



Developing Professionally as an English Teacher: An Autoethnographic Study of ICT Tool Use During and After the Pandemic in Nepal

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted Nepal's education system, forcing educators to rethink their classroom practices and transition from their physical classrooms to online platforms and other modes of teaching and learning. In this autoethnographic exploration, I draw from my significant experiences and practices about growing from a common to a techno-friendly teacher during and after the pandemic. Teacher professional development plays a dominant role in creating positive impacts on the lives of every teacher, especially during the pandemic days and transition. Hence, I reflected on the role of ICT in my professional growth and how they have influenced my professional journey. Subscribing experiential and transition theory, I interpreted my narratives, insights, and flashbacks about past incidents and interpreted them. The study reveals how an English language teacher struggled with ICT tools and other digital resources in the early days of the pandemic and felt vulnerable. These struggles, difficulties, vulnerabilities, and challenges in using ICT, including the applications, tools, and resources, and my resilience to cope with adversities, learning to use these tools, and the awaiting opportunities made a significant change in my teaching journey. My narratives, interpretations, and discussions showed the prominent role of ICT in the professional development of teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

It was March 2020 when Nepal experienced a terrifying epidemic. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 (WHO, 2020, as cited in Villani et al., 2021). Lockdowns, social exclusion, hygienic upkeep, quarantines, moving physical classrooms online, establishing alternative teaching and learning techniques, and more strategies prevented the COVID-19 epidemic from spreading. The world order changed due to COVID-19, demanding new activities from society, including academic institutions (Alvarez-Risco et al., 2021). Following the COVID-19 outbreak, the educational system underwent considerable modifications, including transforming physical classrooms into virtual learning environments. Bharat Prasad Neupane, Rajesh Sapkota and I experienced transition and adopted virtual and online delivery modes. However, in this article, the first author's

experiences are foregrounded, while the second and the third author contributed to conceptualizing the article, reading, revising, and editing multiple times. As the first author's narrative predominates the article, we decided to write the article from the point of view of the first author using the pronoun 'I.'

The COVID-19 crisis forced us to make the pedagogical shift from the traditional to the modern teaching-learning process, from the physical classroom to the Zoom platform and virtual space, and from workshops and seminars to attending webinars (Mishra et al., 2020). The outbreak forced teachers to alter their pedagogies and teaching strategies, and ICT was introduced in instruction and learning. The various technologies are used synchronously and asynchronously in the different higher educational institutes (Shrestha et al., 2021). Information and communication technologies gave unique opportunities for education and training because they fostered individual and corporate creativity and innovation while improving instruction and learning (Maatuk et al., 2021). When the epidemic stroke, most of the educational processes were conducted digitally.

According to Ageel and John (2012), teachers gain advantages from utilizing different types of technology, thanks to the integration of ICT into education. ICT integration assists, guides, and allows them to enhance their teaching. The research findings of Thapaliya (2014) show that "ICTs can help to ease in the teaching and learning activities, arouses students' motivation, provides the authentic materials, makes students creative, analytical and constructive" (p. 255). However, despite all these benefits, teachers continuously struggled to run online classes through the various online appliances as they were unprepared for such unprecedented times. However, with the change in context, they used several platforms like Google Classroom, Google Meet, and Zoom to assist the children during the crisis. They tried to deliver their classroom lesson by incorporating the various ICT tools and resources and motivating the learners to learn new things. The teachers attended several online seminars and webinars to foster their professional growth and expand their horizons of knowledge regarding the use of technologies and pedagogical expertise.

Professional development helps to enhance the skills and knowledge of teachers, involving the sharing of ideas and knowledge to enrich their expertise (Al-Harbi, 2011). Teachers' professional development consists of gaining knowledge and skills through lifelong learning to enhance educators and learners (Day, 2003). The teachers should be supported and encouraged to grow and flourish professionally. This also requires physical and mental skills for them to survive in the present world (Al-Madani & Allafiajiy, 2014). Any language teacher who wants to advance their knowledge and abilities and network with other educators in the community and nation must pursue professional development. However, Nepal has little investment in teachers' professional development activities (Neupane & Joshi, 2022). In addition, though many studies (Neupane, 2023, 2024; Neupane & Bhatt, 2023; Neupane et al., 2022) are conducted on the professional development and identity construction of teachers, developing through online activities is uncharted territory in Nepal.

According to Al-Madani and Allafiajiy (2014), it is unavoidable for educators to include technology in their teaching due to the developments in educational technologies, particularly the accessibility of the internet and various digital resources and platforms. Teachers must integrate ICT skills and knowledge into their language classrooms during the pandemic to foster professional development. Integrating multiple technologies in education transformed how teachers communicate, learn, and enhance their professional development by

exploring and implementing new strategies (Ross, 2013). Teachers should incorporate technology into their pedagogical techniques since it significantly improves classroom instruction and the educational system (Sullivan et al., 2018).

During times of crisis, all educators, regardless of their current use of technology, are expected to support it effectively in their professional development. Most educators now spend time online in areas like discussion forums and websites and seek social networking opportunities (Trust, 2017). Through the use of ICT, educators interact with each other online, letting the discussion and establishing professional communities as well as collaborating, which can uplift their professional growth (Salmon et al., 2015). The various digital tools have become one of the aspects of their professional learning, providing ample space for social interaction (Parsons et al., 2019). Thus, online professional development can significantly enhance their self-growth, leading to a better educational system. The teacher has used their free time to try new things, such as managing online classes, using various synchronous and asynchronous modes to support the learner's learning environment, assisting with distance learning, and setting up multiple teaching resources and materials in their appliances. Teachers even try to collaborate with global educators from foreign countries to develop good networking with them and to flourish in their current teaching practice, and this is all possible through the use of ICT.

I conducted this research to investigate and explore the teacher's professional development and teaching process during and after the pandemic. Educators and students must comprehend the study to appreciate the advantages of online teaching and learning. The findings from the study aid in determining how to use ICT in the classroom. Besides, I further examined the integration of knowledge, tools, and skills in current pedagogical practices and its influence on learning. I try to evaluate the value of teachers' prior memories and personal experiences in helping them forge their identities in the educational setting. This study provides a deep horizon of knowledge related to ICT for teacher professional development. Specifically, this research study examines how COVID-19 has affected education and how language instructors used ICT to boost their careers. It also examines how ICT enhanced teaching and learning activities in English language classrooms. This research study can benefit researchers, ELT practitioners, educators, and policymakers who want to integrate the significant role of digital tools and resources in bringing changes to classroom practices. This can further add to the vital role in designing the different teacher education programs and training, highlighting the role of online teacher professional development. Similarly, this study can be fruitful for those who want to formulate ICT-related plans and policies in the educational field. Educators can gain knowledge and insights by incorporating different ICT tools and resources into their pedagogical practices. This study critically reflects on my professional development journey during and after the pandemic through the adoption of ICT, for which the following research question becomes pertinent.

- How have I developed professionally as an English teacher during and after the pandemic?

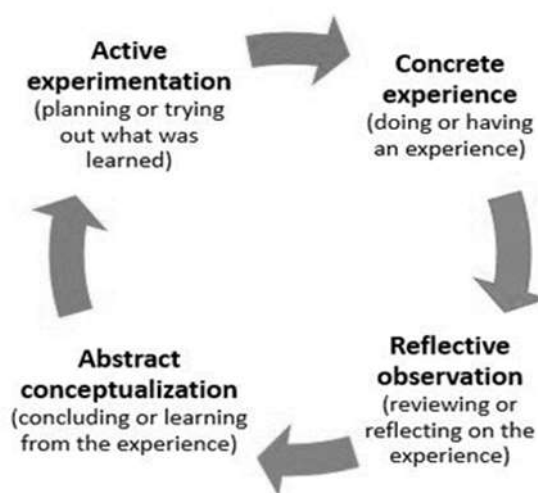
2. Experiential Learning and Transition Theory as Theoretical Referent

I have employed Kolb's experiential learning theory in this research study. This theory states that learning is the process through which knowledge is created by transforming experience (Grover & Stovall, 2013). According to Kolb (1984), knowledge is the consequence of experience that is grasped and transformed. The idea is founded on the notion that reflecting on all of one's life experiences is crucial. As a result, this theory has given much attention to

the idea of experience. I have delved into my personal experiences and anecdotes, describing my challenges. As an English language teacher, I contributed significantly to education during the crisis, which I presented as narratives in this research study. According to the experiential learning theory, there are primarily four learning phases: concrete learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimenting. A learner at the level of direct experience actively participates in an activity. When learners actively reflect on and recall that specific event, they are in the reflective observation stage. They attempt to conceptualize the observed model as they progress through the abstract conceptualization stage. The student then analyzes or prepares for their fourth experience (Jenkins, 1998). The figure below depicts these stages of learning.

Figure 1

Four stages of learning



(Source: Kolb, 1984; Kurt, 2022)

Moreover, Psychologist Nancy Schlossberg's transition theory helps us understand how people respond to change. The fundamental tenet of the transition model is that one's interpretation of the shift determines the meaning of the transition (Pendleton, 2007). The transition hypothesis emphasizes that people go through changes continually (Anderson et al., 2012). Schlossberg's transition hypothesis was developed to study adult development and is based on psychology (Evans et al., 2010). In other words, Schlossberg's Transition Hypothesis is a theory of adult growth. It focused on the adjustments and coping mechanisms that individuals use to deal with the changes in their lives (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

The educational system, as well as the methods of teaching and learning, both require significant ongoing reform. As a result of COVID-19's introduction, the educational system underwent a substantial transformation, requiring all instructors and students to turn their physical classroom into a virtual platform to assist the process of instruction and learning. Though teachers are very reluctant to change, they are continuously struggling to survive and involve themselves in using digital tools and resources with the help of ICTs during the pandemic.

3. Autoethnography as a Method of Inquiry

In this study, I employed autoethnography as a research method. The term "autoethnography" first became widely used in the 1970s. Autoethnography is a technique of study that examines personal lived experiences. It uses stories of or about the self that are

recounted through the perspective of culture to comprehend the complicated lives within a socio-cultural environment (Adams et al., 2015).

Autoethnography offers practical chances for application in the circumstances needing a link between self-awareness and more general socialization practices (Austin & Hickey, 2007). The main goal of autoethnography is to reflect the researcher's life and experiences. Autoethnography is a type of inquiry that, in some ways, facilitates epiphanies. "The most remarkable approach to figuring out what one wants and, consequently, to have any prospect of a successful future is to dig up and talk about the past, which is how one might arrive at this epiphany" (Bochner, 2014, p. 37). Most frequently, autobiographers discuss "epiphanies" as the remembered events to have had a profound impact on a person's life. (Bochner & Ellis, 1992). In the words of Tarisayi (2023), "Memory work entails mining one's past experiences through deliberate, structured recall. This retrospection seeks to evoke and reconstruct significant personal events" (p. 58). Thus, memories can be brought to see the things that happened- it is like a 'flashback' of our life to be reflected in the present time. Utilizing autoethnography, I have explored my experiences and memories of the pandemic to improve a language teacher's professional and technical skills and knowledge.

4. Data Generation Techniques and Process

I reflected on my experiences and elicited data in the forms of narratives, images, and many crucial episodes and reflections regarding my experiences as a language instructor during the pandemic. I can create my narratives (data), which will be self-reflective data that can be reflected in our own experiences and impressions of the subject (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). In a particular study, autoethnography spotlights the investigator, their interpretation, and their thoughts as potential data sources (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008). The self is the subject of the autoethnographic field, which reorganizes data gathering and recording methods to consider this inner self-examination (Austin & Hickey, 2007).

In autoethnography, the common data collection methods include self-observation, reflective journaling, and memory work, whereas external data collection helps to contextualize personal experiences. (Adams et al., 2015). I have personalized the data to vividly show the lived experiences and stories from the pandemic era. I have focused on the emotions and sentiments that have arisen and switched from traditional teaching to the online form. The importance of justification, recounting extraordinary events, and critical evaluation of the process are highlighted. To recognize my teaching career during and after the epidemic, I have enlightened and tied my unique experiences and ideas together. My personal stories and life experiences, representing the period before and after the epidemic, serve as the basis for all the individualized data. Another goal of mine is to promote digital tools and technologies (ICT) to help and encourage the professional development of teachers.

Similarly, I have also mentioned how my former experiences and recollections have helped me advance professionally even today. The primary way of investigation is by describing my tale and using creative narratives to address my recollections and emotions. I can even challenge myself and provide a rich illustration from several facets of my life. Furthermore, "memory work" (Austin and Hickey, 2007) and recalling and revisiting the old memories and experiences of the pandemic have been a part of the fieldwork for gathering the data of my professional life.

5. Data Analysis

I find it useful to reflect on my experience as a language instructor overall by writing tales and memoirs, displaying pictures, and presenting other materials. Essential materials and

in-depth information are introduced and arranged progressively according to thematic notions. I strive to capture the numerous facets of my experiences, sentiments, and life's turning points by being more reflective and detailed. This study presents the data and information using the "dynamic, multiple" (Austin & Hickey, 2007) forms. In other words, the data is studied descriptively by categorizing the responses received in a thematic form. All the data from the stories and reflections were analyzed critically and developed into certain themes and meanings.

I employed thematic analysis to analyze the data in this research study. First, I wrote down the various memorable moments and events related to teaching, along with my emotions and reactions to them. As stated by Tarisayi (2023), "Autoethnography relies on personal memory and subjective experience as data, so the researcher is the data source" (p.58). I coded the data and developed many themes (Gibbs, 2008) under many subheadings before interpreting them in light of my own experiences and reflective sense. Then, I described each theme using my anecdotes, pertinent instances, and other supporting resources.

5.1. Narratives of My Professional Development

In this findings and discussion section, I present my experiences and brief narratives about my professional journey during and after the pandemic. Moreover, it includes the struggles that I overcame during the journey and describes how I grew professionally using the various digital tools and resources in English language teaching.

5.2. Online Crisis- The Earlier Days in the Virtual Class

After the COVID-19 pandemic struck Nepal, several industries, including education, saw significant changes. Many educators were compelled to teach online as the consequences of COVID-19 created the chance to bring transformation to the education sectors, teacher education, and educational system (Flores, 2020). Hassan and Hussain (2020) mentioned that most teachers struggle to teach online during the pandemic. The same applied to me. When I started my online class the following day with grade -10 students, it was challenging for me as the attendance rate of students was low, and the technical issues were seen when online teaching began, like accessing with technological devices, internet connections, and power supply (Sinha & Bagarukayo, 2019).

The next day, when the class started, the attendance rate of students had increased a little bit compared to the previous class. I used to feel delighted to talk and interact with them by asking about their problems, usual life and routines, etc. Maybe they were in the class by force from the administration side, or they think that this online class has become a compulsion for them to continue their schooling during the pandemic. Oh God! Sitting in the same place was a significant problem. No movement! This gave more stress to the eyes and mind on the screen and less interaction with the learners as they kept themselves mute and made their videos off. I was confused whether they were in my class chatting with their friends on Facebook or doing some work by diverting their minds from their studies. It was challenging, wasn't it?

Slowly and gradually, educators started connecting their learners with the help of technology, and they found the newly available resources that could be useful in that particular situation (Kiershner, 2021). As Nuraziza et al. (2021) mentioned, "Teachers and students are forced to boost their knowledge in using technology" (p. 42). I collected a lot of information about the digital platform and the new ways of teaching and learning procedures to be applied in online classes during the pandemic.

Learning and being familiar with the particular digital resources was equally challenging because it was my first time trying those resources and sites. I had to wake up early for my online classes to be ready to avoid the technical cliches and spend my whole time devoting my heart and mind to the screen. The teachers faced many challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as internet connectivity, issues related to students' computers, and difficulties involving the learner (Francom et al., 2021).

As Poonpon (2021) noted, "With shifting teaching and learning paradigms, teachers seem to be highly expected to be able to design lessons, activities, and assessments to support students' learning in the transformed educational situation" (p. 2). I was thinking the same way about formulating some online lesson plans and engaging and increasing the attendance rate of the learners in the online classroom. Turning teaching resources into digital materials overnight adds enormous challenges for teachers on the online platform (Bose & Basu, 2008). It has dramatically impacted the lives of teachers, which "hampers the work-life balance of the teachers" (Bose & Basu, 2008, p. 143).

Adjustments with the Online Tools and Resources

Familiarity with digital skills and knowledge requires dedication and motivation. That was the case with me! Luckily, while using Messenger, I got one message from a teacher from the United States named Antonio (pseudonym). We were connected by social media and started communicating with each other virtually. Internet and social media have made virtual communication possible. Soon after some days, we became Facebook friends, and he asked me about the pandemic situation in my country. I answered him about the difficulties I had encountered those days, like accessing educational materials, networking with educators, and other issues. It was a blessing! Through virtual communication, we can transfer information and knowledge online, which helps connect people from different areas to a single place (Loode, 2021).

As stated by Mulyadi et al. (2021), Padlet can help teach writing skills online. Antonio had created the virtual space in the Padlet (one of the essential applications for developing writing skills) and let me use it for my learners in the online classroom. It functions similarly to a web board or sticky notes where we may independently design and produce lovely projects and postings.

The Padlet application enhances classroom interaction among learners and teachers (Al-Momani & Abu Musa, 2022). So, Antonio created and gave his space to let my learners move on the Padlet. Initially, I was unfamiliar with this application, but I encountered several tutorial videos related to the Padlet site. I accessed them easily and watched the video to be comfortable with the application. I thought I had to create assignments on the Padlet site so my learners would benefit from those digital applications. For this, I first made my account in the Padlet and assigned one task (in the form of a question) to my learners. I had instructed and informed them, at first, on how to use the Padlet tool and let them complete their assignment. The learners accessed the Padlet sites/links through Google Classroom. They were interested in trying the new sites and had created the beautiful walls in the Padlet site.

Figure 2

Assigning Home Assignment through Padlet Page



Source: (Kassabian, n.d.)

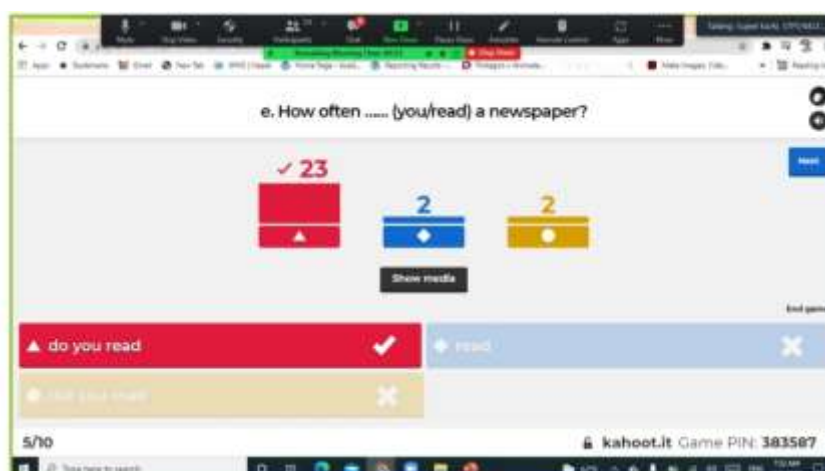
I used to post some of the essential video links on YouTube and links that can benefit from supporting my English course. They used to post their answers, and I used to pass the comments on to them, appreciating them. The learners can easily access the website to upload their content, such as images, documents, and videos. They can also share links or comments on each other's posts (Mulyadi, 2021), enhancing their learning process. Even Antonio used to pass his constructive feedback and valuable comments to motivate me further by adequately utilizing the Padlet application. At the same time, I thought I was enhancing my digital skills and gradually moving on to venture into other tools and resources.

5.3.Engaging in Kahoot!, Quizizz and Wakelet

Trying out the new digital tools and implementing them on virtual platforms became a part of my life during the pandemic. One of the online game-based platforms that I learned in the Global Quarantine Conversation Club (GQCC) was Kahoot! As stated by Lestari (2019), “Kahoot! is a media or platform that can be used to play games, quiz, discussion and survey which became one alternative to create competition through interactive games quiz” (p. 14). Kahoot! is an interactive learning platform that can make learning fun and create joy among the learners to solve quiz-related questions. Kahoot! can play a vital role in assessing learners and engaging them in the online classroom.

Figure 3

Kahoot Quiz



(Source: Screenshots taken by the researcher)

I watched some tutorial videos related to creating a Kahoot! Finally, I could make one on my own. During the online classroom, I prepared some multiple choice questions of the

respective content in Kahoot! and asked the learners to join it by giving them the game code or simply by going through the link (<https://Kahoot!.it>) and entering the game PIN. The learners enjoyed Kahoot!, which was new to them.

The learners can compete with each other to solve the quiz questions and show their speed while solving these questions. Wasn't it a fruitful tool for me? Kahoot! is an excellent online platform that facilitates collaboration with learners by engaging them in interactive games (Rofiyarti & Sari, 2017). The learners in my online classroom can support and collaborate to solve the quiz questions, enhancing their understanding. Similarly, I noticed another tool that can create an online teaching and learning platform, i.e., Quizizz. Quizizz is a free teaching tool that allows assessments to be conducted through online games, quizzes, discussions on specific topics, or online surveys (Lestari, 2019).

I used to let the learners solve the grammar-related questions in the form of a quiz there on the site. I directly shared the Quizizz link with them so they could join the platform and participate in the activities. I considered using Quizizz and Kahoot simultaneously to add variety to the online classroom. All of the students had fun playing various online educational games. Thus, Kahoot! Quizizz helped and motivated learners (Lestari, 2019) to enhance their learning. I have even tried to use another online site named "Wakelet" to strengthen my learners' online learning. Wakelet is one significant online platform where we can store critical educational resources and social media posts, share PDF files and images, and make them public or private collections (Quah, 2023). I used to organize course materials in Wakelet for learners to access and download. I used to hold the online discussion among learners by posting the questions in the Wakelet. The learners then visited the particular page and used to post their ideas and views related to the specific questions. I thought it would be a better tool to motivate learners to post their opinions online instead of writing in hard copy.

Figure 4

Students' Discussion Page in Wakelet



Source: Wakelet. (n.d.).

Thus, the Wakelet tool provided an opportunity to store the teaching resources and students' work, launching online discussions and creating an online space for collaboration with others (Graham, 2018). IELTSA (International English Language Teachers Association) exposed me to contribute as a resource speaker in their eighth IELTSA seminar, "Best Practices in ELT." This was held via online mode. I couldn't wait to meet my international colleagues and discuss how I keep my classroom engaging and dynamic.

5.4. Mentimeter and Answer Garden Tool

I used "Mentimeter" (one of the interactive software that helps to engage the learners by using live multiple choice questions, quizzes, polls, formation of answers through word

clouds, and so on) to learn about their countries and some digital tools that were used by my audience earlier in their English language classroom. Mentimeter can help classroom discussions and uplift the interaction between educators and learners. Jackly and Lestariningsih (2022) remarked that the Mentimeter is generally used for brainstorming activities and clarifying the content or specific lesson. The students can simply join the discussion forum by entering their opinions and ideas on the Mentimeter site, and the teacher will give direct feedback (Crump & Sparks, 2018). The audience/colleagues played a vital role in answering my questions interactively based on their earlier experiences.

Answer Garden is a feedback tool that helps engage learners in live participation and online brainstorming activities. To support this, Jusmaya (2022) stated, “Answer Garden is a new minimalist feedback tool for stimulating real-time student engagement, online brainstorming, and soliciting feedback in the classroom” (p. 70). The students can write their answers by going through the link that the educator would provide to the learners. It can further uplift the students’ participation and motivate them, especially in their online classroom. The use of Answer Garden can help to support English language teaching. It is easy to use by clicking the link (<https://answergarden.ch/>) and following the instructions. Finally, at the end of the session, I evaluated their overall understanding of the session by using the Quizizz tool. I declared the top three winners of the online quiz activity. It was a lovely experience for me to flourish in the digital platforms during the pandemic, wasn’t it?

5.5. Trying Fligrd to Engage the Learners Online

Again, a new tool, ‘Flip Grid’ (www.Flip Grid.com), was on my journey. It is a free app where educators and learners can collaborate by joining the platform. Flip Grid is one of the free apps and tools that help educators engage their learners in various assessment activities and learning processes (Taylor & Hinchman, 2020). In the words of Casan-Nunez (2021), “Flip grid is a free platform that allows video-based asynchronous discussion. It fosters educator-student contact, cooperation among learners, active-learning techniques and student engagement” (p. 22). In particular, I assigned online tasks and activities to the learners via the Flip Grid platform. I requested them to post their presentation on the specified topics (for example, environment and ecology, good neighbors, digital payment systems, marriage practice, the importance of science and technology for human civilization, and social media). “Teachers create a grid for their class, and within it, they post discussion prompts called topics” (Casan- Nunez, 2021, p. 23). Some of the things that are available and inserted in the topics were audio, video, documents, text, and images from which the learners could quickly answer the issues.

They had responded before the specified deadline with their lovely videos. My students delivered the subject excellently since they submitted their projects using a virtual platform. I could utilize my digital knowledge to explore my learners’ level and let them know about their digital skills. I used various web resources to improve and support my instructional strategies. ICT has drastically changed “not only in learning methods for learners but also in the teaching approaches of instructors” (Tezci, 2010). ICT is a relevant means to explore and enhance my digital skills to uncover many things!

Overall, as Taylor and Hinchman (2020) mentioned, “... Flip grid video platform provides students with more learning avenues and increased opportunities to receive the constructive feedback necessary for skill acquisition... also impacted instructional methods” (p. 31). I had a good experience using the Flip grid as I assigned several tasks to my learners

on this site. I used to provide them with constructive feedback, and further, the tool motivated the learners to empower their voices and try something new. They could also listen to the voices of their colleagues and see their videos on the platform. Thus, social interaction could be made, and they could engage with the learning materials (Taylor & Hinchman, 2020).

5.6. My Growth with the NELTA and STFT Webinars?

I continued to explore further on the digital platform. Soon, I got some vital notice and announcement calls on social media about some of the institutions' national and international forum webinars. The various professional webinars during the pandemic were standard means for teachers to flourish (Al-Naabi, 2023). In the words of Gegenfurtner et al. (2020), Webinars are “digital tools to deliver training and education through synchronous audio-visual communication among remotely located training instructors and participants” (p. 5).

I have attended webinars and online conferences to continue my professional development. Several organizations, people, and other experts used to host webinars on teaching English to speakers of other languages. These webinars were highly beneficial for educators in enhancing their professional knowledge and skills (Rao, 2018). There were numerous webinars, online seminars, and training related to ELT, research, and ICT, which I attended during the pandemic, and I continued to watch and participate in the various webinars by staying online. Many other educators from different institutions participated in multiple webinars (Al-Shahrani, 2019) to enhance their teaching and learning activities. I participated in most of the online seminars and webinars that were conducted by the Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA) at the national level.

NELTA is one of the non-profit, non-political, and non-governmental organizations that play a prominent role in fostering the professional development of English language teachers in Nepal. NELTA has initiated various ELT-related programs and coordinated with several national and international organizations. The webinars' contents were related to multiple matters like online assessment during the pandemic, facilitating the learners in emergencies, digital tools and resources in teaching and learning, growing professionally, and so on. I felt that these webinars and online conferences added some benefits to flourish in my teaching and learning process.

Prominent keynote speakers and facilitators were present at the webinars and online conferences. They discussed various topics that helped me update my pedagogical skills and knowledge. I also had the opportunity to listen to their teaching experiences. Online collaboration, conferences, and webinars are emerging as new forms of professional development in education (Elliott, 2009). So, many teachers were attending the webinars online during emergency times. The webinars are considered an essential resource for both learners and educators. They allow educators to learn new ideas and concepts, get counsel from professionals, and improve their educational knowledge and abilities (Rao, 2018). They have given insights on how to move with the digital times and help the learners learn.

I even heard about another national organization named “Society of Technology Friendly Teachers' Nepal” (STFT), a milestone that enhanced my ICT-related skills in the online classroom. The primary purpose of this organization was to uplift and improve digital knowledge and skills among Nepalese teachers and to apply them practically in the online classroom. They have well-formed their identity and mainly carried out several volunteer activities to uplift the digital standard of teachers. I attended a long series of ICT training sessions provided free of cost by the Nepalese volunteer teachers led by STFT, Nepal.

I felt fortunate to be a part of this training. I tried to learn ICT knowledge and skills from the facilitators, applying them practically and advancing my teaching methods in the online classroom. The tips and tricks I picked up on ICT skills from the facilitators have proven valuable, as I can use them effectively in the virtual classroom. Thus, as Rahman and Hakim (2013) stated, “Attending seminars, workshops, conferences and many other kinds of teacher professional development is becoming an exclusive task for teachers...” (p. 440). So, many educators attended them and utilized their time correctly during the pandemic. As stated by Tanucan and Uytico (2021), “Webinars... served as a virtual avenue for formal professional deliberations in times of pandemic” (p. 447). These were unique and insightful for me to collect much information about digital knowledge, pedagogical skills, and techniques and foster my teacher's professional growth in emergencies.

As Brasili and Allen (2021) noted, “Virtual professional learning communities... where groups of educators come together to learn from each other and share their work...” (p. 11). The professional communities established among teachers through online platforms paved the way to develop a sense of learning and sharing the pedagogical skills and knowledge relevant to the teaching field. It also allowed me to build rapport and establish means for teacher networking. The research conducted by Shin et al. (2022) depicted the vital role of webinars in supporting the professional development of teachers globally and the various ways of student engagement via online form. As a result, the COVID-19 epidemic has forced educators to grow professionally and acquire new things through webinars, training, and online seminars.

5.7. ICT was a Boon to me!

ICT technologies are transforming the modern world. It is essential to stay connected to interact with experts and international colleagues and become a member of various teacher associations. “The teacher professional organization is a forum that is expected to beagle to improve and develop the careers of teachers as its members so that teachers can become professional educators... focus on teacher empowerment” (Wahyuni et al., 2023, p. 261). Taking membership in various professional associations physically or online plays a vital role for all educators. The various teachers’ professional organizations help in “stimulating members’ engagement and voluntary activity” (Lichtsteiner et al., 2015); “learning new skills and mentorship opportunities” (Smith, 2010); “opportunities for teachers’ continuous education” (Hill, 2018), and fostering the teachers’ networking via online. It further helps to establish a positive and harmonious relationship among educators worldwide.

ICT truly was a boon to me! Since my involvement and engagement in the ICT tools were increasing, I received a message on WhatsApp from one of the educators from Lebanon. She called me and inquired about my details, professional involvement, and engagement in the organizations. She also asked about my interest and willingness to be the country representative for IELTA (International English Language Teachers’ Association). I was curious to learn more about the benefits of joining the IELTA. The educator from Lebanon clarified my doubts and informed me about the significant benefits of joining the association. So, I was pretty convinced by the answers. At that point, I decided it would be better for me to advance professionally. So, I was appointed as the ambassador (country’s representative) of the International English Language Teachers’ Association in Nepal for Global Leadership in Education, dated 15 June 2021. I was responsible for representing my country in the international forum for Nepalese English Language teachers worldwide and uplifting their professional development.

IELTA Nepal is a voluntary, non-political online association of the International English Language Teachers' Association (IELTA). The primary mission of IELTA is to offer a high-quality international program to English language teachers, researchers, and learners worldwide to foster their professional and scientific skills through respectful, collaborative, cooperative, critical, and intercultural interaction. IELTA Nepal has been established to cultivate the professional development of English language teachers in Nepal. IELTA Nepal conducts different national and international webinars for English teachers to update their professional skills. Fortunately, again, the excellent fate was with me! I have joined the Society of Technology-Friendly Teachers (STFT) and have been active in the Sunsari branch as a technical team member. I have taken the opportunity to support the branches with the ICT knowledge and skills I have learned so far.

On the other hand, another opportunity is knocking at my door! I had a message from another educator from Thailand to be nominated as the key representative for one of the online associations, the International Teachers' Association (ITA). This was one of the international forums where many educators had joined to gain several benefits and professional opportunities. The mission of this association was to foster the professional growth of teachers and to assist the teachers, learners, and other educational institutions.

It further created a platform to evoke the experiences of global educators and created a sense of a worldwide community of educators. I felt comfortable letting others hear my voice in this association. I experienced the significance of communicating and collaborating with educators from all around the world. As a result, it was a fantastic chance for me to further the idea of creating a teacher community and to mentor and encourage one another. We formed ties, interacted, and networked like a big family. We were tied together via the online platform. We also discussed how effectively the facilitation could be made for the learners. Establishing professional learning communities (PLCs) helps develop the skills and knowledge for working in innovative contexts across teacher networks, including in online environments (Owen, 2014). It can be taken as an effective means for the teacher's professional development.

When we worked together by forming the global educators' community through virtual means, we developed a mutual understanding that enabled us to perform and nurture our professional growth. Thus, the various forms of virtual training have become integral parts of professional development (Van et al., 2022). Due to engagement in professional activities like seminars, workshops, conferences, and discussions, teachers have uplifted their knowledge and skills to develop themselves professionally (Sellen, 2016). It was exciting, and now, I think it is a good destination for me to enhance my professional development. After that, the mission was to slowly and gradually educate the people and have connection and empowerment in my teaching journey.

Later, the STFT English Subject Committee was initiated in Nepal. This committee was formed by a group of English teachers from different levels. They initiated this committee to support and flourish the development of English teachers. They tried to share crucial educational knowledge and resources via group messenger. Through this committee, they tried to collaborate and develop a sense of group or professional. The collaboration among the teachers can make teaching and learning significant.

6. CONCLUSION

I began this article by considering the research questions: how I develop professionally as an English language teacher using ICT tools during and after the pandemic in Nepal. I have provided evidence to prove my professional development journey during the pandemic, which

remains in the form of memories. This research provided insights and reflection about the professional journey of a teacher, which has significantly brought about drastic changes in the pedagogy and the area of teacher professional development. I have mainly emphasized the necessity of digital tools and resources to help language teachers' professional growth flourish. Reflecting upon my memories and experiences of pandemic time, I have shown how the circumstances and the use of online tools and ICTs enhanced and transformed my academic and professional journey. This further leads to an impact on my teacher identity and career. Overall, this study has reflected and analyzed my professional growth and transformation and traced my transition from being an ordinary teacher to a techno-friendly teacher and teacher educator.

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