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Teacher Educators' Experiences of Integrating Digital Technologies in English Language Teaching

Dammar Singh Saud
Far Western University, Nepal
ORCID: 0009-0009-3029-7830
Email: dammarsaud68@fwu.edu.np

Abstract

Incorporating digital technologies into English Language Teaching (ELT) has become an essential aspect for enhancing teaching and learning experiences. This hermeneutic phenomenological study explores the experiences of four university-level English language teacher educators in Darchula regarding integrating digital technologies into ELT. Utilising semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis guided by the DigCompEdu Framework, the research reveals the educators' lived experiences with digital technology integration. The findings highlight how digital tools are employed to improve teaching and learning experiences, boost student engagement, enhance access to educational materials, and create dynamic and interactive learning environments. Despite these benefits, the study also underscores the need to address technical challenges and adopt a balanced approach to using online resources to maximize advantages while mitigating potential drawbacks. By providing teacher educators and policymakers in Nepal with insights into the significance of digital technologies and the potential of the DigCompEdu framework, this article aims to promote more effective integration of digital technologies in ELT classrooms.

***Keywords*:** English language teaching, DigCompEdu Framework, digital resources, digital competence

Introduction

Digital technology has been reshaping the global education landscape, and Nepal has not remained untouched by this transformation. Despite the growing availability of digital resources, English language teacher educators in Nepalese universities have faced challenges when it comes to seamlessly integrating digital

practices into their classrooms. The problem lies in the limited competence among these educators, which has been a significant hindrance to the successful incorporation of digital technology into instruction.

Prior research has primarily focused on various aspects related to ICT in English Language Teaching (ELT), such as its role (Gnawali, 2020; Hidayati, 2016; Wright, 2014), promises and barriers (Acharya, 2014; Laudari, 2019; Muslem et al., 2018; Ramorola, 2010), the disconnection between ICT policies and actual practices (Rana, 2018), ICT's role in online education (Jha, 2020; Pangeni, 2017), and the digital competences and practices of EFL teachers in ELT classrooms (Poudel, 2021, Saud, 2021). These studies highlight the potential of digital technologies in enhancing ELT but also underscore the significant barriers, particularly in the context of teacher competence and the practical implementation of ICT policies.

However, gaps remain in understanding the lived experiences of ELT teacher educators in integrating digital technologies into their teaching practices, particularly in the remote regions of Nepal. This gap is critical as addressing it can lead to more effective strategies for overcoming barriers and enhancing digital competence among educators. The DigCompEdu Framework, which outlines specific skills and competencies required for effective digital integration, emerges as a valuable resource in this context.

This study delves into the exploration of challenges and prospects associated with digital practices in English language education within Nepal, utilizing the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators (DigCompEdu) as its theoretical lens. By conducting semi-structured interviews with four ELT teacher educators from university campuses in Darchula and performing a thematic analysis of the data, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles and requirements faced by these educators.

The DigCompEdu framework offers a holistic perspective on the precise skills and competencies essential for teacher educators to proficiently incorporate technology into their teaching methodologies. This study analyzes the framework's potential to address the challenges faced in English language education in Nepal by focusing on its six areas of digital competence: professional engagement, digital resources, teaching and learning, assessment, empowering learners, and facilitating learners' digital competence.

This study seeks to enhance the existing body of knowledge concerning digital practices in ELT classrooms in remote parts of Nepal. It aims to offer ELT teacher educators and policymakers a deeper comprehension of the importance of digital competence and the potential utility of the DigCompEdu framework. The

ultimate objective is to facilitate a more streamlined integration of technology within ELT classrooms, thereby equipping educators and students with the necessary skills for instruction that incorporate digital technologies. Furthermore, the findings and insights garnered from this research may hold relevance beyond the Nepalese context, potentially offering valuable guidance to other regions facing similar challenges in the integration of digital practices within English language education.

By investigating these aspects, this research intends to fill the existing gaps in the literature and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of digital technology integration in ELT, ultimately aiding in the development of more effective educational strategies and policies.

DigCopmEdu Framework

The emergence of digital technologies has brought about profound changes in human behaviour, mirroring the transformative impact on language teaching driven by the integration of advanced educational technologies. Dias-Trindade et al. (2021) stated that the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators serves as an invaluable resource for equipping educators with the essential skills needed to effectively incorporate digital technologies into their teaching methods. This framework, rooted in the beliefs upheld by Ghomi and Redecker (2019) and García-Vandewalle García et al. (2023), underscores the crucial role of educators in nurturing digital competencies in students as an integral part of education in the digital age.

The DigCompEdu framework, elaborated by Dias-Trindade and Moreira (2020), presents a comprehensive model for addressing ICT-related issues in English Language Education through three dimensions: Educators' Professional Competencies, Educators' Pedagogic Competencies, and Learners' Competencies. Within these dimensions, six sub-dimensions—Professional Engagement, Digital Resources, Teaching and Learning, Assessment, Empowering Learners, and Facilitating Learners' Digital Competence—encompass a total of twenty-two specific skills, providing a detailed and holistic perspective on the competencies educators need for proficient digital practices in language classrooms. Employing this framework to assess ELT teachers' experiences with ICT and their reported competencies offers a nuanced understanding of the integration of digital technology in ELT classrooms. This approach aligns with the insights of Caena and Redecker (2019), highlighting its potential impact across various educational levels. Furthermore, the emphasis on enhancing digital proficiency among university students and educators, as highlighted by Zhao et al. (2021), reinforces the ongoing

importance of prioritizing these skills within higher education institutions. The framework, as grouped into these six main areas, outlines specific competencies that educators should possess, which are discussed in the following sections.

Professional Engagement

Professional Engagement in education underscores the vital role of educators in using digital tools to enhance communication within their educational institutions, encompassing interactions with students, parents, and external stakeholders (Redecker, 2017). This involves educators collaborating with peers, actively participating in knowledge sharing, and contributing to the development of innovative teaching methods. Reflective practice is central to this aspect, prompting educators to engage in self-reflection and group discussions, critically assess their digital teaching approaches, and actively enhance digital pedagogy within their personal and educational communities (Cabero-Almenara et al., 2021). Additionally, educators are encouraged to utilize digital resources for ongoing professional development to stay updated on the latest technologies and best practices, aligning with the overarching goals of fostering effective organizational communication, promoting professional collaboration, facilitating reflective practice, and supporting continuous digital professional development.

Digital Resources

Educators play a pivotal role in the realm of digital resources, as highlighted by Redecker (2017). They must be competent in selecting, creating, and managing digital materials, considering various factors such as learning objectives, teaching context, pedagogical strategies, and the learner demographic. This competence extends to adapting and enhancing openly licensed or permissible resources and developing new digital educational materials while aligning with specific learning goals, context, pedagogical approaches, and the target audience. Proficiency in organizing digital content for accessibility, safeguarding sensitive content, adhering to privacy and copyright regulations, and understanding the use and creation of open licenses and open educational resources with proper attribution is also crucial (Moorhouse, 2023). These competencies encompass key objectives: selecting digital resources, creating, and modifying digital resources, and managing, protecting, and sharing digital resources.

Teaching and Learning

In the realm of Teaching and Learning, educators play a pivotal role in integrating digital tools and resources into their teaching practices, effectively managing digital interventions, and exploring innovative pedagogical approaches (Redecker, 2017). This area underscores educators' capacity to utilize digital

technologies to enhance learner engagement, both individually and collaboratively, both within and beyond formal learning settings. It also encourages educators to offer timely, personalized guidance and support while experimenting with novel methods of assistance. Collaborative learning takes centre stage, promoting the use of digital tools in group assignments to improve communication, teamwork, and knowledge co-creation (Ibrahim, 2023). Furthermore, self-regulated learning is emphasized, with educators leveraging digital technologies to aid learners in planning, monitoring, and reflecting on their learning journeys, as well as showcasing progress, sharing insights, and fostering innovative problem-solving. The overarching objectives revolve around seamlessly integrating digital tools into teaching, providing guidance, facilitating collaborative learning, and supporting self-regulated learning.

Assessment

Assessment plays a pivotal role in education by leveraging digital tools for both formative and summative evaluations, and diversifying assessment approaches (Redecker, 2017). Educators are expected to possess the skills to create, select, critically evaluate, and interpret digital data related to learner activities and performance to enhance teaching and learning (Hidayah & Prihantoro, 2022). They should use digital technologies to provide timely feedback, adjust teaching methods, and offer personalized support. Furthermore, educators must help learners and parents understand and utilize data generated by digital tools for decision-making. This encompasses assessment strategies, evidence analysis, feedback, and planning, all aimed at improving the assessment process through digital means.

Empowering Learners

Empowering Learners, as highlighted by Redecker (2017), underscores the crucial need to provide equitable access to learning materials and activities, especially for learners with special needs, considering individual expectations, abilities, digital proficiency, and cultural backgrounds. It accentuates the educator's role in fostering digital literacy, responsible digital engagement, ethical technology use, critical thinking, and creativity. Entrepreneurship education is also central, focusing on cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset and skills to prepare learners for the opportunities presented by the digital economy and society (Chung & Choi, 2023). This encompasses objectives related to accessibility, inclusion, differentiation, personalization, and active learner engagement, ultimately creating an inclusive and dynamic learning environment that caters to diverse learner needs while encouraging active participation and creativity.

Facilitating Learners' Digital Competence

Facilitating Learners' Digital Competence, as outlined by Redecker (2017),

encompasses educators' proficiency in using essential digital tools for teaching, learning, and assessment, including virtual classrooms, and learning management systems, along with competence in handling digital devices such as interactive whiteboards, tablets, and laptops. This domain also underscores the importance of digital security, necessitating educators to possess knowledge and skills for safeguarding digital infrastructure, data, and information, including the ability to counter cyber threats and implement recovery measures during digital emergencies. Subsequently, educators must be equipped to manage crises, deploy recovery protocols during service disruptions, and ensure uninterrupted teaching and learning during emergencies (Iskandar et al., 2022). This overarching goal encompasses sub-areas such as Information and Media Literacy, Digital Communication and Collaboration, Digital Content Creation, Responsible Use, and Digital Problem-Solving, each of which delineates objectives related to promoting information literacy, fostering responsible digital behaviour, and enhancing problem-solving skills among learners.

Research into teachers' digital competencies has revealed disparities between their perceived skills and actual abilities. Zhao et al. (2020) found that while teachers generally considered themselves proficient in digital competencies, they often lacked the ability to create digital content. Similarly, Monteiro and Leite (2021) observed that the underutilization of pedagogical support hampers digital transformation in higher education, impacting both emergency and long-term scenarios. Bond et al. (2018) emphasized that universities focus on enhancing digital skills among future professionals to prepare them for ICT's growing relevance in various contexts, particularly the workplace, where these skills enhance problem-solving and solution-seeking capabilities.

Despite these findings, there remain significant gaps in understanding how to effectively bridge the gap between perceived and actual digital competencies. Specifically, teachers often feel competent in general digital skills but lack specific capabilities in digital content creation. Additionally, there is a notable underutilization of available pedagogical support, which is crucial for successful digital transformation. Moreover, existing research often does not account for the specific challenges faced by teachers in diverse educational contexts.

Addressing these gaps is critical because without proficiency in digital content creation, teachers cannot fully leverage technology to enhance learning experiences. Furthermore, the underutilization of pedagogical support can impede the long-term sustainability of digital initiatives in education. Understanding and addressing the unique challenges in different teaching contexts ensures that professional development programs are relevant and effective.

The design and execution of this research were informed by these identified gaps in several ways. The literature highlighted the need to focus on specific digital competencies, such as content creation, guiding the development of targeted research questions and hypotheses. Recognizing the importance of pedagogical support informed the methodology, ensuring that the research examined both the availability and utilization of such support in different educational settings. Additionally, the research design incorporated a diverse range of educational contexts, ensuring that the findings would be broadly applicable and relevant.

The DigCompEdu framework was pivotal in this research, providing a comprehensive tool for assessing educators' technology utilization skills and consistently revealing deficiencies in technology integration (Caena & Redecker, 2019; Monteiro & Leite, 2021; Zhao et al., 2020). By identifying specific challenges in various teaching contexts, the research was able to propose tailored professional development initiatives. These initiatives aim to enhance technology integration, improve engagement and critical thinking, and ensure that professional development programs are customized to meet educators' needs.

Furthermore, the research underscored the adaptability of the DigCompEdu framework, which ensures its continued relevance as technology evolves. This adaptability makes it a valuable resource for informing policies, curricula, and professional development initiatives at national and regional levels, ultimately ensuring that educators are well-equipped to meet the evolving needs of students in today's digital era.

Methods and Procedures

This research adopts a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, grounded in the belief that our understanding of the world is shaped by individual subjective experiences, relativist ontology, and value-laden axiology (Taylor & Medina, 2013). This method was chosen to delve deeply into participants' lived experiences, emotions, and perceptions, offering profound insights into the phenomenon at hand. This interpretative paradigm facilitates an in-depth exploration of English language teacher educators' lived experiences and perceptions regarding ICT integration in ELT.

Data Collection

Four teacher educators (TEs) were purposefully selected from two higher education institutions in Darchula, based on their extensive and relevant experiences, to explore their lived experiences of ICT in ELT. These participants, all with at least five years of teaching experience and active involvement in ICT integration, provided rich insights. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Nepali in familiar

settings at their institutions, with each participant interviewed twice for about an hour each session. The interviews focused on their experiences with digital content creation and pedagogical support, were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. Respondents were assigned alpha-numeric pseudonyms for confidentiality, and identifying information was removed. Participants reflected on past encounters with ICT, detailing their successes, challenges, and the impact on their teaching practices. Complementary field notes captured non-verbal cues and contextual details, while reflective writings by the researcher offered ongoing interpretation. Guided by the DigCompEdu framework, the study assessed technology utilization skills, with the primary emphasis on the qualitative data reflecting the participants' lived experiences. This comprehensive approach informs tailored professional development initiatives to enhance technology integration and improve educational outcomes in ELT.

Data Analysis

This research utilized thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) method to explore ICT integration in ELT. The process began with data immersion to deeply engage with participants' narratives, followed by systematic labelling of meaningful units and identification of recurring patterns and connections. Themes such as Benefits of ICT Integration, Professional Engagement, Digital Resources, Teaching and Learning, Assessment, Empowering Learners, Facilitating Learners' Digital Competence, Challenges in ICT Integration, and Strategies for Overcoming Challenges were derived from these patterns. Each theme was rigorously defined to accurately reflect the data and align with research objectives. The analysis synthesized these themes into a cohesive narrative, emphasizing implications for enhancing technology use in ELT. To ensure credibility, member checking and peer debriefing validated interpretations, while ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout, ensuring participant confidentiality, privacy, and adherence to ethical principles.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, I delve into the findings and discussion of our study on the integration of digital technologies in ELT within the context of Darchula, Nepal. Through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach and guided by the DigCompEdu framework, I explore the lived experiences and perspectives of English language teacher educators. These findings illuminate both the challenges and opportunities associated with digital technology integration in ELT, offering insights into effective strategies and implications for pedagogy and policy.

Benefits of ICT Integration in English Language Teaching

This study delves deeply into the advantages of integrating digital technologies into English Language Teaching, drawing insights from the perspectives of four teacher educators. Their voices resoundingly endorse the positive impact of ICT across various educational dimensions. TE1 vividly illustrates this impact, stating, "Interactive whiteboards and online quizzes have transformed my classes. They engage students more actively, make lessons more appealing, and were particularly invaluable for remote teaching during the pandemic." TE2 supports this view, noting, "Digital tools like gamified platforms and educational apps not only motivate students but also streamline administrative tasks and enhance personalized feedback." TE3 emphasizes, "ICT has made course materials more accessible and increased student participation," while TE4 highlights, "It fosters collaboration and improves writing skills through interactive learning experiences."

In contrast to traditional methods, which retain value, these insights underscore the multifaceted benefits of ICT in enhancing student engagement, motivation, and learning experiences. These findings resonate with student-centred approaches and underscore the importance of equipping students with digital literacy skills essential for thriving in the digital age. As highlighted by TE1, TE2, TE3, and TE4, integrating digital technologies creates dynamic and interactive learning environments that accommodate diverse learning styles and improve overall class effectiveness.

Moreover, these qualitative findings align with previous research (Gnawali, 2020; Hidayati, 2016), which also supports the positive impact of ICT in education. By connecting these voices directly, this study not only validates but also enriches the understanding of how digital technologies can effectively support English Language Teaching. This comprehensive perspective advocates for continued integration efforts and underscores the transformative potential of ICT in enhancing educational outcomes.

Professional Engagement

Professional engagement is a crucial component influencing the career progression of TEs, encompassing organizational communication, collaboration, reflective practice, and digital continuous professional development. Within ELT, TEs have embraced digital technologies to revolutionize their professional practices. They rely heavily on platforms like email, messaging apps, and video conferencing tools to facilitate efficient communication with students, colleagues, and other stakeholders. For instance, TE1 highlighted how Zoom transcended geographical boundaries, enabling international academic conferences and global scholarly

exchange: “Zoom has been instrumental in connecting us with colleagues from around the world. It’s not just about meetings; we’ve hosted entire conferences where scholars from different continents could participate and share their research.”

Messenger groups such as WhatsApp, cited by TE2, facilitate seamless communication within organizations: “WhatsApp groups are our lifeline for quick updates and discussions. We use it daily to coordinate with our department and ensure everyone stays informed.”

Similarly, TE3 and TE4 emphasized using online surveys for feedback and learning management systems for instructional communication: “We use online surveys to gather student feedback promptly, which helps us adjust our teaching methods in real-time,” noted TE3. TE4 added, “Learning management systems have transformed how we deliver course materials and interact with students. It’s made teaching more interactive and accessible.”

Moreover, professional collaboration among TEs thrives in the digital landscape, leveraging platforms for communication, resource sharing, and collaborative projects. TE1 exemplified the use of learning management systems for academic collaboration (Wulantari et al., 2023). TE2 emphasized cross-location collaborations via video calls to enhance knowledge about digital technologies in ELT. TE3 fostered community through online webinars, enriching teaching methodologies. TE4 engaged in workshops and conferences, utilizing digital technologies to disseminate teaching strategies (Dhanavel, 2023). These experiences underscore how digital tools transform professional engagement and advance ELT practices.

The integration of digital resources in education, including selection, creation, modification, management, protection, and sharing, significantly enhances student engagement and learning outcomes. TEs prioritize selecting resources aligned with learning objectives, reliability, and accessibility. They employ systematic evaluation criteria to ensure equitable access (Moorhouse, 2023). TEs actively engage in crafting and modifying digital materials to optimize student comprehension and engagement (Heine et al., 2023). Platforms like Google Classroom and OneDrive are used for content management, emphasizing privacy and copyright considerations (Inamorato dos Santos et al., 2023).

In interpreting these findings, TEs’ conscientious approach to digital resources fosters a dynamic educational environment that enhances student engagement and educational outcomes. Their dedication to quality education and equitable access is evident in their selection and adaptation of digital materials.

While managing and sharing resources effectively, TEs acknowledge the importance of ethical and legal considerations in digital education.

Teaching and Learning

In their pursuit of effective teaching and learning strategies, the teacher educators (TEs) examined in this study have prominently incorporated digital technologies into their instructional methods, utilizing a diverse array of tools and platforms to elevate the educational experience. For instance, TE1 emphasized the use of multimedia projectors and interactive whiteboards to create dynamic lessons, stating, "Multimedia elements engage students visually and help in better understanding complex topics." Similarly, TE2 highlighted the integration of Google Classroom and Messenger groups for remote instruction during the pandemic, noting, "These platforms allowed me to maintain regular interaction and provide immediate feedback outside class." TE3 and TE4 recommended educational websites and apps, enabling students to explore supplementary materials independently and participate in enriching online discussions, enhancing their overall learning journey.

In terms of guidance and support, these TEs adeptly harnessed digital technologies to provide continuous assistance and foster collaboration among students. TE1 established online discussion forums, where students freely exchanged ideas and received peer feedback, affirming, "The forums encourage active participation and help students develop critical thinking skills." TE2 utilized video conferencing for personalized support and feedback, explaining, "I use 'track changes' in Microsoft Word to give detailed feedback on assignments, which students find very helpful." TE3 and TE4 maintained seamless communication through learning management systems, ensuring students received timely guidance beyond regular class hours, with TE4 noting, "I believe in being accessible to students whenever they need clarification or support."

The integration of digital tools extended to collaborative learning practices, where the TEs effectively utilized online platforms to stimulate student collaboration. TE1 facilitated meaningful discussions through online forums, fostering a sense of community among students, who shared, "The forums allow us to debate topics and learn from each other's perspectives." TE2 encouraged student engagement by sharing relevant resources and supporting discussions via video conferencing, emphasizing, "Collaborative learning helps students develop teamwork skills essential for their future careers." TE3 and TE4 utilized various communication channels to promote interaction and problem-solving among students, illustrating the importance of digital platforms in facilitating active participation and collective learning experiences.

Lastly, concerning self-regulated learning, the TEs empowered students to take ownership of their educational journey using digital tools and resources. TE1 utilized social media and online forums to foster self-directed learning and critical thinking, stating, "I encourage students to explore topics independently and share their insights online." TE2 employed learning management systems for self-assessment and progress tracking, affirming, "Students can monitor their own progress and adjust their learning strategies accordingly." TE3 encouraged independent exploration through online resources, noting, "Digital tools enable students to delve deeper into topics of interest and develop a deeper understanding." TE4 utilized online quizzes and interactive platforms to promote self-paced learning and adaptive study habits, remarking, "These tools help students assess their understanding and make improvements."

In interpreting these findings, the teacher educators in this study have adeptly integrated digital technologies into their teaching, guidance, collaborative learning, and self-regulated learning practices. By amplifying the voices of the TEs and their students through direct quotations and specific examples, this study illuminates how these practices enhance the overall educational experience, preparing students effectively for the challenges and opportunities of the digital age.

Assessment

The theme of Assessment revealed nuanced insights into how TEs integrate digital technologies within their educational contexts. TEs utilized various assessment strategies, with TE1 highlighting the use of Google Forms and Google Classroom for quizzes and assignments, emphasizing immediate feedback and progress tracking. TE4, in contrast, employed a broader range of digital tools such as online quizzes and digital portfolios, offering flexible assessment formats. Reflecting on their practices, TE2 and TE3 expressed challenges in developing digital skills and allocating time for further exploration. This variability underscores the need for targeted professional development initiatives to support TEs in effectively integrating digital technologies into assessment practices:

TE1 remarked, "I find Google Forms very useful for quick quizzes. It helps me see where students are at and adjust my teaching accordingly."

TE4 elaborated, "Digital portfolios allow students to showcase their work in diverse ways, which helps me assess their understanding more holistically."

Concurrently, the subtheme of Analyzing Evidence highlighted TEs' efforts in interpreting assessment data to inform teaching strategies. TE1 documented students' work digitally to facilitate ongoing reflection and track academic progress over time. In contrast, TE2 utilized a learning management system to monitor online

interactions and submissions, focusing on student engagement indicators. TE3 emphasized metrics such as participation rates and completion rates to gauge learner involvement, while TE4 applied digital tools for comprehensive analysis of learner activities:

TE2 explained, "The LMS helps me track student engagement patterns, which guides how I adjust my lessons based on their online activities."

TE3 noted, "I look closely at participation rates to understand how actively students are engaging with the course content."

These insights underscored the pivotal role of digital tools in providing actionable insights into student learning behaviors and academic performance. Such data-driven approaches enable TEs to tailor instructional strategies effectively:

TE4 reflected, "Analyzing digital data helps me understand where students struggle and where they excel, allowing me to adapt my teaching to better support their learning."

In interpreting these findings, it becomes evident that while some TEs adeptly integrate digital tools for assessment and data analysis, others face challenges in developing these competencies. This variability highlights the importance of continuous professional development tailored to enhance digital skills among educators. By supporting TEs in leveraging digital technologies more effectively, educational institutions can foster improved teaching practices and enhance learning outcomes in diverse educational settings.

Empowering Learners

The concept of empowering learners in education involves equipping students with essential tools and knowledge to take charge of their learning journey. Throughout this study, participants articulated their experiences and strategies, illustrating a nuanced understanding of these themes. In the subtheme of accessibility and inclusion, one participant emphasized, "I use educational apps that provide captions and audio descriptions to ensure all students, including those with disabilities, can access the content effectively." This approach highlights a commitment to equitable learning environments through digital tools. Another participant shared, "I integrate online platforms that allow students to engage in discussions and collaborative projects, promoting inclusivity in classroom interactions."

Regarding differentiation and personalization, participants discussed varied approaches tailored to individual student needs. As one educator stated, "I curate online resources that cater to different learning styles and interests, allowing students

to explore topics at their own pace." This practice underscores a personalized approach to learning facilitated by digital tools. In contrast, another participant noted, "I utilize adaptive learning technologies that adjust content based on student performance, ensuring each learner receives targeted support."

In the realm of actively engaging learners, participants highlighted diverse strategies to foster student involvement and initiative. One participant remarked, "I encourage students to use digital platforms for independent research and project-based learning, fostering their curiosity and critical thinking skills." This approach demonstrates how digital resources can empower students to drive their learning experiences. Another educator shared, "I incorporate gamified learning apps that motivate students to tackle complex concepts through interactive challenges." Such methods illustrate innovative uses of technology to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

These voices from the study illuminate the multifaceted role of digital technologies in empowering learners. They underscore themes of accessibility, differentiation, and active engagement as essential components of effective educational practices. Comparatively, studies by Chung and Choi (2023) and Ayuningtyas et al. (2023) reinforce these findings, showcasing similar trends in employing digital tools to foster inclusive, personalized, and engaging learning environments. Collectively, these insights contribute to a richer understanding of how educators harness technology to empower students and promote educational equity and efficacy in diverse contexts.

Facilitating Learners' Digital Competence

TEs play a pivotal role in fostering learners' digital competence across various dimensions, as highlighted by participants' experiences. In the realm of information and media literacy, TEs emphasize critical evaluation and responsible usage of digital information sources. One participant noted, "We teach them how to critically assess online sources, to question what they read, and to verify information before using it." This aligns with findings by Bilki et al. (2023), who similarly emphasize the importance of source credibility and discernment of reliable content.

Furthermore, TEs facilitate digital communication and collaboration through online platforms, enhancing students' skills beyond the physical classroom. A participant reflected, "We use forums and group projects to teach them how to communicate effectively online, to work together despite being physically apart." This approach mirrors insights from Iskandar et al. (2022), highlighting the role of online tools in bridging educational boundaries.

In the subtheme of digital content creation, TEs guide students in creatively using digital tools. One participant shared, "We encourage them to explore different media forms and create content that's meaningful and engaging." This hands-on approach fosters digital literacy and content creation proficiencies among learners.

Addressing responsible use, TEs educate students on online safety, privacy, and ethical behavior. A participant emphasized, "We discuss the importance of protecting personal information online and behaving ethically in digital spaces." This aspect of digital competence is crucial in today's interconnected world.

Moreover, in digital problem-solving, TEs create environments that encourage experimentation and application of technical knowledge to real-world issues. Participants noted, "We want them to think critically and apply what they've learned to solve problems using digital tools." This approach aligns with fostering creative thinking and practical skills necessary for navigating digital challenges.

These experiences underscore the significant role of TEs in nurturing learners' digital competence despite challenges such as time constraints. By focusing on participants' voices and experiences, this qualitative exploration reveals nuanced insights into how TEs actively shape digital learning environments. These findings not only resonate with previous research but also highlight the contextual nuances and personal perspectives that enrich our understanding of effective digital education practices.

Challenges in Integrating ICT in English Language Teaching

The challenges faced by the TEs provide a comprehensive view of the complexities involved in integrating digital technologies into ELT. TE1, for instance, highlighted technical issues such as unreliable internet connectivity, equipment malfunctions, and power outages that disrupt both teaching and learning. They expressed concerns about students' overreliance on online resources, potentially hindering creativity and productivity, while also emphasizing the risks of cybercrime and bullying associated with ICT use. TE2 echoed these sentiments, noting the continuous adaptation required for new software and the financial burdens of specific digital tools. They lamented the influence of politically appointed leaders lacking expertise, which stifles innovation and effective ICT adoption in classrooms. TE3 and TE4 further underscored challenges with frequent power outages, unreliable internet connections, and unequal access to technology among students, all of which impact teaching effectiveness and student engagement.

These voices illustrate the multifaceted challenges in implementing ICT in ELT. As TE3 noted, "Frequent power outages and unreliable internet connections disrupt our ICT integration efforts and dampen student enthusiasm." Similarly,

TE4 emphasized, “Technical disruptions and slow internet speeds make preparing and delivering ICT-based lessons time-consuming and frustrating.” These firsthand accounts highlight the disruptive impact of technical limitations and infrastructure deficits on educational processes.

Comparatively, the literature supports these findings, indicating that technical glitches, infrastructure inadequacies, and financial constraints hinder effective ICT use in education (Acharya, 2014; Bashyal, 2022; Rana, 2023; Laudari & Maher, 2019; Ramorola, 2010). Concerns about an overreliance on online resources stifling creativity are also echoed (Laudari & Maher, 2019). Moreover, the influence of political factors and organizational culture on ICT integration in academic settings is a recognized barrier (Acharya, 2014). Teacher-related challenges, such as inadequate training and reluctance to embrace technology, further complicate efforts to leverage ICT for enhanced learning outcomes (Bashyal, 2022).

In interpreting these findings, it becomes evident that addressing the diverse challenges highlighted by TEs is crucial for effective ICT integration in ELT. Strategies must focus on improving infrastructure reliability, providing targeted training and support for educators, and fostering a conducive organizational culture that values technological innovation. By addressing these issues, educational institutions can mitigate disparities in technology access and empower educators to harness ICT’s potential for enriching teaching and learning experiences in diverse educational contexts.

Strategies for Overcoming ICT Integration Challenges in ELT

Effectively addressing the challenges associated with the integration of digital technologies in English Language Teaching requires a collaborative effort from various stakeholders, including educational institutions, policymakers, and teacher training programs. As one participant expressed, “It’s not just about having the latest gadgets; we need reliable infrastructure to support our lessons. Stable internet and up-to-date devices are crucial.” Mitigating technical issues is foundational, and allocating sufficient funding is essential to enhance accessibility. Equally critical is comprehensive training for educators, as another participant noted, “We need training that goes beyond basic skills. Troubleshooting and using educational software effectively are key.” This sentiment underscores the need for educators to be proficient in technology use to seamlessly integrate digital tools into teaching methods.

Fostering a supportive and collaborative culture within educational institutions involves addressing political barriers and fostering an environment conducive to innovation. A participant emphasized, “Decision-making processes

need to be streamlined to support quick adaptation to new technologies." Facilitating the exchange of best practices among educators fosters innovation and cooperation, essential for effective ICT integration. Educating students about responsible ICT use is equally vital, ensuring they navigate online resources safely and responsibly. A participant shared, "We must teach students about digital citizenship and how to critically evaluate information online."

In interpreting these findings, while the challenges related to ICT integration in ELT are diverse and apparent, they are not insurmountable. Coordinated efforts involving stakeholders can effectively address these challenges. By addressing technical issues, providing robust training and support, ensuring equitable access to technology, and promoting a collaborative culture, ICT's full potential can be realized in enhancing teaching and learning experiences. This prepares students for the digital age, equipping them with essential digital literacy skills to thrive in a technology-driven world.

Conclusion

The integration of digital technologies in ELT in Nepal presents both opportunities and challenges. This study explores these dynamics using the DigCompEdu Framework, focusing on its implications for equity and social justice in education in remote areas like Darchula. English Language TEs in these regions have transformed their teaching practices significantly with digital tools, moving away from traditional methods. They highlight challenges such as technical issues and concerns about over-reliance on online resources, while also acknowledging the benefits like enhanced learning experiences and diversified teaching methods. Multimedia and interactive content are praised for catering to diverse learning preferences and creating engaging classrooms. As the educational landscape adapts to digital technologies, there is a growing need for resources and support to improve educators' ICT skills.

The experiences of English Language TEs align with the DigCompEdu Framework, demonstrating their proficiency in using digital tools for professional engagement, resource management, teaching, and assessment. However, challenges persist in managing digital resources effectively, diversifying assessment strategies, differentiating learning experiences, and fostering digital problem-solving. This underscores the importance of continuous professional development and a holistic approach to integrating ICT into ELT in alignment with the DigCompEdu framework.

This research provides a detailed exploration of digital competence through the DigCompEdu framework in the context of ELT in Darchula, Nepal. A

hermeneutic phenomenological study of English language teacher educators sheds light on theoretical and practical aspects of digital technology integration. The study's alignment with the DigCompEdu framework demonstrates its relevance and adaptability in guiding educators' digital competencies within authentic teaching environments. This contribution enriches existing literature by illustrating how the framework can effectively address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the digital landscape in ELT.

Pedagogically, the study emphasizes student-centered approaches in ELT, illustrating how digital technologies empower learners, enhance engagement, and foster digital literacy. This highlights the need to adapt teaching methods to meet modern students' evolving preferences and needs. From a policy perspective, the study offers insights for educational institutions and policymakers, informing evidence-based strategies to integrate digital tools into ELT curricula effectively. By aligning policy recommendations with study findings, policymakers can address technical and training-related challenges, leading to improved learning experiences, student outcomes, and digitally literate learners. In summary, this study advances our understanding of applying the DigCompEdu framework in ELT, laying groundwork for future research and policies to enhance digital competence and seamless technology integration in English language education.

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