learning communities have proven instrumental in enhancing professional agency and fostering pedagogical innovation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015). These models contrast sharply with one-off workshops, which often fail to translate into sustained classroom change due to their limited scope and lack of continuity. Similarly, the integration of Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) into PD design highlights the importance of dialogic learning structures such as peer observation, lesson study, and co-teaching, which have been successfully implemented in countries like Japan and South Korea (Saito & Atencio, 2013). These practices position PD not just as a means of knowledge transmission but as a socially mediated process of co-constructing teaching expertise.

However, research from resource-constrained settings, including many parts of South Asia, suggests that even theoretically sound PD initiatives can be undermined by systemic barriers. Studies from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and rural India, for example, have found that PD programs often suffer from poor alignment with local classroom realities,

limited follow-up support, and lack of teacher involvement in planning processes (Westbrook et al., 2013; Moon et al., 2013). These issues closely mirror the challenges identified in the Nepali context, where motivational obstacles, such as the imposition of top-down training, and structural barriers, like limited internet connectivity, absence of substitute teachers, and restricted travel allowances, impede meaningful participation (Acharya, 2025; Lamichhane et al., 2024). Even promising innovations such as blended learning models require robust digital infrastructure and pedagogical support that many rural regions in Nepal currently lack. Comparative evidence from Uganda shows that without addressing foundational logistical and institutional constraints, PD efforts often fail to reach the teachers who need them most (O’Sullivan, 2010).

At the same time, examples from Nepal provide context-specific insights into how PD can be made more inclusive and responsive when it is embedded in classroom practice and supported by peer interaction. The British Council’s ELT Empowerment Programme in Nepal, for instance, combines face-to-face training with classroom mentoring, enabling teachers to receive immediate feedback and scaffolded support (British Council Nepal, 2023). This aligns with global evidence from Brazil and Indonesia, where in-class coaching has shown notable improvements in teacher retention and instructional quality (Popova et al., 2022). Yet, such models are still unevenly distributed in Nepal, with remote provinces like Sudurpaschim and Karnali facing disproportionate barriers to access (Neupane & Bhatt, 2023). Furthermore, sociocultural factors, such as hierarchical school leadership structures and cultural reluctance toward open peer critique, limit the effectiveness of collaborative PD formats unless trust and collegiality are purposefully cultivated. These nuances underscore the need for PD programs to not only adopt internationally recognised best practices but also adapt them sensitively to local institutional, cultural, and geographic realities.

In sum, this review demonstrates that while global research offers valuable frameworks and principles for effective ELT professional development, their application in Nepal, and especially in underserved regions, requires careful contextualisation. The Nepali ELT landscape illustrates both the promise and the limitations of PD when it is implemented without sustained institutional support, meaningful teacher involvement, or alignment with local needs. Moving forward, a dynamic interplay between global evidence and local innovation is essential. As international studies and Nepal-based research converge, it becomes increasingly clear that transformative PD should be relational, continuous, and context-driven, anchored in the lived experiences of teachers and co-constructed through inclusive policy dialogue and practice.

Insights

One of the central insights emerging from this review is the importance of

conducting rigorous needs analyses to ensure PD initiatives are relevant, contextual, and demand-driven. Generic or prescriptive programs often fail to resonate with teachers' actual classroom challenges. Instead, mixed-methods approaches—including structured surveys, focus groups, and interviews—enable a deeper understanding of what teachers need, expect, and value in PD. These data can then guide the design of content, format, and delivery models that are both pedagogically meaningful and contextually appropriate. Needs assessments also help align PD goals with school-level development plans, creating coherence between individual professional growth and institutional objectives.

Another critical insight involves institutionalising ongoing teacher professional development programs which have proven effective in promoting sustained professional learning. Unlike isolated workshops, coaching provides teachers with classroom-based feedback and support from trained mentors, enabling iterative improvement. Embedding such cycles within the school calendar and supported by peer collaboration or professional learning communities can build a culture of trust and continuous development. Additionally, developing local PD hubs—particularly in regional centres—can help decentralise PD efforts, reduce the over-reliance on capital-centric programming, and empower local master trainers to lead and adapt sessions to their communities. These hubs can also serve as repositories of teaching resources and models of best practices, further supporting the PD ecosystem.

Lastly, leveraging mobile learning tools offers a cost-effective and scalable solution to Nepal's geographic and infrastructural barriers. Short text messages with pedagogical tips, low-bandwidth video demonstrations, and audio reflections can reach even the most remote teachers, keeping them connected to PD opportunities. Moreover, embedding reflective practices—such as teacher journaling, classroom-based inquiry, and action research—can transform PD from a one-time event into a habit of mind. Reflective tools support teachers in contextualising theory into practice, identifying what works in their settings, and developing as autonomous, self-aware professionals. Together, these insights affirm that PD must be embedded, sustained, and responsive to local needs to truly enhance English language teaching in Nepal.

Conclusion

Enhancing English Language Teaching through professional development requires a comprehensive and contextualised approach that aligns with teachers' intrinsic motivations, classroom realities, and socio-cultural dynamics. This study highlighted that effective PD is sustained, job-embedded, collaborative, content-focused, and increasingly delivered through blended models. These features foster deeper pedagogical engagement and transfer of learning to practice when implemented with appropriate scaffolding and institutional support. The theoretical grounding in Self-Determination Theory underscores

the importance of fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness among teachers, while Sociocultural Theory emphasises learning as a social, collaborative process best facilitated through interactive practices like lesson study and peer observation.

However, realising the potential of PD in ELT is not without challenges. The insights suggest that motivation and ownership among teachers often decline when PD is mandated or disconnected from their needs. Structural barriers such as limited internet access, inadequate mentoring capacity, and rigid institutional norms further constrain participation, especially in remote areas of Nepal. Addressing these challenges requires systemic reform that includes teacher involvement in PD design, investments in digital infrastructure, leadership commitment, and policy support for flexible, locally adapted PD structures. Such efforts are particularly crucial in Nepal's diverse geographical and cultural contexts, where one-size-fits-all models are often ineffective.

To transform PD from an occasional intervention into a sustainable professional growth mechanism, stakeholders need to embrace evidence-based strategies and localised innovation. Insights from the Nepali context suggest the value of mobile learning, decentralised PD hubs, mentoring frameworks, and reflective practices such as teacher journaling and action research. By integrating these practices with theoretical insights from SDT and Sociocultural Theory, PD programs can become more responsive, empowering, and impactful. Ultimately, when teachers are meaningfully supported in their professional journeys, the quality of English language instruction improves, contributing to stronger student outcomes and a more resilient education system.

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