

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF A THANGMI GIRL'S STRUGGLES  
AND RESILIENCE IN BECOMING AN ENGLISH TEACHER

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## AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Ranju Thami* for the degree of *Master of Philosophy in English Language Education* presented on 27 January 2025 entitled *An Autoethnographic Account of a Thangmi Girl's Struggles and Resilience in Becoming an English Teacher*.

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This research study focuses on deepening our understanding of an Indigenous woman's, more specifically, a Thangmi woman's, English language learning journey by exploring her painful and gainful experiences of English language learning and teaching, concentrating on childhood memories, education, employment, and careers. In doing this, this research study explores how an Indigenous woman evolved into English Language Education and what challenges she faced and overcame before becoming an English Teacher.

The study explores the personal and professional navigation of a Thangmi girl in becoming an English Language teacher amidst the Indigenous and highly marginalized community. This study employed qualitative research methods, such as reflective narratives and analysis of educational experiences, to explore the evolution in learning and teaching of the English language. The research questions addressed are: How have I evolved as a daughter from a marginalized Thangmi community in English language learning and teaching? What difficulties did I go through, or am I still facing in the voyage to becoming an English language teacher? How did I overcome the many hurdles in the English language learning and teaching journey? I started by sequencing my experiences according to the sequential order of their occurrence, highlighting only those incidents that seemed relevant to learning and teaching in ELT.

Thus, I supported these experiences with research studies and analyzed the data to combine with the literature. Different insights are derived from reflection on my experiences, extensive literature review, and engagement in the identified transformative learning and critical social theories. Thus, efforts finally resulted in meaningful theoretical implications and a comprehensive conclusion. My reflections indicate that while awareness among parents of the value of education is on the increase, the life prospects for a non-indigenous child and that of an Indigenous child are very different. Economic hardship, social barriers, and linguistic barriers continue to impede most Indigenous children from achieving academic results.

I had to face many difficulties. To earn my livelihood, I used to work in other individuals' agriculture fields. Though it helped me to some extent, there is still a limitation to getting extra learning opportunities. As an Indigenous female, I was confronted by a series of social barriers: humiliation, bullying, and persistent questioning of my ethnic status, which hindered my acquisition of the English language directly or indirectly. My challenges at school, college, and university are memories I cherish today. They were years of struggles. I now reflect on my journey as a transformative learner, which were golden years. These formative moments helped shape growth, resilience, and commitment to learning.

The research study opens pathways toward critical reflection on the interplay among education, identity, and systemic inequality for learners and educators who live in the margins.

.....

27 January 2025

Ranju Thami

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## शोध सार

अंग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षामा दर्शनशास्त्रको स्नातकोत्तर डिग्रीको लागि रन्जु थामीको शोध प्रबन्धको शिर्षक "एक थाङ्गी महिलाको अंग्रेजी शिक्षा बन्दाको यात्रा संघर्ष र जुझारुपनको अटो इथ्नोग्राफिक अध्ययन" १४ माघ २०८१ मा प्रस्तुत गरिएको थियो ।

.....

प्रा. लक्ष्मण ज्ञवाली, पीएचडी  
शोध निर्देशक

.....

प्रा. वेइवेइ झाङ, पीएचडी  
शोध सह निर्देशक

यो अनुसन्धान एक आदिवासी महिला, विशेष गरी थाङ्गी महिलाको, अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा सिकाई यात्राबारे गहिरो बुझाइ बिस्तार गर्नमा केन्द्रित रहेको छ । जसमा उनको बाल्यकालका स्मृति, शिक्षा, रोजगार तथा वृत्तिलाई केन्द्रमा राखी अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा सिकाईका क्रममा भोगेका पीडादायक र उपलब्धीमुलक भोगाईहरुको विस्तृत अन्वेषण गरिएको छ । यसो गर्दा, यस अध्ययनले एक आदिवासी महिला कसरी अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा शिक्षामा उदाइन र उनले अङ्ग्रेजी शिक्षक हुनुपुर्व कस्ता चुनौतीहरुको सामना गर्नुपर्यो र त्यसलाई कसरी पार गरिन् भन्ने कुराको अन्वेषण गर्दछ ।

यस अनुसन्धानले एक आदिवासी तथा अतिसीमान्तकृत समुदाय अन्तर्गत समावेश थाङ्गी केटीको अङ्ग्रेजी भाषाको शिक्षक बन्ने क्रमको व्यक्तिगत र पेशागत यात्राको विस्तृत अध्ययन गर्दछ । यस अध्ययनले अंग्रेजी भाषाको सिकाइ र शिक्षण सम्मको विकासको अन्वेषण गर्न गुणात्मक अनुसन्धान विधिको प्रयोग गरेको छ, जस्तै कथन पुनर्स्मृति र शैक्षिक अनुभवहरूको विश्लेषण । यस अनुसन्धानले सम्बोधन गरेका अनुसन्धान प्रश्नहरु निम्न छन्: एक सीमान्तकृत थाङ्गी समुदायकी छोरी म कसरी अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा अध्ययन र अध्यापनको तहमा पुग्न सकेँ? अंग्रेजी शिक्षक बन्ने यात्राका दौरान मैले के कस्ता अप्ठ्याराहरुको सामना गरें र गरिरहेकी छु ? अंग्रेजी अध्ययन र अध्यापनको यात्रामा देखापरेका असंख्य व्यवधानहरु मैले कसरी पार गरें? मैले अंग्रेजी भाषा अध्यापन (इ.ल.टी.) अन्तर्गत अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा अध्ययन र अध्यापनसँग मिल्दाजुल्दा घटनाहरुलाई मात्र प्राथमिकतामा पाउँ, मेरा अनुभवहरुलाई घटनाको समय क्रमअनुसार क्रमबद्ध रुपमा प्रस्तुत गर्दै शुरु गरें ।

यसरी मैले यी अनुभवहरुलाई अध्ययनसँग तालमेल गर्दै तथ्यांकहरुलाई साहित्यसँग संयोजन गरी विश्लेषण गरेको छु । अनुभवहरुको पुनरावलोकन, व्यापक साहित्य समिक्षा तथा पहिचान गरिएका रुपान्तरणकारी सिकाई र आलोचनात्मक सामाजिक सिद्धान्तहरुको अध्ययन गरी विभिन्न अन्तरदृष्टिहरु प्रतिपादन गरिएका छन् । परिणाम स्वरुप यि प्रयासहरुले अर्थपूर्ण सैद्धान्तिक निचोड र बृहत निष्कर्ष सम्म पुर्यायो । मेरा अनुभवहरुले के संकेत गर्छन् भने शिक्षाको मूल्यप्रति अभिभावकहरूमा चेतना बढ्दै गइरहेको

भए पनि गैरआदिवासी र आदिवासी बालबालिकाहरुको जीवन दृष्टिमा धेरै भिन्नता छ । आर्थिक कठिनाइ, सामाजिक व्यवधान र भाषिक अवरोधहरूले अधिकांश आदिवासी बालबालिकाहरूलाई शैक्षिक नतिजा हासिल गर्नबाट वञ्चित गरिरहेको छ ।

म स्वयंले धेरै अवरोधहरुको सामना गर्नुपर्यो । आफ्नो जीवीकोपार्जनका लागि अरुको खेतबारीमा काम गर्थे । यद्यपी यसले मलाई केही हदसम्म मद्दत गरे पनि थप सिक्ने अवसरहरुमा भने सीमा थोपरी दियो । एक आदिवासी महिलाको रूपमा मैले सामाजिक अवरोधहरूको श्रृंखला नै सामना गर्नुपऱ्यो: अपमान, धम्की, र मेरो जातीय पहिचान बारेको निरन्तर प्रश्न । जसले मेरो अङ्ग्रेजी भाषा सिकाईमा प्रत्यक्ष वा अप्रत्यक्षरूपमा बाधा सिर्जना गर्यो । मेरा विद्यालय, कलेज र विश्वविद्यालयका चुनौतीहरूलाई आज म स्मरण र गर्व गर्छु । ती संघर्षका दिनहरु थिए । म अहिले एक रुपान्तरकारी सिकारुको रूपमा मेरा विगतका यात्रालाई सम्झन्छु, जुन सुनौलो वर्षहरु थिए । यी रुपान्तरणकारी क्षणहरूले मेरो प्रगति, समस्यासँग जुध्ने धैर्यता र सिकाइप्रतिको प्रतिबद्धतालाई आकार दिन मद्दत गरेको छ ।

यस अनुसन्धानले सीमान्तकृत शिक्षार्थी र शिक्षकहरूका लागि शिक्षा, पहिचान र प्रणालीगत असमानता बीचको अन्तरक्रियाको आलोचनात्मक पुनरावलोकनका लागि मार्ग प्रशस्त गर्छ ।

.....

रन्जु थामी

उपाधि उम्मेदवार

१४ माघ २०८१

This dissertation entitled *An Autoethnographic Account of a Thangmi Girl's Struggles and Resilience in Becoming an English Teacher* presented by *Ranju Thami* on 27 January 2025.

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I understand that my dissertation will become a part of the permanent collection of the library of Kathmandu University. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been submitted for candidature for other degrees.

.....

27 January 2025

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband and parents, who have always encouraged and supported me in my studies. It is also dedicated to my little princesses, who have been good and supportive in my studies. Additionally, it is dedicated to my esteemed guru, Prof. Laxman Gnawali, PhD, who has consistently inspired my professional growth and development.

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I want to express my special regard to Prof. Tikaram Poudel, PhD, who became my mentor and muse in the first semester. I am very thankful to him for guiding me in selecting such a wonderful topic. Once again, my gratitude goes to Tikaram Poudel, PhD.

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I thank my husband, Tahal Thami and my parents, Ram Bahadur Thami and Nanu Thami, for their love and support. I also thank my younger brother Raju and sister Sanju for staying beside me and rendering every possible support.

Lastly, I want to thank all my friends for their invaluable suggestions. I must thank those authors and publishers in the field of ELT, whose works I have listed in the reference, from which I have borrowed many ideas to complete this project.

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## ABBREVIATION

AD	Anno Domini
BBS	Bachelor in Business Studies
BS	Bikram Sambat
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELL	English Language Learning
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
IPs	Indigenous Peoples
KU	Kathmandu University
MPhil	Master of Philosophy
NFDIN	National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities
NIWF	National Indigenous Women's Federation
NSO	National Statistics Office
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SMC	School Management Committee
TL	Transformative Learning
UN	United Nation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

## GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

*Indigenous Peoples:* In Nepal, the term "Indigenous Peoples" is employed to denote *Adivasi Janajati* (officially recognized term) groups who have a distinct language, religion, tradition, culture, and civilization; traditional egalitarian social structure; traditional homeland or geographical area; written or oral history; and no decisive role in the politics and government of modern Nepal (National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities [NFDIN], 2003). The government and also the groups themselves use the term "Indigenous Nationalities," or "Indigenous," or "Nationalities" while identifying themselves. However, Indigenous Peoples also used widely following the universal recognition and use of the term.

*Marginalized:* Marginalized in Nepal means belonging to a group or community that is discriminated against, excluded, and oppressed. Marginalization can be based on caste, ethnicity, gender, religion, or economic status.

*Thangmi:* Thangmi of Nepal is the native ethnic group known as the "Thami" people, who use a Tibeto-Burman language also known as "Thangmi *Kham*" or "Thangmi *Wakhe*", inhabiting primarily the eastern Himalayan region of Nepal, precisely the Dolakha district; essentially, "Thangmi" is their native ethnonym, while "Thami" is the name by which they are commonly referred to in Nepali by outsiders.



## CHAPTER I

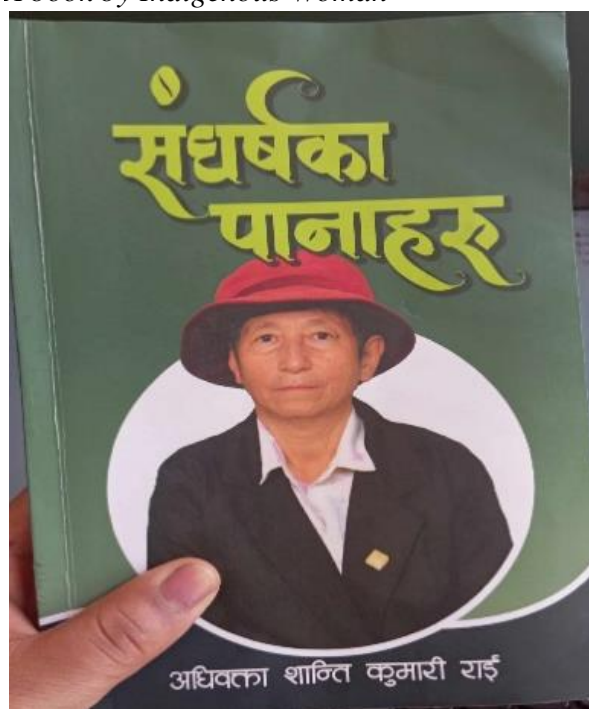
### INTRODUCTION

This chapter comprises how I delved into the research and became an autoethnographic researcher. Here, I discussed the study's rationale in detail and elaborated on the study's problems. Furthermore, the purpose of the research study is also included. This dissertation addressed three research questions devised based on research problems identified through the literature review. As an academic researcher, there are some limitations that the researcher has to follow. Therefore, I highlighted the area of delimitations while conducting this research. Thus, I have taken this chapter as a guide, which supports me further in the Research Study.

Once, my husband gave me a book. He said this is the book by “Our *Didi* (elder sister).” He called the writer a *did*i with respect because he had known her for a long time and worked together for more than a decade, defending the collective human rights of Indigenous peoples in Nepal. Often, he used to talk about her. When I got the book, I saw the title *Sangharshaka Panaharu* (The Pages of Struggle), which is also written by an Indigenous woman, Shanti Kumari Rai. As this is the book about her (biography), I was curious about her life story. At first, I directly jumped

**Figure 1**

*A book by Indigenous Woman*



into the book's table of contents. I found the book starting with *Janma Sait* (date of birth), struggles to achievements. She had difficulties going to school because a girl from a wealthy and renowned family like her was not allowed to go to school in her society. She had hardly joined the school without informing her parents. She spent her early childhood as a shepherd (grazing animals) in her village. She struggled to get an education despite her parents' reluctance to enroll her. She also faced many hurdles in

her professional life. Despite this, she didn't lose hope as she was brave. She kept trying. She crossed the road of thorns. Now, she is a renowned Indigenous woman lawyer and human rights activist. Rai was also one of the architects of the 2007 Interim Constitution of Nepal. She was appointed by the then government of Nepal as a member of the Constitution drafting committee. The Constitution was in effect for more than eight years (from January 15, 2007, to September 20, 2015) till the adoption of the 2015 federal Constitution, during the political transition after the success of the *Jana Andolan II*. Including 11 indigenous peoples, we can find her name in the book *Prayraniya Adhivasi Byaktitwo ra Sangharshaka Aayam* (Inspiring Indigenous Figures and their Path to Success).

After reading her biography, I recalled my past life. I remember my childhood, going to school after the completion of grazing animals. In the past, most of the children in the region/area where I spent my childhood had their extra duties before going to school and after coming back from school. I also remember my struggle to get a slipper, a pen, and a copy. On my holidays, I used to make some pocket money as a part-time worker in agricultural activities in the farming field.

Reading Shanti Kumari Rai's story motivated me to write my own academic story—the book I found the catalyst for, which let me reflect on my past days as an Indigenous woman. Thus, I tried to reflect on my past English language learning experiences and connect them to research. Therefore, during my MPhil research, I asked for suggestions from my respected guru Professor, Dr. Laxman Gnawali. He happily suggested that I conduct this autoethnographic study on an ELT Indigenous woman.

I conducted the narrative inquiry in my master's degree in 2019, focusing on the Thangmi community. I learned about my research participants' incredibly upsetting experiences in English Language learning while researching the Thangmi people some years back. Indeed, the research was guided by the narrative inquiry method. After extensive interviews and conversations with my key informants, I produced narratives of Thangmi people with formal education and English language proficiency. They found it difficult to learn English as a third or fourth language in school since they must communicate with members of other communities in Nepali while speaking Thangmi at home as their mother language.

Additionally, they occasionally need to be familiar with other local Indigenous languages like Newa and Tamang. However, conducting research applying an

autoethnographic study as a research method was new for me. Though I was excited to write about myself and connect to research, I was in a dilemma. However, with the help of my supervisor and different literature, I conducted the research study.

This research explores how a Thangmi girl evolved in English language learning and teaching and the challenges faced in English language learning and teaching. Further, it examines how the girl copes with those challenges while becoming an English teacher. Finally, it uncovered the painful and gainful English language learning experiences of the Thangmi girl.

### **Rationale of the Study**

It is imperative to undertake this research, as this study explored how the members of the Indigenous community, specifically members of the Thangmi community, identified as a highly marginalized Indigenous group, evolved into English language education and how the members of the marginalized community learn English. The schooling is taking place in how members learn certain subjects like the English language of the marginalized sector. The knowledge that comes from this type of study helped strengthen democracy and women's empowerment initiatives. This study also sheds light on Thangmi women's experiences, where other marginalized Indigenous communities will get more assertiveness. It also can be related to the struggles of other marginalized communities' individuals, particularly Indigenous peoples.

The National Statistics Office (NOS) (2015) has given some space to women in different sectors, but there is a lack of materializing those legislative provisions into practice. Article 38 (5) mentions that women shall have the right to obtain special opportunities in education, health, employment, and social security based on positive discrimination. Therefore, the current research helps strengthen Indigenous women's empowerment as it uncovers the difficulties and challenges they encounter and recommends ways forward for their empowerment and competence/ability development. On the other hand, this study highlighted the issue of marginalized communities so that relevant policymakers would be aware of the problem and take measures to address it. As Dhakal (2019) stated, little effort is being made to ensure a bottom-up policymaking approach through stakeholder engagement. However, some concerns of the 'voiced groups' teacher union are sometimes touched upon. Therefore, in contrast with the constitutional provision regarding participation for marginalized communities, Indigenous groups, Adivasi, etc, in decision-making

processes that concern them (Art. 51 (j)), the ground reality remains starkly different. Thus, this research is worth conducting to uncover individuals' daily reality to strengthen democracy, women empowerment, and other marginalized communities, including the Thangmi community.

In addition, this study provides ground for the reconceptualization of formulation and implementation strategies for educational policies in the context of Nepal. As Dhakal (2019) asserted, policymakers often neglect bottom-up approaches to policymaking and discard the voices of marginalized groups in many instances. The present study has raised a call for participatory decision-making processes involving Indigenous and marginalized communities at all policy formulation and implementation levels. It contributes to the academic discourse on the participatory democratic process in the educational sphere; at the same time, the findings have useful implications for policy, practice, and future research by policymakers, educators, and development practitioners alike. This study suggests that education policies should be culturally responsive to marginalized and oppressed groups' particular needs and aspirations. The study has emphasized ethnicity and socioeconomic status; hence, targeted interventions should be designed to empower Indigenous women through education.

Finally, the study explored the lived experiences of a Thangmi woman as a guideline for addressing other challenges the marginalized group faces. It is a call to stakeholders to bring equity in education to the frontline, tap the potential among Indigenous groups, and generally provide an enabling environment for any person to do well, irrespective of their background. The research is thus not only of an academic nature but also a step toward social change. It will empower socio-economically backward communities, advocate inclusive policies, and inspire transformation in Nepal's education scenery. Giving a voice to the Thangmi and other marginalized communities contributes to a more equal and democratic society. The study will ensure that policy-level interventions address the systemic barriers to accessing quality education and the marginalization of Indigenous communities. Policy should ensure that resources are justly distributed, Indigenous people are more included in curriculum development meaningfully, and the marginalized are affirmed. Investing in teacher training, infrastructure, and financial support programs for students from underprivileged backgrounds will also go a long way toward bridging the gap.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In Nepal, women's educational journey is not always easy, evidenced by the small proportion of women working in institutions. Against the backdrop, it is not easy for a girl from an Indigenous and marginalized community like a Thangmi community or other ethnic groups to go to school and engage in a highly qualified profession. As mentioned above, in the introduction section, Indigenous women faced multiple challenges while attending school. She faced challenges from home and society. She shared that her father refuses her to enrol school, though they are economically strong in the village. She could go to school after completing household chores and grazing animals, hiding from her father. I have similar experiences, though I did not have full responsibility to accomplish the household chores and graze the animals. I faced challenges in society, like questions on identity, humiliation, and socio-economic crises, which hindered English language learning. Even though the constitution advocates providing equal opportunities for minority women, the real scenario is not satisfactory. Thus, I got the question: How did I grow as a Thangmi girl and fall into ELT? Are there other girls from the Thangmi community or other communities like Thangmi that also end up teaching English as a foreign language? What obstacles do ethnic girls like me or Thangmi girls face from going into education, higher education, and seeking a proper job? What social barriers are there? What financial barriers are there?

In answering, I went through different national and international research studies. Several studies (Bhalalusesa 1998; Gurung 2018) on general women are available in the literature. For instance, Gurung (2018) explored how female EFL teachers perceive and understand professional development, highlighting what motivates them to go for professional development activities. Similarly, Shyangtan (2018) investigated Tamang women's experiences in engaging in higher education through five Tamang women's stories. Bhalalusesa (1998) explores women's career and professional development in developing countries, emphasizing common characteristics among women from diverse cultural backgrounds and calling for gender sensitization in regions where gender issues are under-researched. Likewise, Ryan and Fraser (2010) canvasses systemic change in the professional development of academic staff concerning learning and teaching. It suggests the emergence of professional development in higher education pedagogy as a discipline and a field of practice and as a consequence of various convergent factors, especially mass higher

education, and the blurring of boundaries in the roles of academic and general staff in the university. In addition, White (2007) focuses on deepening our understanding of Indigenous women's participation in contemporary Australian society by exploring their experiences in employment, careers, education, and leadership. Few studies have been conducted on Indigenous women in Nepal, including (Shyangtan 2018) and Turin (2023). In addition, Turin (2023) studies extensive ethnolinguistic introduction of Thangmi and their culture. However, I found no research study exploring the Thangmi women in ELT.

Reflecting on my experiences, I realize that it is not easy for a learner from a highly marginalized community to get educated at a high level. Besides learning English, individuals face social and economic barriers in their educational and professional journey. Due to this, I have gone through many hurdles, such as social and economic barriers, while learning English. Hence, I endeavored to explore, besides the challenges, how I became an English language teacher in my circumstances.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study aimed to reflect on and explore my painful and gainful experiences of English language learning and teaching.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were set,

1. As a daughter from a highly marginalized Thangmi community, how have I evolved and grown in English language learning and teaching?
2. What challenges have I faced in becoming an English language teacher?
3. How have I overcome challenges in the English language learning and teaching journey?

### **Delimitations of the Study**

Some important delimitations help to set the scope of my study. Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018) defined delimitations as the definitions that the researchers decide to set as the boundaries of their work so that the study's aims and objectives do not become impossible to achieve. In this context, the delimitations of my study are as follows.

Firstly, I consciously avoided studying the wide range of available Thangmi ethnographic areas, such as profile, grammar, etc. Rather, I decided to explore undocumented research studies in ELT. In doing so, I delimited my study on

challenges faced while learning and teaching the English language, overcoming the challenges, and becoming an English teacher. Secondly, I have delimited this study to my experiences. I tried to uncover my challenging yet rewarding lived experiences of English language learning and teaching. Finally, my methodological delimitation is autoethnography, among other methods.

In addition, I tried to explore two sides of me. I tried to present the experience of Thangmi and a woman simultaneously. My story narrates the experiences of Thagnmi and a woman.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter I includes the introductory part of the dissertation, where I have included the general background of the study and rationale for choosing the particular topic for the study. Furthermore, it also accommodates statement of the problem, purpose of the study and research question. Delimitation of the study is also included in this chapter. Chapter II comprise the review of literature. This presents the findings of the literature review pertaining to the research topic. The findings are provided thematically. In chapter III I have presented Research methodology, where I have discussed about the philosophical stance, research paradigm and method of data generation. The chapter IV present the analysis how I have evolved as language teacher despite multiple hurdles and challenges. In fact this chapter present my academic journey in chronological order. The following chapter, chapter V, presents the socioeconomic and other challenges faced in the course of academic journey as a Indigenous girl and the chapter VI presents how I have overcome the challenges faced in the course of my academic journey to date. Final chapter, chapter VII presents the reflections, insights, conclusion and implication of the study.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented a scene from my study that works as a background and provides guidelines for me to continue this journey. This chapter's background section helped me set the scene of my context. In addition, the problem statement set the agenda for the study. This section intends to present the issue and the purpose of this study, which are genuine and need to be explored in Nepal. The research questions were explored from the context and endeavored to answer them in this study. I have set the pillars of this study in the next chapter, Chapter II. Those pillars are the literature and theoretical orientations that guided me in building this research study.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I reviewed the relevant literature. I initiated this chapter with thematic concepts, a theoretical review, and a review of empirical studies. Then, I discussed key concepts and theories employed in my research and how and where the research proceeds further. At the end of chapter I (for consistency in your writing), I also discussed the research gaps identified by reviewing the existing literature on the theme.

Firstly, the literature concerning language learning is generally presented to provide a language learning process and language learning strategies in the context of the Thangmi community. Secondly, the literature concerning Indigenous women is generally presented to provide a broader context for understanding Indigenous women's educational journey in ELE. Finally, the literature review focused on four specific bodies relevant to the proposed study about Indigenous women and their careers in ELT, challenges faced by marginalized students in ELL, resilience and overcoming adversity in educational pursuit, and the Thangmi community's profile and origin.

#### **Language Learning**

In the context of Thangmi English learners, language learning indicates obtaining and internalizing any language, whether one's native tongue or a foreign language. The second language learning process and the ability to communicate in it is called language learning. In other words, learning a language also involves learning how to use it. Additionally, it involves learning and developing proficiency in the second and target languages. According to Tarone (1981), it is a kind of effort to develop both linguistic and sociolinguistic competence, especially to combine linguistic and sociolinguistic competence into one's inter-language competence. Therefore, learning a language is honing one's communicative skills in the target language and using them appropriately for communication in context. According to Crystal (2008), language learning in applied linguistics and psycholinguistics is the process through which a language, whether a mother tongue or a foreign language, is internalized.



Vygotsky (1978) states that social interaction is an important part of the language-learning process. He further claims that language learning is mediated through tools like communication and interaction with more experienced peers or teachers. This brings out the importance of the sociocultural environment regarding language acquisition. Gass and Selinker (2008) mention the involvement in input, interaction, and output that were considered important aspects of second language acquisition (SLA). The input refers to learners' exposure to the target language, interaction highlights the importance of social engagement and cooperation of meaning, and output refers to the learners' practice and active use of the language in real-life situations. Oxford (1990) states that it involves the development of metacognitive strategies by learners in self-monitoring, goal setting, and evaluation of progress toward proficiency. Therefore, this study helped to determine how Thangmi women tackle language interference and acculturation in new cultural ways. It also explored the motivation and identity that are significant in language learning in the process of language learning.

### **Language Learning Strategies**

Defining and classifying language learning strategies are not simple tasks (Griffiths, 2004). Even though it's challenging, some academics have attempted to define it. According to Rubin (1975), learning strategies are the techniques or devices that a "learner may use to acquire knowledge through guessing, communicating, avoiding, inhibition, attending to form, practicing, monitoring, and attending to meaning" (p.5). Language learning strategies help learners learn a language more quickly and efficiently. Rai (2017) proposed that "Language learning strategies are kinds of individual action or plan and efforts that the learners used to learn the language easier and faster" (p. 20). "Language learning strategies are deliberate actions students use to make learning simpler, quicker, interesting, independent, and adaptable to new circumstances" (Oxford, 1990, p. 9). Cohen (1998) outlines six major categories of second language learning strategies, including cognitive, compensatory, affective, social, and metacognitive memory-related strategies.

Cognitive strategies refer to reason, scrutiny, making notes, a summary, synthesis, outline, and restructuring, through which learners can directly manipulate language materials. Furthermore, through practice in a realistic environment, formal structure, and sound practice, cognitive strategies assist in developing stronger

schemas (knowledge structures). As an English language learner, I have used cognitive strategies (e.g., summarizing and outlining) to learn languages.

Using meta-cognitive strategies, learners can identify their learning style preferences and needs. They help learners to plan for a second language task or gather and organize learning materials. Memory-related strategies allow learners to connect two concepts or items from their second language. Acronyms, sounds, images, combinations of sounds and images, body movement, and mechanical means are just a few examples of the orderly string in which learners learn and retrieve information.

Compensatory strategies assist language learners in inferring from the context in reading and listening. On the other side, in speaking and writing, these strategies can help learners use synonyms, talk around the missing word, and speak while demonstrating or pausing. Affective strategies help learners determine their level of mood and anxiety with the help of effective techniques. They relate to the learner's emotions, making rewarding oneself for good work easier.

Students enquire about a topic to get confirmation and clarification on a perplexing point. Additionally, they request assistance with a language task. Social strategies improve conversation with a conversation partner who speaks the target language and explores cultural and social norms, assisting learners to collaborate and comprehend the target culture in addition to the target language.

### **Indigenous Women and English Language Education**

Indigenous women and English language education are related in various complex ways, generally indicating broader issues of cultural identities and access to resources. Amin (2001) noted that the experiences of Indigenous women in English language education are complex and complicated. It vividly depicts my language learning experience. I, as a Thangmi woman from a highly marginalized Indigenous community, have gone through several multilayered experiences.

In many Indigenous communities of the world, English language education has been at once a tool for empowerment and a source of cultural erasure and marginalization. Indigenous women gain access to economic opportunities, higher education, and global communication networks through the English language and its education. Mastery of English may give them the wherewithal to navigate the systems of power, claim their rights, and participate more fully in society. For some, fluency in English opens doors to employment in fields such as tourism, government, or international development. On this, Crystal (2008) elaborates that English has become

"a global and an international language due to the migration of English speakers and colonialism by the British, the international role and influence of the USA, Commerce, international communications, media, films, etc., and the spread of new technology" (p.123).

The pursuit of proficiency in English also comes at a cost. Poudel & Subedi (2020) observe that emphasis on Nepali and English within the Nepalese educational system has repeatedly undermined Indigenous languages and cultures, leading to a loss of cultural identity among Indigenous women. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2019), inequity in quality education access reinforces other systemic barriers, such as poverty and discrimination, that further marginalize these communities. This could suggest that such assimilation loses the culture and identity; thus, there is a loss of cultural identity, as well as belonging, in an Indigenous woman.

### **Indigenous Women and Careers in ELT**

There is a lack of research studies on the career challenges of Indigenous women in English language teaching in Nepal. However, Bhandari (2022) has mentioned that some current studies highlight the wider context of women's employment in the country. The Indigenous women pursuing a career in ELT must negotiate a specific intersection of cultural identity, linguistic diversity, and educational empowerment. For many Indigenous women, engagement in ELT is an avenue for gaining agency over their language and culture in the often-dominant colonial legacy spaces of education. In Pennycook's view (2001), Indigenous women in ELT challenge the traditional narratives and serve as proponents of linguistic inclusivity as they reclaim their agency over their language and culture while addressing colonial legacies in schools. One of the most important contributions of Indigenous women in ELT is their ability to bring Indigenous languages, cultural perspectives, and pedagogical approaches into teaching the English language.

Smith (1999) further argued that Indigenous women in ELT serve as role models and mentors for Indigenous learners, particularly young female generations, to show that fluency in English does not necessarily require the loss of one's cultural identity. Their presence in the classroom can inspire confidence and pride in Indigenous students, encouraging them to pursue higher education and aspire to leadership roles in their communities. Yet, in reality, the Indigenous women who are now selecting career options within ELT find many issues with professional

development opportunities, linguistic discrimination, and institutional and systemic barriers. Such challenges call for greater recognition and support of Indigenous educators within the ELT community.

### **Challenges Faced by Marginalized Students in English Language Learning**

ESL (English as a second language) Indigenous students encounter several difficulties in learning English. These can be based on cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, and institutional barriers. Many Indigenous students come from homes where the primary language is not English. The same situation happens to Thangmi English learners. Thangmi learners must simultaneously learn Nepali and English as the Thangmi language is their first or primary language. Limited exposure to English negatively impacts their potential to express themselves in an academic environment and, in turn, their language acquisition. The majority of Aboriginal people are of school age. Yet, aboriginal people have the highest rates of school dropout in the nation, and of those who complete high school, only a small percentage go on to post-secondary education (Bezanson et al., 2007). Similarly, the Thangmi learners were in the same situation in the Thangmi community. The cultural and linguistic differences between their native language and English can pose significant challenges; grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure are often different in English than in other languages, so it may take more time and hard work for Indigenous students to master the language. According to Cummins (2000), Indigenous students, especially from low-income families, may experience socio-economic challenges that impact their learning of the English language. Limited access to resources such as books, technology, and educational support may hinder their progress in acquiring English language skills.

Thangmi learners of English faced different challenges, such as language interference and socioeconomic factors. Thami (2019) also highlighted that poverty is a major challenge hindering learning. She further states that due to poverty, Thangmi learners of English cannot afford extra learning opportunities. Often, marginalized students attend schools with limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient support for English language learning (ELL). These are compounded by a lack of adequate funding, a shortage of qualified English as a second language (ESL) teachers, and limited access to language support programs that make the playing field even more unfair for Indigenous students. Among various challenges, a language barrier is one of the major challenges an Indigenous learner encounters. According to

Rai (2012), language barriers can lead to social exclusion for marginalized students, particularly when children can't communicate effectively with their peers or fully participate in classroom activities. She further added that the Indigenous learners of English, Puma learners, faced the same problems due to mother tongue interference; they are unable to communicate in the classroom. Poor peer interaction and poor assimilation of cultural practices hinder the progress of language acquisition and, eventually, scholastic performance.

### **Resilience and Overcoming Adversity in Educational Pursuit**

The American Psychology Association (APA) (2014) defines resilience as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors” (p.1). According to Smith (1999), resilience and overcoming adversity were the central themes in the educational pursuits of Indigenous women who often had to confront unique challenges along their academic journey. Different challenges in learning English are faced as a Thangmi woman, originating from low socio-economic status, racism, discrimination, and being part of a minority. However, it is through such historical and systemic inequalities that Indigenous women access higher education, a true testament to their resiliency, determination, and perseverance. Thami (2019) noted that though the journey of learning the English language is arduous for the speakers of Thangmi, there is consensus that no matter how complex their education journey has been, they have struggled and learned English. Children and adolescents from the most difficult backgrounds can overcome challenges and succeed in school even under sometimes improbable circumstances (Wyner et al., 2007). The identity of Indigenous women intersects with gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and language. These identities may add to their obstacles but condition their singular experiences of resistance and resilience to discrimination and marginalization.

For example, Ebersohn (2012) commented that Indigenous women are leading several advocacy and activism efforts on educational equity, Indigenous peoples' rights, and social justice. They organize their communities, demand policy change, and struggle against systemic barriers in education to claim their rights to quality and culturally relevant education. Ebersohn (2012) further highlighted for resilience to be achieved, there has to be the development of at least one domain of life that is threatened and positive adaptation to the adverse situation.

### **Thangmi Community's Profile and Origin**

Thangmi is the ethnonym used by the community to recognize themselves. However, Thami is a surname known and recognized by outsiders and state administration to refer to them. Interestingly, the term Thami is also used by other groups in Nepal, India and Africa. We could find various instances of use of the term Thami by other communities than Thangmi. It means that the term Thami does not always indicate the Thangmi community. Thus, all the Thangmi are known as Thami and not all Thami are necessary to be Thangmi until and unless they have similar socio, cultural, linguistic and territorial bonds and historical closeness. It is sure that the Thangmi is the original native term that refers to them and the Thami is the distorted term of Thangmi which is used in the government documents (Thami, 2023). There are different stories about the evolution of the terms Thangmi and Thami. I do not go into details on this. In this dissertation, I generally used the native term Thangmi. However, the term Thami is also employed in specific circumstances and when citing texts and people. According to the national census data, the Thangmi population in Nepal is 32,743, spread over more than 30 districts (National Statistics Office (NSO), 2023). Thangmi is one of the languages out of 124 languages spoken in Nepal. I am a mature woman who belongs to that community. I am happy to be a part of this community. There are 26,805 speakers of the Thangmi language. Thangmi language is categorized as an endangered Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the districts of Dolakha and Sindhupalchok in central-eastern Nepal.

Thangmi is socially and economically backward in the area. The physical characteristic and overall customs of the Thangmi lead to the fact that we are of "Mongoloid" descent. Thangmi is one of the ethnic groups that lived originally in the Himalayan area of the Bagmati province of Nepal. We have lived in the Dolakha, Sindhupalchowk, and Ramechhap districts since ancient times. 80% of the Thangmi population resides in those districts (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2023). Nowadays, we are scattered all over the country. Thangmi belongs to an Indigenous group of Nepal. In the past, people used to express surprise whenever they heard Thangmi(Thami), which was often mistakenly related to the "Dhami" or "Kami" caste/ethnic groups. Due to this, Thangmi individuals used to conceal their ethnicity, embracing other known surnames after their names. Even my father, when he was in Kathmandu Valley for Twenty-Five years, kept his surname as 'Thapa.' My birth certificate still depicts my surname as 'Thapa,' and I feel that the certificate has been

evidence of the identity crisis of Thangmi. Thangmi is considered the "*plane change jat*" (touchable caste) under the Hindu hierarchical structure to avoid the odds they might encounter in the new society, even though they are not part of the *varna* system, which strictly follows the vertical caste hierarchy. The Muluki Ain of Nepal (1854) legalized the Hindu religion-backed caste system in Nepal. This legal framework divided caste/ethnic groups of Nepal into the following hierarchies: Tagadhari (wearer of sacred cord), Matwali (alcohol drinkers: non-enslavable and enslavable), Impure but touchable, and Impure and touchable (Höfer, 2004). This is how the imposition of the Hindu religion-based caste hierarchy marginalized our ethnic groups from the socio-political and economic scene of the nation.

It is believed that Thangmi falls under the Kirat civilization, Like Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar, Yakkha, and others. In the study process, I went to Shushpa, the place of origin of Thangmi, to get historical information regarding their origin and civilization. When I researched the English language learning experiences of Thangmi speakers, I visited the origin place of the Thangmi people. I met one of the women named Rugu, a socially active person. She is one example of an empowered woman who likes to take her society ahead in every field, such as education, health, etc. She and her husband had been involved in building the museum of Thangmi in their society, which was in the process of building. After meeting Rugu, it came to know that an ancient couple named Yapati Chhuku and Sunari Aaji traveled to day's *Rang Rang Thali*, a place in Bhimeshwor municipality of Dolakha district, all the way from *Simang ghat*, *Kumang ghat* and settled there. Often, it is heard/written that Simang Ghat and Kumang Ghat are the Simrongarh of the present-day Bara district; however, this stereotype remains a subject of further study and verification (Thami, 2025). Another (mis)representation is that the term Chhuku and Aaji denotes father-in-law and mother-in-law, which is also true. However, those terms also denote grandfather, grandmother, or respected ancestors in the Thangmi language.

### **My Theoretical Referents**

Although I was exposed to and applied the theoretical framework in my master's thesis, ambiguities and unclarity persisted in the study's connection and application of theory. During my Master's level, I learned to pass the examinations only. This led me to many struggles in understanding the concepts of those learning theories and their applications in real-life experiences during my higher studies.

When I joined MPhil in 2020, I spent much time reading literature in the library and attending professors' English language education and development studies sessions. Besides, during my MPhil studies, I was exposed to research training, workshops, and seminars organized by the university and some foreign organizations/institutions. Those events helped tremendously enhance my interest in looking at the world through my theoretical lens. However, I started gaining a more profound knowledge of theories through Advanced Qualitative Research in my MPhil degree.

Meanwhile, I studied some of the MPhil and Ph.D. dissertations written through the autoethnographic lens (e.g., Bhandari, 2022; Bohara, 2021; Dhungana, 2023; Gurung, 2018) and available published literature precisely to get a clear idea to start with my dissertation. This reading of those research works helped me to understand, analyze, and interpret my experiences of personal as well as professional life and relate it to the world around me. These theories have been most relevant to my autoethnographic journey as an English language learner and lecturer. Therefore, this research study is guided by the following theories/conceptual frameworks:

### **Transformative Learning Theory**

Transformative research involves educational practitioners transforming their professional practices and the lives of future generations (Luitel & Taylor, 2019). Transformative learning (TL) involves a significant change in the learner's perspective and ultimately shapes their thoughts and behaviors to help them accommodate the changing world. Cranton and King (2003) affirmed that these frames of reference help us make meaning of the world through our experiences, and Mezirow (1997) delimit our expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings so our habits of mind help us understand the world. These frames of reference are the structures of assumptions that help us understand our experiences. In daily learning, we absorb those frames of reference for understanding the world and transforming our lives. The TL theory focuses on the knowledge that learners can regulate their thinking based on new information they receive during the learning process. TL attempts to describe and analyze how adult learners learn to make meaning to their experiences (Mezirow, 1991), and while doing so, they define their lives through various frames of reference or habits of mind. Therefore, I also defined my experiences through different genres and tried to reflect on my learning experiences. Through the lens of transformative



learning theory, I reflected on my experience and tried to explore the transformation within me, from the village girl to the lecturer in the city.

### **The Socio-Cultural Theory**

This learning theory was propounded by L. Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, during the early 20th century. He believed that human development and learning are solely possible through socio-cultural interaction by which they could learn social norms, values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies (Vygotsky, 1978). Since language and culture are inseparable and both exist in society, language has to be taught in the sociocultural context of the learners (Kavakli, 2020). Since my purpose of the research is to explore my own English language learning experiences as a girl from a marginalized community, indeed, the Sociocultural Theory (SCT) of language learning will be helpful in interconnecting language and culture in the social context.

Learning is an interaction that "unfolds during the dialogic activity collaboratively constructed by learner and tutor" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 367). This theory claims that the learning process, i. e., thinking and problem-solving, is essentially social due to the linguistically mediated interaction between learners and other members of society. Therefore, sociocultural theory helped me view how I, as a learner of English, learned English my entire life. It also helped me to explore how I collaborate with the social Periphery. Further, Vygotsky (1978) categorizes thinking and problem-solving tasks into three categories: some can be performed independently by the child; some cannot be performed at all (yet), and between these two extremes are tasks that the child can perform with help from others. Similarly, in my childhood, I also had difficulty performing independently. Rather, I learned from performing tasks with others. Thus, Vygotsky has called the dynamic process in which the child and adult collaborate in constructing a mutual activity frame "the zone of proximal development (ZPD)" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 84) for learning the third kind of task. Hence, the individual develops their language and rational thought with assistance from and in collaboration with more experienced members of society.

### **Critical Social Theory**

Critical social theory is a framework for analyzing and understanding society that emerged from the Frankfurt School of Social Thought in the early to mid-20th century. Critical social theory aims to critique and change society rather than explain or describe it (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). It also encompasses a range of perspectives and approaches that critique the status quo, question power dynamics, and seek to

uncover underlying structures of oppression, inequality, and domination in society. Thus, critical social theory helped me to criticize my past experiences. It compelled me to think about the barriers I faced from childhood to now.

Critical social theory analyzes power dynamics and structures of domination in society, including how power operates through institutions, systems, and everyday practices. Horkheimer (1972) highlights the unequal distribution of power and resources and how power is exercised to maintain existing social hierarchies. According to Freire (1970), critical social theory provides a framework for understanding the complexities of social life, interrogating power relations, and envisioning alternative futures based on principles of equality, justice, and human liberation. Critical social theory contributes to efforts to create a more just, equitable, and inclusive society by critically examining social structures and advocating for transformative change.

Critical social theory seeks to uncover how dominant ideologies, beliefs, and discourses shape social reality and perpetuate systems of power and privilege. It examines how dominant ideologies serve the interests of the ruling class while marginalizing and suppressing the voices of marginalized groups. With the help of critical social theory, I realized my privileges and disadvantages. It changed my belief system. It helped to critique the challenges that I faced during my early years.

### **Policy Review**

Nepal is a land of social, cultural, religious, and caste/ethnic diversity. 142 caste/ethnic clusters, 124 language groups, and 10 religious categories are recorded in government documents (National Statistics Office NSO, 2023). However, recently, 124 languages have been introduced. In total, 61 Indigenous groups are officially recognized in Nepal, and 59 Indigenous Peoples in Nepal received official recognition from the government in 2002 (NFDIN, 2003). Among them, 10 communities are recognized as endangered, whereas 12 are classified as highly marginalized; 20 Indigenous Peoples are categorized as marginalized; 15 groups are clubbed under disadvantaged, and two are as advanced. Recently, two more groups (Rana Tharu and Humlo) have been enlisted as Indigenous Peoples of Nepal.

Thangmi is one of the highly marginalized Indigenous communities of Nepal. According to national census data, the total population across Nepal is 32,743 (National Statistics Office NSO, 2023). Thangmi language is one of the 124 languages spoken in Nepal. Government data shows that Thangmi speakers in Nepal

are 26,805. According to Turin (2012), the Thangmi language is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Nepal's Dolakhā and Sindhupālchok districts. Like many Indigenous languages, the Thangmi language is also on the verge of extinction due to the authority, recognition, and prestige of a single language, Nepali, which has the corollary effect of leaving the remaining minority languages in poverty and on the periphery of society (Yadava, 2009). Besides being the official language, Nepali is also the language of the education medium in Nepal's educational institutions. Neither government offices nor schools use Indigenous and marginalized languages. In this sense, Nepali is the dominant language in Nepal. Due to this, children from non-Nepali-speaking communities are deprived of equal access to mainstream education.

The right to education on the mother language at the primary level, as guaranteed by legal provisions enacted after 1990, has not been implemented. According to the Nepal Law Commission (1990) provision on mother tongue education, each community can operate schools up to the primary native language level to educate its children. (art. 18.2). A similar guarantee was made in the 2015 constitution. It provisioned that each Nepali residing in Nepal has the right to secondary-level education in their native language as well as the freedom to establish and operate educational institutions (art.31.5). But a lot of ethnic languages are ignored and excluded when the dominant language, Nepali, is adopted in the classroom, which causes trauma and discrimination for the kids who don't speak Nepali. Traumatized children are incapable of doing well in school.

The committee welcomes the 33 percent representation of women in the constituent Assembly. However, it is deeply concerned about the extremely low representation of women, in particular, Dalit and Indigenous women, in high-level decision-making positions, public service, the judiciary, and the diplomatic service, in the National Human Rights Commission, and at the local level (NFDIN, 2003).

It is also mentioned in 27. While welcoming the overall increase in gender parity in primary and secondary education, the committee is concerned about the minimal increase in female enrollment, the extremely high dropout rate for girls, the urban/rural disparities in access to education, and illiteracy rates for female adults. The committee is further concerned about the extremely low number of female teachers at all levels of education.

### **Empirical Review**

I reviewed different national/international research studies related to my research. Gurung (2018) explored how female EFL teachers perceive and understand professional development and highlighted what motivates them to go for professional development activities. In general, the study aimed to uncover their experiences in their professional development journey. The study used the narrative inquiry method, where different EFL teachers gathered stories from Nepal. The research was accomplished through in-depth interviews. Though Gurung has explored the professional development of female EFL teachers, her study has focused on the motivational aspect of interning in professional development activities. Therefore, the study has not explored the challenges and overcoming journey of the EFL teacher.

Shyangtan (2018) uncovered the experiences of Tamang women regarding access to and participation in higher education. She narrated stories of five Tamang women's access and participation in higher education. The research study concluded that Tamang women experienced pride in getting access to higher education as the first-generation educated women in their families. Higher education institutions are likely to perpetuate inequality in order to ensure the access and participation of Tamang women. Higher education is out of reach for Indigenous students such as the Tamang women to ensure inclusive higher education in Nepal. The study has focused on women's access to and participation in higher education. It has brought up stories about only Tamang women. So, the study can hardly be generalized to other Indigenous women because different Indigenous communities have different socio-economic cultures.

Rai (2017) studied the perceptions of Puma speech community members towards English language learning, uncovered their challenges while learning it, and discovered their coping strategies to meet the challenges. Adopting ethnography as the research method, she collected data from Puma members of the Puma speech community and Puma learners of English from secondary-level schools in the Khotang District of Eastern Nepal. The research was accomplished through classroom observation, interviews, and field notes. This research study has highlighted the challenges faced by students from the Indigenous community in English language learning. This research study was done by staying in the field for a prolonged period. Though the research study is about Indigenous communities, it has focused on the students from the indigenous communities without considering teachers' perceptions.

National Indigenous Women's Federation (NIWF) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2018) examined issues of ancestral lands. They restricted access to forests and natural resources to a strong patriarchal division of labor, including land ownership norms and participation in decision-making processes. It also addressed the development of eco-tourism and the production of high-value cash crops to provide recommendations on how best to empower Indigenous women to continue maintaining, preserving, and promoting their culture, traditional skills, and heritage. The study has talked about the best way of empowering Indigenous women and the result of it.

Turin's (2023) book includes a grammatical description of the Dolakha dialect of Thangmi, a collection of glossed oral texts, and a comprehensive lexicon with relevant examples. In addition, the reader will find an extensive example of an ethnolinguistic introduction. In addition, the reader will find an extensive ethnolinguistic introduction to the speakers and their culture.

Bhalalusesa's (1998) study explores women's career and professional development in development in developing countries, emphasizing common characteristics among women from diverse cultural backgrounds and calling for gender sensitization in regions where gender issues are not well-studied. Regardless, his study talked about women's career and professional development. It hasn't raised the issue of the indigenous EFL teacher. So, my experience highlights the challenges of Indigenous women EFL teachers.

Sapkota (2017) explored the professional development experience of EFL teachers in Kathmandu. The study aims to explicate the experiences of professional development opportunities used by EFL teachers in Kathmandu. The study also aimed to explain how EFL teachers develop, the challenges they face during their professional development, and their coping mechanisms.

Dhakal (2021) takes the question of how the formal structures at an institutional level are (dis)empowering school stakeholders and (dis/encouraging) participation of women in school governance. Further, he explored the understanding and practices of inclusive school governance in a rural Nepali community school, especially from the perspective of women's participation. Applying the theoretical lenses of participation, representation, critical mass, and feminist standpoint, the study examined the dynamics of including others in the School Management Committee (SMC) by unfolding the perceptions of SMC members themselves.

White's (2007) research deepens our understanding of Indigenous women's participation in contemporary Australian society by exploring their experiences in employment, careers, education, and leadership. Since the purpose of this study is to explore how university education Indigenous women understand and make sense of their career journeys, the epistemological framework of the research is constructionism using an interpretive approach.

It was a qualitative study in which the researcher used narrative inquiry as the research method. The researcher interviewed five EFL teachers. The experiences shared during the interviews were used as the narrative data for the study. The study found that EFL teachers keep their efforts to use diverse professional development opportunities. The development of teachers results in changes in their classroom practices as EFL teachers and teacher-learners. I found this research study similar to Gurung (2018), where they focused on EFL teachers keeping their efforts to use diverse professional development opportunities. They are also motivated in their professional development.

Amin's (2001) study is based on another one that investigated the experiences of visible minority immigrant women teachers of ESL in Canada. Highlighting data from 6 of the 8 participants in the study, in this study, she explores their encounters with the discourses of the native speaker and nativism. She first described her study, after which she detailed its theoretical underpinnings. She then described the challenges the Indigenous ESL teachers interviewed faced and how they negotiated them in the classroom. Finally, she looked at the implications of her research for English Language Teaching (ELT).

The above research studies have explored general women's professional development. This is worth it in the field of Indigenous women. Some research studies have focused on Indigenous women and their careers in general. Also, there is a research study on Thangmi linguistics and grammar. However, I found no research study on highly marginalized communities like Thangmi and their struggle in their English language educational journey.

### **Research Gap**

In line with the literature review above, I found that most research studies focused on women's professional development. The study by Gurung (2018) explored the perception of female EFL teachers regarding professional development activities and what motivated them to undertake the professional development journey but did

not find any research studies on Indigenous women's professional development. I found a single research study by Shyangtan (2018) on the experiences of Tamang women in higher education, where the study explored the experiences of Tamang women in terms of having access to and participation in higher education. However, I have not found any research study on Indigenous women in ELT. When I reviewed another research study on professional development, Sapkota (2017) explored the professional development experience of EFL teachers in Kathmandu. The study aims to explicate the experiences of professional development opportunities used by EFL teachers in Kathmandu. The study also aimed to explain how EFL teachers develop, the challenges they face during their professional development and their coping mechanisms.

The study is somewhat similar in some aspects but hasn't focused on Indigenous women in English language teaching (ELT). Rather, it was conducted randomly with two males and three females. Therefore, I found no research studies on Indigenous women in ELT. I also did not find any research study on Thangmi women in ELT. Consequently, I believe this research work will bridge the gap in Nepal by exploring how being a Thangmi girl evolved into ELT education, what sort of challenges I have faced in the journey of becoming an English language teacher, and how I have overcome many challenges in the journey of English language teaching/learning.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reflects the literature review section under five themes and the theoretical framework. Five themes in this chapter support the idea/essence of English language learning and Indigenous women's education and careers. The themes of English language learning and second language learning advocate space in teaching and learning English as a second or third language. Likewise, themes like Indigenous women's education and Indigenous women's careers present the situation and struggle of Indigenous women. Similarly, this chapter placed two broad lenses of theoretical framing: socio-critical theory and transformative learning theory. The socio-critical theory helped me to reflect critically on my experiences as an Indigenous woman in English language learning. In addition, the transformative theoretical lens made me aware of the transformation of Thangmi girl into an English teacher. It is time to set the roadmap for this study; the next chapter is Chapter III,

which constructs a methodological framework that guides me in accomplishing this study.



## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The philosophical issues are covered in the first section of this chapter. Further, it details the research paradigm. It also includes the research method. In addition, it explains the issues related to quality standards and ethical considerations.

#### **Philosophical Considerations**

Philosophical considerations refer to a set of beliefs and ideas that deal with principles of reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), and value (axiology). They are also the foundations for the logical analysis of knowledge and the meaning-making process in this study.

#### **Ontological Assumption**

“Ontology is a formal specification of a perspective” (Smith, 2004, p.2), which means it concerns the nature of being. The study of "being" and "what" is, i.e., the form of existence and reality as well as what is known about the world, is known as ontology. (Snape and Spencer, 2003, as cited in Saadi, 2014). It deals with the issues related to nature, existence, or being. The same reality may not be real for everyone. One thing may be right for one person but not for another. Reality keeps changing. Therefore, my ontology in this research is subjective and relative. I also believe that there is no universally accepted reality or understanding of how to adapt and accept any phenomena by which each individual can be different.

Moreover, this research study aims to explore and critically assess my beliefs and practices as a learner and teacher in ELT. Being an autoethnographic researcher, I believe that reality depends upon time and context. In this regard, I strongly support the idea of Cohen, et al. (2000), knowledge is personal, subjective, and unique. So, I appreciate multiple realities and my interpretation based on my experiences.

#### **Epistemological Assumption**

The presumptions we have about the nature of knowledge are known as epistemology. (Richards, 2003, as cited in Saadi, 2014). It is focused on the definition of knowledge, involving aspects of knowledge. The epistemological lens helps me gain knowledge by interpreting my own experiences. Certainly, I had many lived experiences recollected from my childhood onwards. As an autoethnographic researcher, my epistemological stand is to make meaning from my experiences.

Moreover, I applied the inductive process (bottom-up) of meaning-making in which my daily practices and experiences tend to support me in acquiring new knowledge (Saldana, 2015). As a researcher, I connected my experience to research and made meaning from it.

### **Axiological Assumption**

The axiology is related to value. It deals with what principles one should adhere to. “Axiology is a science that studies how people think and deal with values” (Richards, 2003, p. 36). It is all about the value that everybody carries, ‘I’ is an integral part of the autoethnographic study; my values, perceptions, experiences, and beliefs guide me in interpreting and questioning my experiences of English language learning and teaching.

The interpretive paradigm asserts that researchers' values are inherent in every research phase. It holds that reality cannot be detached from our knowledge and experiences (there is no separation of subject and object). In my research, I explored knowledge and created value. I also value the knowledge gained from my experience, books, articles, and magazines.

### **Multi-Paradigmatic Research**

I tried to explore my experiences on how I evolved and grew into English language teaching and became an English teacher, crossing many obstacles. For this, I chose a multi-paradigmatic research design. Autoethnography embraces multi-paradigmatic design space as researchers need to ground their narratives in context, reflect critically on taken-for-granted assumptions, and use arts-based approaches in representing experiences (Luitel & Taylor, 2019). This research design inculcates different research designs, such as interpretive, critical, and postmodernism. Therefore, I applied three research paradigms, interpretive, critical, and postmodernism, and reflected on my experiences, values, and beliefs to envision myself in different roles and to speak from my unexplored voices.

### **Interpretivism**

All researchers' thinking is based on their perceptions, which arise from how they relate to their external environment. Because different individuals have different perceptions, the research process and findings can be considerably different. However, some norms and principles govern a researcher's behavior, referred to as paradigms. Paradigms provide a framework from which researchers are guided through the making of choices in methodology. Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted

that paradigms help researchers make sense of the studied phenomena. The interpretive paradigm is oriented explicitly toward understanding human experiences, centering on how individuals make sense of their realities. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) elaborated that the interpretive paradigm prioritizes the subjective meaning that participants ascribe to their experiences, considering such insights as critical as explanation or prediction. In his research study, Schwandt (1994) mentions that operating within the interpretive paradigm seeks to uncover the context-specific understandings that emerge from participants' perceptions, experiences, and interactions with their environments. Thus, the reflections within the study had to do with a challenging journey in learning and teaching the English language. This effort included the life experiences between childhood and the present. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), this is within the interpretive paradigm that works towards attaining human experiences through narration or storytelling and a narrative inquiry. I aimed to give meaning and sense to the field of ELT by examining how individual experiences can add to a broader understanding of learning and teaching English. Gichuru (2017) believes that interpretivism offers an in-depth understanding of cultural and social contexts by delving into the lived experiences of individuals. In addition, Krause (2022) has further described how interpretivism can help researchers look at multiple layers of interpretation by adding subjectivity and view from the cultural perspective. In my research, the interpretivism paradigm supported understanding the cultural perspective of a Thangmi girl concerning learning and teaching the English language. This helped me take on the emergent nature of the inquiry, which was iterative, with interpretations evolving as newer insights were attained (Bryman, 2012). Being obliged to use multiple layers of meaning, I looked to uncover the subjective realities of my experiences to know how I navigated the challenges of learning and teaching English on my professional journey. From these experiences, I have tried to uncover multiple meanings of the challenges and strategies used to overcome them. This interpretive approach let me understand my journey and the broader implications for English language education within my cultural context. In this regard, the interpretive paradigm thus supported me to make sense of the problems I encountered and how I coped with them to gain a richer and more nuanced understanding of the field of ELT.

### **Criticalism**

According to Asghar (2013), the Critical paradigm is a new but increasingly important approach in research, offering valuable insights and a change-oriented agenda for addressing inequalities and advocating improvement. In the critical paradigm, my research found the tools to analyze and reflect on the difficulties of being an Indigenous woman learning and teaching English as a second language and how these challenges have shaped my journey and identity as an educator. This was an opportunity to seize as a critical researcher in critically reflecting on my life experiences to explore the challenges and strategies that helped me out of them. Asghar (2013) mentioned that critical theory strives for human emancipation; it frees people from situations that oppress or enslave them. It criticizes traditional forms of power and seeks transformative practices toward equity and inclusion. This provided me with an opportunity not only to perceive my journey but also to understand and question all those structural and systemic barriers impeding genuine access to English language quality education for Indigenous groups. One important principle of this critical paradigm is a call for reflective practice and an action-oriented process. It impresses on researchers the need to critically reflect on how their experiences are linked to larger societal structures. Olle (2008) points out that critical paradigms shape our perceptions of reality by challenging dominant discourses and providing alternative perspectives to motivate positive change. Yet, this perspective said something to me about making meaning of my experiences of struggles and successes within a greater social and cultural context. Looking back on experiences that I went through and that made me stronger, important insights were recognized that enriched my knowledge of self as an educator and conveyed some lessons related to inequity in English teaching. The critical paradigm also allowed me to realize the significance of empowerment in learning. Thus, the critical paradigm allowed me to reflect critically upon my experiences and to make meaning from them. Such reflections shed light on the systemic barriers that have challenged Indigenous women in education. It also provided me with the means to challenge such barriers and support a more inclusive and equitable approach toward learning and teaching the English language.

### **Postmodernism**

I have always enjoyed learning through different forms of art. Since arts are inseparable forms of human evolution, people express, present, and represent the ways of their lives according to their unique culture. The postmodern paradigm allows

us to describe our thoughts and feelings through various means of communication, such as language, art, or gesture (Taylor & Medina, 2013). Likewise, I have presented my experience through different genres, such as story (narrative), poem, dialogue, monologue, letters, conversation, etc. I chose the postmodern paradigm to present my lived experiences best to help my readers understand what I mean in this research. The postmodern paradigm also helps to attract the readers' attention as the researcher uniquely presents the research. Following the postmodern paradigm, Javanmardi et al. (2020) claimed that narratives, theories, and scientific laws are changing to build an understanding of human experiences. As this study employs the autoethnography method, the blend of narratives and theories helps to understand the experience of Indigenous women's ELT journey. Using different genres- stories (narratives), poems, dialogues, monologues, letters, and conversations- allows me to reflectively reject the strict, traditional structures of academic writing in postmodernity. It provides a multidimensional presentation of ideas, hence a more creative, fluid interpretation of my lived experiences. A poem or a monologue allows an emotional understanding of my experiences that the more traditional research paradigm might restrain. It is at this personal, lived experience level, being an Indigenous woman within the ELT field, where my research essence resides. This attention to subjective realities orients the postmodern emphasis on individual perspective rather than a universal, objectively established truth. The researcher's voice in postmodern writing is not exclusive authority. However, presenting my journey may invoke reflection and dialogue from the readers through their unique interpretive work based on my experiences.

### **Autoethnography as a Research Method**

I remember that in Laxman sir's class, he assigned us to write reflections. He assigned us to reflect on memorable experiences. I was confused about how and where to start because I was not habituated to it. He also provided hints and ideas on how I could go through them. Before I started my postgraduate education, I just read the text from the book and wrote the answers. I recall that sometimes I used to write essays. As Laxman sir assigned the work, I wrote about my memorable experiences. In the next class, he provided a title to write: "A Thangmi girl dreamed of becoming an English Teacher." I wrote my English language learning experiences. But I wasn't aware of connecting those experiences with research. However, my postgraduate education at KUSOED opened my eyes to different research methods.

Adams et al. (2022) illuminate that through autoethnographic study, researchers tell a carefully written, lively story that unfolds in a detailed description. Similarly, Adams et al. further mentioned that autoethnography is a research method that uses personal experience (“auto”) to describe and interpret (“graphy”) cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices (“ethnic”). Autoethnographers believe that personal experience is infused with political/cultural norms and expectations, and they engage in rigorous self-reflection—typically referred to as “reflexivity”—to identify and interrogate the intersections between the self and social life” (Adams et al., 2017). Autoethnography is a highly regarded and widely used research methodology and practice whereby the researcher is deeply immersed in self-experience while observing, writing, journaling, and reflecting. “A researcher uses tenets of autoethnography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product” (Ellis et al. 2011, p.273). By product and process, autoethnography is the relentless act of self-reflection, data gathering, and narrative building to generate a text that is both highly personal and analytical. From this vantage point, as an autoethnographic researcher, I constantly glide between being a storyteller and an analyst in ways that navigate the intimate landscapes of my experiences while trying to find the greater cultural forces that shape and give meaning to them.

Hence, I developed an intense curiosity in doing autoethnographic research to explore my experiences concerning English language learning and becoming a teacher when I studied different qualitative research methods. I was inclined to autoethnography so that my past experiences and stories, connecting them to the social world, could be brought into the present and give meaning to social life. Therefore, I reflected on my past experiences using various data texts. I tried to explore my English language learning and teaching journey. Sardabi et al. (2020) believe autoethnographies enable individuals to reflect on and understand their lived experiences and enact a transformative role in their sociocultural milieu. Unlike many other research methodologies in quantitative and qualitative camps, in autoethnographies, researchers are the participants and write about their own experiences. In this sense, it provides a unique opportunity for any individual, including teachers and learners, to write their own stories, reflect on them, and explore how they could understand various sociocultural phenomena. Therefore, I

have reflected on my own experiences, connected to the research, and tried to give meaning to my experiences.

### **Data Generation**

Data generation in this autoethnographic study was dynamic and reflective, centered on exploring my personal experiences. According to Ellis et al. (2011), autoethnography is both a process and a product since it works through the self-analytical ability of the researcher, using personal experience to link the individual with the sociocultural context. This research primarily employed journaling, memory recall, and reflective writing as data generation methods. Reflective writing assignments from Laxman Sir's class during my postgraduate days generated formidable data. I remember writing on memorable experiences and my assignment to reflect upon "A Thangmi girl dreamed of being an English Teacher." These helped me articulate what was happening inside my head and remember specific incidents related to my journey of learning and teaching English.

Furthermore, I returned to personal artifacts, some old notes, essays, letters, and academic assignments, recording my earlier struggles and triumphs with learning the English language. Another valuable data collection method was journaling, where I could record and reflect on current experiences by drawing from the past. Furthermore, discussions with peers, mentors, and family members added layers through which I reflected upon the meaning as they helped me situate my experiences within my community's sociocultural and educational realities.

### **Meaning Making Process**

In autoethnography, meaning is made through the analysis of personal narratives to gain deeper insights into sociocultural phenomena. According to Adams et al. (2022), autoethnography is guided by critical reflection and a commitment to connecting individual experiences with broader societal contexts. I tried to interpret my learning and teaching English journey through this process. What triggered my personal incident reflections was considering particular cases in my life, for example, the case of failing to name some common vegetables in English during a conversation with relatives. It was these moments of personal struggle that then set off more pervasive problems experienced by Indigenous learners in accessing quality education and mastering the English language as a second or third language. Informed by the critical paradigm, I reflected critically on how socio-cultural and institutional barriers molded these experiences and how I negotiated my way around them. According to

Sardabi et al. (2020), autoethnographies allow an individual to reflect upon lived experiences and may serve as a tool for transforming one's sociocultural surroundings. The stories I've been able to share with my broader struggles and visions have made sense and derived meaning in relation to my experience in ELT. In embracing the creativity and diversity of experience presented via narratives, poems, and dialogues in an emotionally engaging intellectual manner for readers, the postmodern paradigm is inclusive enough to accept multiple expressions of identity. This is further supported by Javanmardi et al. (2020), who argue that postmodern positions allow researchers to employ various forms of expression in representing human experiences authentically. Therefore, as a Thangmi woman, I express my experience employing different genres. Ultimately, meaning-making allowed me to see my past experiences not as fragmented incidents but as part of a broader growth narrative. It also further embedded my belief in the transformative power of education and self-reflection in shaping one's personal and professional identity.

### **Quality Standards**

Maintaining quality in research is considered the most significant task. Its quality might ensure its standardization. Maintaining quality standards in qualitative research is a complex process that involves various aspects (Flick, 2007), such as assessing the quality, standards, criteria, quality indicators, relevance, and creativity in qualitative research. Therefore, every researcher must maintain the quality of the research study by taking responsibility for portraying accurate and truthful production of knowledge so that the reader will get valid and authentic information. As my research study incorporates an autoethnography in its design, verisimilitude, self-reflexivity, credibility, critical reflexivity, and pedagogical thoughtfulness are considered quality standards.

### **Verisimilitude**

Verisimilitude is the degree by which the reader can tell how true and realistic this quality standard defines the stories (Luitel & Dahal, 2021). I unfolded. Using my experiences as primary data in the study challenges me with the degree of connectedness I may evoke with the readers. I adopted verisimilitude as my quality standard to ensure my studies are true to life. To make my feelings life-like, believable, and possible, I attempted to decorate them while keeping them in the proper context. As a result, its readers might assume that the study is based on truthfulness.



### **Self-reflexivity**

I have maintained quality in this research by digging into my life deeply and reflecting on my lived experiences as honestly as possible. Reflexivity indicates self-awareness, self-exposure, and confident introspection (Le Roux, 2016). I was intensely aware of my role in and relationship to the research within my socio-cultural contexts.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is a quality standard of interpretivism with the question: How can you believe me as an autoethnographer? To ensure the process is possibly persuasive in every situation, to account for its believable and appropriateness among myself and others (Mills et al., 2010). Likewise, this quality standard is side by side, demanding honesty to be ensured by myself as an autoethnographer. As a result, my visibility and intentions are exposed openly in the research (Dauphinee, 2010).

### **Critical Self-reflexivity**

The standard of critical reflexivity in this research study requires how and why the researchers perceive, practice, believe, and expose themselves throughout the autoethnographic design. Dahal (2023) explains that critical reflexivity is the ability to reflect on one's own beliefs and practices critically. In similar vain, I hope that students, teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers will realize the importance of reflecting on one's own beliefs and practices. Therefore, I reflected critically on my experiences as a Thangmi woman learner and teacher of ELT.

### **Pedagogical Thoughtfulness**

As an autoethnographic scholar, my pedagogical concern emerges from a richly personal and reflexive source, where my experience is used to inform learning and teaching. As Ellis et al. (2011) describe, Autoethnography is a qualitative approach that bridges the personal and the cultural to examine how personal experiences meet up with larger social narratives. As a teacher, over the years, I have understood that pedagogic sensitivity is not just the transmission of knowledge but the construction of an empathetic, fair, and revolutionary learning environment. My challenges during education as an Indigenous woman from the Thangmi community informed my philosophy of education. As did Shanti Kumari Rai, whose life in *Sangarsaka Panaharu* illustrated the grit required to overcome barriers to education, so have I bridged language hierarchies, social bias, and resource limitations during my studies. Gay (2018) mentions that language hierarchies, social bias, and resource

limitations imparted the benefits of culturally responsive pedagogy, enabling learners to become themselves, to be respected and enabled in the classroom.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The academic community, including researchers and students, faces various ethical challenges. According to Wet (2010), there should be an in-depth and thoughtful discussion of the broad, difficult, and contentious subject of ethical concern in the academic community. The exploration of Indigenous women in English language teaching involves understanding the worldview and philosophy, which includes an examination of universal principles, such as the inherent worth of every person, human or natural rights, respect for the law of the land, concern for one's health and well-being, and increasingly, concern for the health of the planet.

Therefore, a researcher must adhere to ethical principles like truthfulness, integrity, confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, and authorship. Although there are many ethical concerns regarding research, ethical guidelines do not only apply to the security of research respondents, respect of participants, impartiality, avoiding harm, being truthful, preserving self-respect, confidentiality, anonymity, and secrecy of research participants, or using informed consent to enlist a study participant (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007).

Ethics governs every research. Human activities run in everyday life are alarmed with ethics. As humans, there are certain things that we do not want to reveal in front of others. A researcher, therefore, needs to follow ethical guidelines, which are called ethics. As an autoethnographic researcher, researcher, and participant, I should protect myself and avoid any intervention (Schnell & Heinritz, 2006; as cited in Flick, 2017). For this, I convinced myself that expressing my experiences in the study would be out of any tension.

Further, as an ethical researcher, I have maintained strong ethics of valuing all the writers and authors, publications, organizations, etc., to whom I referred. They have been mentioned in citations and references with due respect.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this. Chapter, I discussed how I conducted this study and how I interpreted my English learning experiences. In addition, this chapter contains my philosophical concerns and ethical issues. I have even maintained the quality standard of the study through components like verisimilitude, self-reflexivity, critical self-reflexivity, and credibility.

As I set the roadmap of my study in Chapter III, further chapters deal with my experiences of learning English as an Indigenous woman. Chapter IV contains the stories from my past experiences.

## CHAPTER IV

### EVOLUTION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

In this chapter, I narrate my journey as a daughter from the marginalized Thangmi community during my evolution in learning the English language. This chapter aims to recount childhood memories, the initial stages of learning English, the identity crisis, humiliation at school, and the negative name tag society gives. It also reflects upon turning points, such as the very first influential stage in my English language learning process, periods of irregularity in attending English classes, learning through meaningful mistakes, and a significant turning point in life. After these reflections, I have analyzed and interpreted the data in light of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks.

#### **From a Big City to a Village**

I was born on 2048-02-03BS (1991-05-17 AD) in the Big city of Kathmandu. I was born to a Tamang mother and a Thangmi father. The Tamang ethnic group is counted as having a “higher” status than the Thangmi. Though both the communities do not fall under and follow the *Varna* system (caste hierarchy), Thangmi was and is facing discrimination and oppression by caste groups vis-à-vis Indigenous groups, who are influential in terms of social, economic, and population size (Thami, 2025). So, there were issues related to ethnicity in the marriage of my parents. However, my parents were happy to have me as their first child. Though I was born in the city, I didn’t get the chance to stay in the city long.

After a short stay in the city, we had to return back to our hometown village for family reasons. Therefore, though I was born to a Thangmi family, I started my schooling in Kathmandu Valley years back; my early schooling could not last long in there since my family had to return to the village, *Mama Ghar* (my maternal home), Tikhatal of Dolakha district, due to various family reasons. Back in the village, I was enrolled in a public school, Kalinchok Secondary School. Again, after a year, I had to transfer to a school near my home. I was at another public school, Tikhatal Primary School. Though my parents temporarily migrated for employment, I started my education in Kathmandu at one of the private schools. However, since my family had to return to the village, Dolakha district, my education journey could not be sustained in the Kathmandu Valley for long. I vividly remember that while I had poor English

skills in school, I had good handwriting. I recall the time my English teacher praised my neat handwriting. Even though I needed to practice speaking English, the teacher's compliments felt like awards. Again, I had to switch schools after finishing primary level at the same school because it was a primary school. I started sixth grade at Bhim Higher Secondary School. I completed my School Leaving Certificate (SLC) degree from the same school.

My beginning days of school were unclear; as my parents shared, I started schooling in the Kathmandu Valley in 2052 BS. I started schooling in grade nursery when I enrolled in a boarding school. It is hard to remember my early school days; therefore, the conversation with my dear mother is evocatively clear.

Once, my mother came to Kathmandu to look after her granddaughters (my children)

during my surgery for reno-lithotomy (stone removal from the kidney). One day, my elder daughter randomly wrote on a blank sheet of paper. She had not gone to school as she was only two years old. While she was writing, my mother and I discussed my daughter's learning.

**Figure 2**

*School Where I completed My Primary Level*



*Mother: Why is she writing randomly? You people (me, including my siblings) didn't do so.*

*Me: Is it??*

*Mother: yes, you started A, B, C, and D directly. I did not see this type of writing.*

*Me: What?? I do not think so. Without writing Kismet (hazard), how we started to write. Is it impossible?)*

*Mother: Yes, you people have written A, B, and C directly.*

*Me: Umm, okay, maybe you have forgotten how we started writing. Mummy, writing A, B, and C directly was impossible without writing Kismet (hazard.)*

Further, I would like to know about my early schooling, and I continued the conversation with my mother.

*Me: Mummy, do you remember how I was in my childhood? Did I love to go to school? What did I do in my first school day? Did I cry while going to school?*

*Mom: umm... I do not remember much. I have forgotten everything.*

*Me: Please, mummy, try to remember.*

*Mom: Umm, As I remember, you used to be a happy girl while attending school. You never deny going to school. But your brother did not like to go to school.*

*Me: But one day, you had bitten me very badly. Why? I also remember that day I did not go to school and hid in the jungle.*

*Mom: eh .... that day, I told you to go to school from one way, but you liked to go to school another way. I sent you the way I said, and you felt angry and hid in the jungle for the whole day, and you came back after school.*

*Me: Ah... then??*

*Mom: Then, I also called you by showing love and by saying, come, my daughter, I will give you a snack. I got angry and gave you very nicely.)*

*Me: Then??*

*Mom: I also made you naked and sent you out.*

*Me: and??*

*Mom: Your grandmother used to love you, and she called you. And had brought you back.*

*Me: eh eh*

*Mom: I was a bit strict with you and your siblings. You had gone to school regularly from the day.*

*Me: eh, okay!*

*Mom: ummm*

The interesting incident helped me to remember my school days. It shows that I was always happy to attend school, except for some exceptional times. As my mother shared, she didn't feel any difficulties at school. Simkhada (2019) states that the community and parental support levels for English education can vary significantly. In some areas, there might be a lack of awareness or value placed on learning English, affecting students' motivation and opportunities to practice outside

the classroom. But in my case, my parents were a bit aware, and they wanted their kids to be educated.

As my mother shared earlier, without hazard writing, I started writing A, B, C, and D; it could be due to my age because I was sent to school at the age of four. But my daughter was only two. Therefore, the above conversation shows that I was a happy kid to go to school in the early school days and started learning from A, B, C, and D (English alphabets). In my later school days, I still remember that English language classes were okay. Lightbown and Spada (2010) further mention that early childhood bilingualism is a reality for millions of children worldwide.

I remember we used to do rote learning: A for Apple, B for Ball, C for Cat, D for Dog, etc. In the beginning grades (one, two, three,) rote learning, repeating after the teacher, and writing were the activities in the classroom. Lightbown and Spada (2010) comment that one of the most impressive language developments in the early school years was the astonishing growth of vocabulary. So, though I did rote learning, I got chances to learn vocabulary in my early schooling days. But later, I started to dislike the English language. I just attended the class for formality. I hardly used to pass the English subject. I did not even like the English teacher. If I had written a letter to my English teacher for apologizing me being irregular and no attention to English subjects in school, I would have written this way....,

### **Letter to my English Teacher from School**

7<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Thursday

Kathmandu, Nepal

Dear Sir,

*I hope this letter finds you in high spirits and good health. I am well these days and happy to share some good news. I have completed my master's degree and am currently undertaking an MPhil in English Language Education.*

*Looking back at my past, I am surprised to find myself thinking about how poor I was at English in school. I failed English exams and never enjoyed English lessons. To compound the issue, I even started disliking the subject and, I am embarrassed to admit, my English teachers—like you and Tika Sir. My dislike grew over the years, and I completely lost contact with the subject.*

*But as I progressed to tertiary levels of learning, I realized how crucial the English language was. I now bitterly regret not trying to study well when at school. In hindsight, I regret not appreciating your efforts to teach me and not listening, respecting, or taking my studies seriously. On a humble note, I ask for your forgiveness.*

*I also wonder if my teachers ever envisioned that I would be where I am today in my education. It is incredible to reflect and consider how far I have come, and I have a great deal of it to thank you for, even though I didn't realize it then.*

*Thank you for your patience, guidance, and impact on my life, even when I was unaware.*

*Warm regards,*

*Ranju Thami*

**Name Tag provided by a Society (Thami, Thamini, Musa, Musa Khane Thamini)**

Being a hockey daughter from home, I was straightforward. I could not bear it if someone said something negative to my family and me. If somebody says something negative towards me, I used to defend it directly. Therefore, I had several incidents related to it.

*I remember the day I was studying in grade five; my brother was studying in grade three. After our school hour, my brother had gone home a bit earlier because I was talking with my friend. But when I was moving home, I saw my younger brother and one of the sisters (my maternal uncle's daughter) fighting on the way. She had thrown the stone towards my brother. The stone had almost reached my brother, and I got angry. I started scolding her. And she said to me, Thami (the word Thamini is the female version of the surname of ThamiI, given to dominate the Thangmi females). Musa Khane Thamini, Musa (a mouse) (derogative words) used by other communities. By hearing the word, my temper had gone up, and I started beating her. At the same time, her mother came and said to me to go to Doktheli. That is your home, not here. Why are you fighting here? She punched my nose, and my nose started bleeding. After a while, again, her mother was afraid of my grandmother from my mother's side; she was very strict and our protector. The woman started making me happy, and she cleaned my shirt, which was*



*full of blood. She had provided Makai Bhatmas (Nepali Khaja, Popcorn, and roasted soybeans).*

When I studied connotative, denotative, and derogatory words at my master's level, I realized that those words come under derogatory words, which indicates disrespect. Also, the derogatory use of certain terms like *huchapali* and *Thamini* shows how language enforces stigma and supports marginalization. Link and Phelan (2001) mention that such an expression exemplifies how societal prejudice becomes enclosed within everyday communications to produce psychological hurts, as explained. In the past, I used to have hatred for the terms that showed the deep-seated effect of caste-based humiliation. I also remember several incidents regarding the different name tags provided by the people from the society. Once I came across the notices sent by one of the organizations regarding the *Deusi Bhailo* program, I noticed a grandmother from the society who belonged to the non-Indigenous community. When I provided her a notice, she tore the paper into small pieces and said Keep this with you; why are you giving this to me? I tried to explain here, but she completely ignored me and said again, you, *Musa*, go to your homeland and do these kinds of activities, not here. Though this incident seems simple, as a young Thangmi girl, it affected me very badly in my young mind.

Smith and Doe (2019) mention that negative names can lead to a range of psychological issues, including low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. The constant reinforcement of a negative identity can deeply affect an individual's self-perception and mental health. Likewise, whenever I heard the words *Thami*, *Thamini*, *Musa*, *Musa Khane Thamini*, I experienced low self-esteem and anxiety. I could not perform well in my classroom. I did not like to hear my surname (Thami). At school or in any public place, I used to feel ashamed to announce my surname. Negative names can erode self-esteem and confidence, which are crucial for language learning.

Brown (2019) also highlights that students who feel stigmatized may be less willing to participate in class, ask questions, or practice speaking English, leading to slower progress and lower proficiency. In addition, the above name tags were the word of dominance provided by the society. Whenever they want to dominate us, they say these words. We migrated to a society where people from different religions and castes lived. As we migrated from our original hometown, we were habituated to hearing those types of dominant words from the people in the society. As Johnson (2020) noted, derogatory words or negative name tags can denote someone as inferior

or different, leading to social exclusion. This can hinder their access to opportunities and social networks. Thus, I encountered a phase where I felt different from others in society.

### **Bearing Humiliation as a Thangmi Daughter**

There are different incidents in my life where I was humiliated being a daughter of an Indigenous community. I had been humiliated, especially by the boys in my childhood school.

It was 9:30 in the morning, and I was hurried to go to school. It took around 30 to 45 minutes to reach the school. I was running fast down the stairs. On my way from a far distance, I saw a boy standing in the middle of the way. When I reached near to him, I was afraid as he was carrying a scorpion in his hand. In the spring, the tree named Paieu was full of scorpions. Scorpions eat the leaves of trees during that season. The scorpion also hung with the help of a spider's web and came near the way from the top.

*Me: What are you doing? What happens? (Being straightforward)*

*Boy: See this (showing scorpion on his hand hung with web). I will throw it on you.*

*Me: Please, brother, do not do this.*

*Boy: (Being happy, shaking his hand) HIIHI, I will throw.*

*Me: (Being afraid, with an afraid voice) NO, NO*

*Boy: (About to throw and laugh) It is near you.*

*Me: Please! (by joining your hands, nodding your head) Brother, do not do that.*

*Boy: HIIHI, see this how dangerous it is.*

*Me: If you throw on me, I will tell my mother.*

*Boy: She will do nothing. Go, tell, ... I am not afraid.*

*Me: (started crying loudly)*

*Boy: (saying nothing, leaving my way, and vanishing)*

After school, I returned home and shared the incident in the morning. But I did not get any reaction from her as I had expected; rather, she said it would be okay the next time he didn't do it, let it be. She also said to learn to bear it. Once you bear, nothing happens.

Now, I realize he might not attempt to do this if my parents were strict. If I were a boy like him. Suppose I am not a Thangmi woman. As I mentioned above, the

girls from the higher caste (non-Indigenous) community whose parents were more socially aware than my parent crossed the way smoothly without any hindrance. However, I am the only one who faced the problem. The discrimination can manifest in various forms, including verbal abuse, limited access to education, and expectations to conform to traditional gender roles. Therefore, I often faced strict patriarchal norms that limited my opportunities and reinforced gender discrimination.

Similarly, I also remember another similar incident from the same society. It was the day before *Holi* (the festival of colors celebrated in Nepal). I was coming back from school after my coaching class in the evening. In the middle of the way home, I saw four boys standing. One was carrying a bucket, and another one was holding a packet of color powder. Two were standing and smiling. By seeing this, I was afraid. But, before me, one Indigenous girl had smoothly passed the way, and I was relaxed. I thought they did nothing, but at the same time, two of the boys came near me and held my hand. And another two boys spelled a full bucket of water from head to toe and threw the colors on me. I was wet as a mouse. I was about to cry. From that day, I did not go to school that way, as there were two ways to go to school from my home. Though I did not like the way of the jungle, I started going to school from the way of the jungle. I was more afraid of the locals than of wildlife. In light of critical social theory, these incidents are most reasonably understood as a direct outcome of the systemic economic and social marginalization of the Thangmi community. Critical social theory addresses power relations, inequality, and social justice and how historically marginalized communities such as the Thangmi are discriminated against and excluded.

From a critical social theory standpoint, I believe such incidents can be explained best as an immediate result of the systemic social and economic marginalization of the Thangmi community. Critical social theory considers power relations, inequality, and social justice and how historically marginalized groups such as the Thangmi are excluded and discriminated against.

The Thangmi community has slightly uplifted from the past situation, but not completely. Still, a similar situation can be found in the community. Therefore, being a daughter from an Indigenous community is a challenging process of becoming an English teacher.

Looking back on my childhood experience, I realize that the first incident, involving a boy threatening with a scorpion, demonstrates how patriarchal norms

create an environment where boys, even at a young age, assert dominance and control over girls. The use of bullying reflects deeper societal attitudes that normalize such behaviors against girls, especially those from marginalized communities. Further supporting a study of as a victim, I plea for mercy, and the boy's mocking response further illustrates the power dynamics where the girl's vulnerability is exploited. Connell (2009) mentions that these behaviors are not isolated but are rooted in a system that socializes boys to exert power over girls and teaches girls to accept humiliation as a part of their lived reality.

It also highlights the layered marginalization faced by Thangmi women. My reflection that I might not have been targeted if I was a boy or not a Thangmi underlines the compounded vulnerabilities of being a female and belonging to a marginalized ethnic group. UN Women (2014) highlights that such marginalization often expresses itself in lack of respect, as well as physical and emotional harassment, as cited in research on Indigenous women. The feelings of helplessness and isolation are further emphasized by the inability of women to seek support or justice, indicating systemic failures in addressing discrimination against Indigenous women. My personal experience further reflects the wider systemic issues that marginalized and Indigenous women have to face within educational settings. In the same light, Norton (2013) explained how in ELT, research has never failed to focus on the fact that language acquisition is not solely a cognitive endeavor but a highly social one, whereby learner identities and societal perspectives are powerful factors for learner motivation, confidence, and engagement. Therefore, in my school days, I was demotivated to learn the English language learning due to humiliation and bullying in society.

### **The Stage of Identity Crisis**

Once, I attended the *Ghewa* (funeral ceremony of the Tamang people) of my maternal aunt's relatives with my maternal aunt. There was a pleasing sound around as monks read the holy book to conduct the funeral ceremony. Some monks were playing *Ghyaling* (Piano) and *Dyangro* (drum set), which provided the sound to the heart. I remember I was at the age of thirteen. At the time, one of the drunk men asked me *connmey chahi tik tharilla ho?* (what is the nephew's clan?). Usually, people ask the clans in the first meeting in Tamang culture to know whether a person is different from their clan. If the person is not from the same clan, they can tease each other in male and female for fun. After a while, hurriedly, my maternal aunt answered,

“*Moktan*” (one of the clans from the Tamang). I have understood why she said so. These incidents took place many times whenever I attended the different ceremonies. My relatives used to provide different clans from the Tamang ethnic group and did not like to tell Thami my ethnicity. Interestingly, the mother is Tamang, and the father is Thami. They have inter-ethnic marriages. My mother often faced similar incidents to those we had in the Tamang community. She also had to face hurdles when getting married to Thami. In our society, the Tamang caste is considered superior to the Thangmi. Other people also hesitate to call our ethnicity.

At that time, I did not like to call myself a Thami. Though I was not fluent in the Tamang language, I used to speak it to show myself as a Tamang. I used to prefer to speak Tamang than Thangmi. I used to think that if I spoke Thami, even a word would put me down. I remember my friends circle from the community; wherever they got angry with me, they used to growl *huchapali* (children in the Thangmi Language) and *Thamini* (female version of Thami). I did not like the words. I did not want to be called those kinds of names. The word related to Thami was/is the humiliation, discrimination, and suppression in the society. Therefore, now I am a foreigner in my language. I remember that my father also used to speak Tamang, although he was pure Thami.

In addition, taking as an opportunity, I am a fluent speaker of Tamang now, though I am a slow learner of Thangmi. Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development has mentioned eight stages; among them, the fifth stage highlights identity vs confusion. Similarly, I went through confusion with my own identity. Erikson's psychosocial theory has listed eight stages thereof, of which the fifth stage describes identity vs confusion. Similarly, I was confused about my own identity. Erikson's (1968) fifth stage of psychosocial development, identity vs. role confusion, identifies the adolescent development task as introducing a consistent sense of self to oneself. The process of rejecting the Thangmi identity but embracing the Tamang language and culture illustrates this conflict. The struggle for identity was further heightened by the social perception that the Thangmi community has a lower standing than the Tamang. Internalized discrimination and disidentification with one's language are essential tools for cultural transmission and identity construction. According to Fishman (1999), the fluency in Tamang but limited proficiency in Thangmi symbolizes a detachment from their Thangmi heritage, driven by societal pressures. Tamang was considered a strategic choice for social acceptance since

identification with Thangmi was stigmatized. As a transformative learner, I reflected on these experiences as a powerful tool that helped me become an English language teacher directly or indirectly. If I had not gotten the questions about my ethnic identity, I might not have endured the pain and would have stayed relaxed like others in the community.

### **First Striking Stage of English Language Learning Journey**

After my SLC, I remember feeling the importance of the English language. It might be the influence of relatives outside the country for different professions, mainly for earning. I remember one of the aunts (my mother's younger sister) used to speak English; though she was not formally educated, she was working abroad.

On the other hand, I, who had almost completed the school level, could not understand and speak with her. She used to say *timi harule padeko k kam euta English pani bolna naaune chhya....* (no use studying and going to school you do not know how to speak even a single sentence). Further, she asked the names of vegetables shown in the kitchen in English, such as garlic, onion, ginger, and turmeric. But I was speechless; I did not know those items in English. And my face turned into shamefulness. I had felt humiliated. I had not felt good. At the moment, I was demotivated and discouraged. I got angry with my aunt, as I was a bit aggressive and egoist. But later, I realized that she was right. Having completed grade 10, I still could not communicate in English in simple conversation or did not even know the simple things.

Therefore, while waiting for my result, my best friend and I joined an extra English language class. Recollecting the memories of those days, we had to walk an hour to the institution from our home, and we planned to speak in English while walking and returning from the institution.

My experience reflects the influence of external factors, personal experiences of humiliation, and intrinsic motivation as motivators for the commitment to learn a second language. Supporting the ideas of Vygotsky (1978), my past story reflected in the socio-cultural theories of language learning because, in this area, interaction, cultural contexts, and motivation are the criteria when one develops linguistic competency. In this case, the meeting of the aunt presented a turning point wherein a mixture of shame and a sense of awareness created the needed boost for more active involvement, such as attending English language classes and rehearsing conversational English, meaning that obstacles or setbacks can have transformational

forces (Mezirow, 1991). The use of the walkway going to and coming from the institution to practice the use of English reflects principles of self-regulated learning and experiential learning. Such strategies fall within Oxford's (1990) language learning strategies, which include metacognitive strategies such as planning and self-monitoring and social strategies involving interaction with peers.

### **Irregular in English Language Class**

*After completing the school level, I was happy to join +2 in management. I joined +2 in 2065 BS at Bhim Higher Secondary School from my hometown. I remember that I used to be irregular in the English language classroom. I didn't enjoy English language class because it was really difficult to perform in the class. Usually, I used to go to college after the first period, as the first period was English. In +2 also, I hardly used to pass in Nepali and other subjects, but English was the same as before. I also didn't feel good when I attended the class because I used to feel the teacher wasn't supporting me. This might be the reason for not attending class regularly.*

Therefore, the method and technique adopted to teach English are inappropriate for Thangmi learners of English. The highly privileged method, the GT method, could not address Thangmi pupils' needs and abilities. It is because Nepali is heavily used in the EFL classroom that Thangmi learners of English do not understand. On the other hand, language learning is the outcome of interaction and conversation between and/ or among people. How is it possible to have a conversation when one does not understand the language spoken by others? Due to the deficiency of educational policy in the world, the national and international languages dominate educational policy, disregarding how children learn and are taught (Benson, 2014). Hence, I could not perform in the English language class and used to be irregular.

### **Passed by Meaningful Mistake**

*When I was studying in +2, one of the sisters named Hira Thami came to me, and she gave me an idea about networking business. After listening to her, I started to dream about huge earnings. I started dreaming about money. As she said, I initially invested around one lakh and fifty thousand. The money that I invested was from my parents. They used to send all their earnings to me for saving. But the networking business didn't go as I thought. I had thought that after earning, I would return their money; therefore, without informing my parents, I invested. I couldn't return the money.*

After a year, my parents returned from abroad. They asked about money, but I was speechless. My mother scolded me very badly. After the final result of +2, I couldn't stay long in the village, so I came to Kathmandu. I joined Bachelor in Kathmandu, but I didn't study for more than seven months because of the mistake I had made previously. So, I planned to go abroad and earn, thinking that I had to return the money to my parents. Besides earning, I also had fruitful experiences in my learning and teaching journey. If I had not gone abroad, I wouldn't have been in the position where I am. Moving abroad was the better decision because I transformed from a village girl to a lecturer of the English language in Kathmandu Valley. In today's position, I realized that if I had not encountered the incident, I might not be in the position. Therefore, I have brought up the incident in my autoethnographic study.

In this same vein, autoethnography emphasizes the interplay between personal experience and broader sociocultural contexts (Ellis et al., 2011). The experiences showcase my critical reflection on choices, such as investing in a networking business and the subsequent need to reconcile financial missteps. By linking these micro-experiences to broader societal patterns, such as the expectations generated by increased economic mobility and the cultural pressures exerted by family responsibilities, the experience captures well the intersection of the personal and the collective. Leaving for Kathmandu and then migrating abroad was best understood as a self-redefining act. It shows resilience in response to the disorienting problem of financial failure and determination for personal and professional betterment. According to Mezirow (1991), transformative learning is when the learner critically reflects on his assumptions, leading to radical changes in the learner's perspective. Through labor, learning, and teaching, he develops skills and views that launch into becoming a lecturer. It shows how transformative learning works, where challenges bring resilience and change.

### **Life's Turning Point**

After a second try, I got a visa to work as a caretaker in one of the schools in Dubai. I started working in the school. It was new for me. I had never been to work in a community beyond my culture. So, getting acculturated into the new environment was difficult for me. The most unforgettable difficulty was in communication, specifically communicating in English. Perhaps it was the first time I realized the need to learn English. I felt the pain that one bears while communicating. I remember when my supervisor at the working station used to supervise me in English, but I



could not understand properly. There, I felt the need to learn to speak and understand the sentences the communicator uttered, i.e., the supervisor. In the meantime, I came in contact with many Philipino friends who were good speakers of English.

One day, an incident took place when I had to go to the market (Carreefour Mall) to shop. I wanted to buy a pair of shoes. I told one of my Philipino friends, “I want to buy sose” instead of shoes. She got confused and asked, “What sose?” (as a pardon). She chuckled at me with a gentle smile, and I showed my shoes by indicating my feet with my finger, and she knew that I wanted to buy shoes. I realized that my pronunciation was wrong, which created a communication gap.

I had to face such incidents repeatedly. That was the incident of the same days when I was working as a caretaker. One day, I was asked, “What are the things you need?” I was unable to answer confidently. Perhaps the reason was a lack of vocabulary. So many minor events while working abroad, which created a communication gap. Those incidents made me realize the dying need to speak in English. These incidents made me realize that I was deficient in speaking and understanding English, too. From that day onward, I felt that English was the most important need of my life. I thought not to work further and decided to repatriate to my homeland to advance study focusing on English language teaching and learning. Taylor (2008) indicated that based on the transformative learning theory, such events catalyze change, reorienting the individual's perspective toward a new understanding of self and their goals and states. I had experiences that were going to be incompetent in the English language, though there were unintended humiliations, and those were primarily lessons for me. Lessons in the sense that the same situation provoked me to learn the English language and further my career. This feeling germinated the journey towards learning English and sharing English language learning experiences. Similarly, I remember when my friend Karuna (pseudonym) shared how she felt humiliated because of a lack of English language proficiency. It further made me realize the need for English to accomplish my daily work.

While working at a school abroad, I got support from my seniors, with whom I used to work. Two of the seniors were Aliza and Mamta (pseudonym). They always encouraged me to speak in English. I got ample motivation that rationalized my career in English education. I got exposure from my friends, as mentioned earlier, and started speaking in English smoothly. As soon as I had some knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, I felt easy to embark on the journey of English. I started watching

movies and asked students to do the same. In this way, learning and teaching together geared up the English language.

To realize my dream, I returned to my homeland and joined a B.Ed. in English at Sandipani Multiple Campus. I also started to work as an English teacher at Nexus International Academy.

I wasn't happy to go abroad, but there weren't other options. I had to return the money to my parents. So, I went to UAE. My relatives also influenced me. There was a practice of going abroad and earning. Hence, I had gone as a caretaker in the school. I vividly remember my first day there. The first day, our supervisor, Samser, took me shopping and asked me what I wanted to buy. I couldn't even say the names of the kitchen appliances due to language problems.

*Very young, innocent girl  
Went to a big country in the world  
With confusing mind  
Country different, food different  
People different and language different*

*Having no experiences  
With a confused mind, nervous  
Besides that language problem*

*The supervisor assigned the task  
She was trying to understand hard  
Even she couldn't make other friends understand  
They did not understand because of her pronunciation*

*With dilemma, confusion, and humiliation  
Around two and a half years, she stayed  
She realized the importance of education  
And though coming back to home for study*

*After a year, she came back  
She joined B.Ed after that  
She realized the importance of education*

*She completed her bachelor's degree with full dedication*

I remember one day in Al Ain, UAE when I called my mother and shared my plan to return to Nepal and continue my studies. Her words, *ajhai padne! lau baccha jasto ajhai padxu vanxa tah, padnalai aauxu vanxa.... 12 tah pas vayo tah kati padne?? (hah! You want to study, and you have already completed 12th grade. Are you a baby?? Still want to study?)* compelled me to think critically. That was not her fault because her understanding was that completing +2 means completing education. Due to social and economic reasons, modern education was not the priority of the Thangmi community. Even if they enroll their children in the primary level, they often drop out when they reach the higher level. This is evident in the educational institutions where I have completed my education. This is the national trend among the Thangmi community. The national census data illustrates that the net enrollment rate of Thangmi students at the primary level is 66.5%.

In contrast, in lower secondary, secondary, and higher secondary, it is 20.1%, 5.4%, and 4.4% respectively (Subba et.al, 2014). This data indicates the declining rate of the Thangmi children's school enrollment in higher education. Fewer Thangmi people are found in the higher level. My cousins, sisters, and brothers from the community have completed their primary and lower secondary levels only. This evidence was not from my family but rather from the entire Thangmi community. Several Thangmi were aware of higher education. While talking about the Thangmi girls' enrollment rate, the situation is even more frustrating. The enrollment rate of Thangmi girl children in primary, lower secondary, secondary, and higher secondary levels is 59.4%, 5.2%, 2.8%, and 8.5%, respectively (Subba et al., 2014). The presence of Thangmi children at the tertiary level is negligible. Among the women, I would be the first female to pursue an MPhil degree in Nepal. However, few have either completed or are pursuing this level of education in the Thangmi community in India.

Starting a teaching career from home tuition from the small city of Al Ain (one of the states of UAE) was a challenging journey. Because that was my first experience teaching. While working as a caretaker in the school in 2009 AD, I got to teach preschool kids. One of the school's teachers, Aliza, provided me with home tuition. As I realized the importance of English and my teaching career, I was happy to join home tuition. I started teaching in 2009 AD. I used to work in school as a caretaker and take tuition classes for kids from preschool as a part-time job. I was

happy to teach a toddler named “Mohammad”. As my duty was to care for the kids in the classroom, I had some ideas for preschool teaching. I vividly remember when my career as a teacher began, although I was planning to work at the bank in the position of an accountant. But, technically, my career as a teacher began when I returned from UAE. I registered for a bachelor's degree in ELT and began working at Nexus International Academy in preschool. Cranton's (2016) theory of transformative learning notes that learning from experience, particularly in challenging contexts, results in higher comprehension and assimilation of new knowledge. Some examples, such as using English with colleagues like Aliza and Mamta, teaching preschool kids, and learning through immersion in the real world, are employed to substantiate the theory.

Humiliation, perplexity, and a sense of cultural disorientation are the pervasive recurring themes. These feelings were demoralizing initially but later proved to be stimuli for growth. My resilience in learning English and coping with an extraneous environment is a prime case of emotional resilience and adaptation. Reflection, as Mezirow (1991) understands it, is a constructive process through which individuals can reframe experience and adversity as learning opportunities. My life was transformed when I transitioned from babysitting to educating young children. My passion for teaching had started innocently; then, it grew into something beautiful- a means of knowledge, motivation, and guidance to others. Then, there were other mentoring figures, such as Aliza, and instructors training on teaching the English language; these became nails holding this hammer in its correct socket. This transformative learning might also involve professional identity changes, such as I evolved from a caretaker to a committed teacher. In my case, the learning process was also heavily indebted to encouraging colleagueship and mentors. Indeed, for Vygotsky (1978), peer encouragement and collaborative learning are defining features of transformative learning and language acquisition. Now, I realize that interacting with colleagues like pseudo-named Mamta and Aliza was linguistic practice and gave me emotional support to feel confident and competent.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I narrativized childhood to turning points, evocative English language learning experiences, and faced challenges. I have given a few glimpses of lived experiences as encounters with the English language learning journey. I faced many hurdles than opportunities to learn it. Although I got to go to school, the journey

was not easy. Being a girl from a highly marginalized community, I encountered different challenges such as humiliation, identity crisis, and queries on the caste. Due to these issues, I was irregular in the language class and disliked the English subject or the English language. At last, I passed through a meaningful mistake, and there came life's turning point.

## CHAPTER V

### CHALLENGES FACED IN BECOMING AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER

*"Through trials of humble means,  
I turned criticism into dreams.  
Leaving comfort, I took my flight,  
For education's beacon, burning bright.*

*A learner first, then teacher born,  
In novice steps, new paths were sworn.  
Though isolation shadowed my way,  
Resilience carried me to the day."  
Inspired by the journey of transformation.*

In this chapter, I reflect on my life events, highlighting the economic hardship, social barriers, and journey as a novice. For this, I generated different themes such as trifling financial support for parents, turning criticism into motivation, moving out of the comfort zone, English language learning and the teacher simultaneously, my journey as a novice, and feeling isolated in the academic journey. Here, I aim to interpret and analyze my experiences.

#### **Trifling Financial Support for Parents**

I also recollected the memories of the holidays. Besides my school days, I went to the farming field with my mother to support my parents financially. Still, my father was not doing well in his business. Though he had started a local business, the luck didn't favor him. Consequently, I used to go in the farming field to earn some rupees.

*I intensely remember that my mother used to help me wear a big myaksi (a gown worn by an adult) to make me mature enough to work in the farming field. She had thought if I wore a myaksi, I would look young, and people would believe I could work. This incident is crystal clear to me because my mother always shared whenever we talked about our past and struggles. I remember it was the month of Ashadh when everyone was busy farming (paddy plantation). There was heavy rain, and I had to go to the field for the paddy plantation of others. I had gone to the field with the owner's husband*

*and wife. Due to heavy rain, they both went home, leaving me alone in the field. A big jungle surrounded the field. As I was too young, I cried, but they didn't come, and I went back to their home. When I got home, I found them sitting and having lunch in a cozy environment. When I was small, I felt very bad, and I thought that I had to study hard and support my parents in every step of life.*

Therefore, we had a problem with living or household. The problem wasn't in our home only; in my observation, around seventy-five percent of Thangmi people fully depended on others for living in my context. Hence, poor economic conditions hinder English language learning in the Indigenous community. So, there were fewer chances for affording extra learning opportunities in the community. United Nations (2009) states that across the globe, Indigenous peoples suffer disproportionately from poverty, marginalization, lack of adequate housing, and income inequality. Further, It highlights social, economic, and environmental change sweeping most countries today in the guise of 'development' or globalization that has destroyed or threatened Indigenous modes of livelihood, such as fishing, hunting and gathering, livestock cultivation, and small-scale agriculture. Economic limitations are a major barrier to English education in rural Nepal. Families with limited financial resources may prioritize immediate economic survival over education, and schools may struggle to fund adequate facilities and materials.

Through the lens of critical social theory, the story provided is an authentic self-reflection on the hardships faced while growing up in a financially constrained household embedded in the broader sociocultural and economic struggles of the Thangmi community.

### **Turning Criticism into Motivation**

There was an incident that helped me to do hard work in my studies. On the cool morning, the day after my result, I swept the *Aagan* (the house grounds). I was sad because I failed in grade eight. I hadn't slept well the whole night because my mother had badly scolded me. At the same time, I saw one of my maternal uncles, pseudo-named Aaji, passing by my house and saying that *lah bdhai xa Ranjulai fail vayekoma* (a huge congratulation to Ranju for failing in grade eight). I remember him as a greedy person in society. He used to be unhappy whenever we got a success. He cannot see our happiness. After listening to his words of *congratulations!* Again, my mother started scolding him.

After him;

### **A brief monologue**

*(Weeping, depressed) Why would he say that? What have I done to him? Why is he such? (Baleko aago ma ghiu halna aaune) Putting ghee on fire. Wait, I will prove it to you one day, pseudonym Mr. Aaji. I will do better than your children. I am doing better than your children. In front of him, I have to do something. Now onwards, I work hard. I will work hard, get a good grade, and score a good rank. I get a good job.*

The case of my maternal uncle was a triggering incident that awakened a sense of determination and agency to overcome the negative perceptions that surrounded me and succeed in life. This aligns with the transformative learning theory, which has been described as how critical reflection and challenging experiences lead to significant personal growth and a redefinition of one's goals and aspirations. My experience, as Mezirow (1997) shows, is how a person acquires resilience against adversity and societal challenges. Moreover, supplementing Mezirow's arguments, my experiences, as outlined here, have set in sharp relief the interactions of external condemnation, emotional distress, and internal drive in shaping the academic path of a person. The social criticism from the uncle made me resolve and demonstrate myself, covering over feelings of inadequacy through hard work and academic achievement.

### **Moving Out of the Comfort Zone**

When I asked my father about migration from one place to another, he said, *“I went to Kathmandu at 12, and I started working with Laxman Sahu (his owner). He was a very good person. He helped us. After some years, I earned money and started a business, but it couldn't go long because there was no back support. I was alone to run the business. I got married to your mother. Again, another business was started, but that also could not sustain long and returned to the village again”.*

I still remember my grandmother used to say, “Your father ran away at the age of 12. One morning, I sent him to school, but he did not come back. After a few days, I got the news that he had started a job at Laxman Sahu”. Similarly, my mother came to Kathmandu very early to get employment. She had worked with the same Sahu as a housekeeper. Later, they went back to the village again. Our parents didn't remain in the place where they were born. In the beginning, they came out from the village for employment opportunities. Shneiderman (2014) states that insufficient agricultural



productivity and employment opportunities in their native regions have pushed many Thangmi to seek work in urban areas or abroad. At first, they had come to Kathmandu for employment opportunities, but later, they happened to go back to the village. After that, we lived at our mama ghar. My mama ghar was a little far from our village. There was easy availability of different facilities such as schools, hospitals, employment, etc. Our parents were always worried about our education. I vividly remember that, among many neighbors, my parents were a bit aware of education. I also remember that the other children from the village were always busy with household work, foresting work, and agricultural activities. However, my parents used to provide us with time for study. This might be the result of coming out of one's comfort zone. Likewise, I also didn't remain in the place.

I moved to Kathmandu after my +2. I studied BBS (Bachelor in Business Studies) for around seven months in Kathmandu Valley. After some months, I traveled to the UAE to find employment. Therefore, moving out of my comfort zone (the village) for a short period for employment and education empowered my family socially, economically, and academically. Shneiderman (2010) also mentioned that Thangmi youths who pursue higher education often achieve significant success, returning to their communities as role models and agents of change. Supporting Shneiderman, my father, mother, and I migrated for education and employment for some years, which has taught us the importance of education, employment, etc. And when we moved back to the village, we took the knowledge about it. As a result, the Thangmi community and other communities have taken us as role models in society. Hence, through the lens of transformative learning theory, I learned from the experiences that I faced hurdles out of my comfort zone.

### **English Language Learner and the Teacher at the Same Time**

For me, completing +2 in management and starting a bachelor's degree in English language teaching was a bit of a difficult task. Though I had learned colloquial language in my work abroad journey, formal language learning was in the beginning phase. The colloquial language helped me a lot in the process of learning the English language in my study. I started learning the English language and simultaneously journeyed to teach the English language. I started working as a teacher in 2070BS. I started teaching from grade UKG. Teaching at the preprimary level for the first time was an amazing experience. I started enjoying myself with small kids. After a year of experience teaching at the preprimary level, the organization trusted

me and assigned me the duty of preprimary coordinator. I was overwhelmed by the position, besides nervousness. With this, I also started teaching in primary. I started teaching at the lower secondary level after my bachelor's degree. After completing my bachelor's degree, I gradually started teaching at the secondary level.

But being a learner and a teacher of English was an extraordinary experience. It was largely favored because I was learning and teaching the same course. Saying so, while one studies English, there are countless hardships for the learner who comes from an Indigenous society. Shneiderman (2014) also notes that the Nepalese larger society generally ethnically marginalizes Thangmi communities. This marginalization may be institutionalized and can limit access to opportunities and resources. I faced double the trouble of gender and ethnic discrimination. As Thangmi's daughter, I had a different set of issues, such as a language issue, cultural adjustment, and professional identity. Therefore, English learners, Thangmi women, find it challenging to learn a new language because of their limited exposure to English in their rural environments.

### **Journey as a Novice**

It was 10 pm, and I could not sleep after the monthly reporting at Nexus International Academy. (Thinking whole night!!!) .....

*I would have begun the presentation by greeting the stakeholders hierarchically. Why did I start with greetings and go directly to the report? Hya....., what Dhungana ma'am had thought about me? I was visibly shaking in front of many teachers. I also could not elaborate on the statements. Rather, I just read the slides. Oh my God! Miss Dhakal and Neupane were gossiping to each other when I was presenting; how shameful it was. How will I go to school tomorrow???*

Poudel maam was presenting very nicely. Calmly, she was presenting. Why I could not do the same. I failed to control myself. When I am presenting, I am in a hurry. I am in a hurry to wrap up my talk. Why, Why? I could not do like others. Mr. Basnyat has presented well and elaborated on everything in detail. But I Failed to do it.

*(I Checked the clock in the room; it was midnight. Still, I could not sleep. Meanwhile, I thought that this was my first time; I could do better next time. Why worry? Intrinsic motivation positively guided me.*

*Being optimistic hmm, I will try to present nicely next month by addressing all the mistakes I made yesterday. Next month, I will do better. I will try to build my confidence.) I will speak to the audience.*

Again, another similar incident took place where I was completely demotivated to speak. That was the place in a KU speakers club at Kusoed. Thus, I would like to recite the poem on the incident.

*“KU Speaker’s Club”*

*, Enthusiastic, Excited, Eager to speak*

*Thinking as a better speaker*

*Started talk in the session*

*Introduction given being happier*

*After a while, pauses*

*Rote learning and remembering as the causes*

*Trying to remember hard*

*Could not speak a word*

*Randomly spoken here and there*

*Cohesion, coherence missing somewhere*

*Started turning chicks into red*

*Completed speech without end*

*Feedback from the timer (completed speech before a time)*

*Feedback from the grammarian (correction in the verb and preposition)*

*There were many uh, umm, hmm*

*Less use of filler sounds good*

*After a talk, no speaking mood*

*Thinking about speaking next time better*

*Hoping to win the prize later*

*Again, the same thing happens*

*Never gone be a speaker better*

It all began with that dizzying feeling of poor presentation at the official ceremony at Nexus International Academy. That momentary experience of real failure, if at all felt, with obvious nervousness, hurried speech, and incoherence, has keen self-criticism. Perceived peer reactions balance inadequacy and how one's inadequacy is contrasted with apparently bolder speakers. According to Mezirow (1997), disorienting dilemmas are the starting point of transformative learning, challenging existing beliefs and assumptions. Also, the story of the sleepless night portrays deep engagement in a reflective judgment of the self, a principle of transformative learning. I evaluate other individuals' presentations, noting what was done well and what went wrong, such as greetings from superiors, explanations of points, timing, and audience involvement. The story unfolds from this feeling of uselessness to a moment of intrinsic motivation. I am resolved to improve in future presentations, showing resilience and readiness to learn from mistakes.

### **Isolation in the Academic Arena**

I remember the classes at the university, where most scholars were non-Indigenous. The few scholars only belong to marginalized communities. As a daughter from a marginalized community, specifically the Thangmi community, I used to connect academic issues to my own experiences. I used to write research studies in my community. One particular day stands out vividly; I presented the title Perception of Thangmi Teachers and Students Towards English Language Learning in class. I started the presentation, and I presented smoothly. However, when the professor opened the space for comment from other scholars, there wasn't any voice from anyone. The class was silent. No discussion, no comments. By that time, I felt isolated. I also thought, am I doing okay, or am I doing something wrong? Therefore, whenever issues were raised about Indigenous minorities, marginalized groups, and, more specifically, Thangmi, the classes remained silent. The silence was not an isolated incident; whenever I had to present on the issue of Indigenous, I started hesitating. In my MPhil classes, I did not get any comments. After my presentation, I did not find any discussion on the issue of Indigenous, specifically Thangmi. I still remember another incident when I presented at one of the conferences; after my presentation, there were questions from the participants rather than on an issue: what is Thangmi? Where are you from? Are they Magar?

These incidents took place because the other scholars wanted to ignore the topic. After all, the issue criticized the non-Indigenous or so-called high-caste people.

It seems they do not like to listen to ideas. Probably because of the systemic underrepresentation of Indigenous voices in academic circles, there is no discussion or feedback after the presentation. According to Smith (1999), this colonial legacy in education, whereby the system had led to the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems to the periphery of intellectual life, probably made them not well equipped to join this discussion area, thus the silence.

One might consider this a microaggression: silence in the classroom serves to communicate a lack of value in the contributions of Indigenous peoples. According to Sue et al. (2007), microaggressions can be-and often are-subtle, non-verbal forms of ignoring or avoiding topics that question dominant narratives. This incident adds to the isolation experienced by the individual from the marginalized group spoken of in the narrative. Through the lens of critical social theory, I criticize those incidents; still, the Indigenous issues are not highlighted at the government level. Indigenous issues are not brought into the field of discussion in academics. Thus, I encountered difficulties in my academic journey.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I narrated a story of challenges I faced, particularly relating to my Thangmi community and the complexities of learning and teaching English. I narrated the struggles I went through, including the stereotyping by society, identity crisis, financial problems, and humiliation, which shaped my journey. Despite all these adversities, I consider how I gradually overcame them, drawing strength from self-motivation, perseverance, and the support of meaningful experiences. I have also deeply explored the transformational process that took me from a novice in the English language, grappling with foundational concepts, to eventually evolving into an English teacher who empowers others.

## CHAPTER VI

### OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

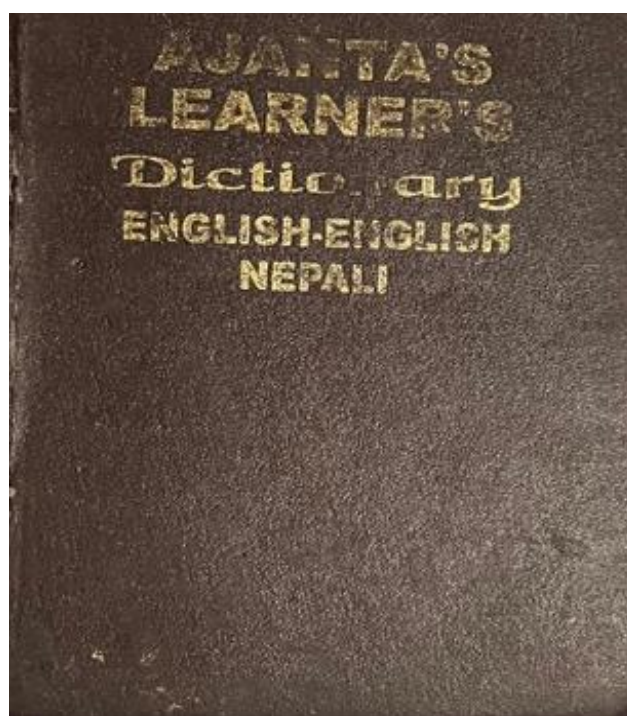
In the chapter, I reflect upon how I became an English teacher, on some obstacles in my path, and the challenges I overcame in my personal and professional experiences. It reflects upon the strategies I applied to learn the English language, my surroundings, and my circle in shaping my learning journey, my choice of Kathmandu University for higher education as the best platform, and my pride in teaching as an English lecturer for the first time. Moreover, self-reflection and theoretical insights have been carried out to interpret and analyze my experiences.

#### Strategies to Learn the English Language

In learning the English language, learners apply their strategies to learn, and sometimes, they are also guided by teachers. They apply different strategies, such as reading story books, talking with friends, listening to English news channels, etc. Oxford (2010) suggested that learners must do the task effectively and manage themselves. He further suggests creating a learning environment. It means that the task, along with the environment, matters a lot for

**Figure 3**

*Dictionary that I used to learn English vocabularies in my school days*



fruitful learning. I remember that up to SLC, I did not focus much on my studies. I used to study at school only. I was interested in studying but could not understand English well. In SLC, I secured lower marks in English. So, I started to pay more

attention to the subject of English. Though I did not understand properly, I used to read news articles like in the,

The Himalayan Times. I also started to use a dictionary (Ajanta). In this way, I came to learn the English language. It reveals that giving more attention and using different techniques also helps people learn English. Vocabulary learning strategies enhance vocabulary learning (Schmitt, 2000, as cited in Huang and Eslami, 2013). To learn vocabulary, I used the dictionaries of different publications. Huang and Eslami (2013) mentioned, “The current investigation attempted to provide insight into vocabulary learning issues by providing a better understanding of advanced English language learners’ strategies pertaining to dictionary use and contextual guessing (p.1). Similarly, I also used a dictionary to learn English.

Further, I practiced rote learning for word meanings at the school level. When I found difficult words, I used to scan the dictionary. For my bachelor's degree, I took extra English classes. I used to watch English movies with subtitles. Generally, I used to buy English newspapers (Himalayan Times) and Nepali newspapers (Kantipur). I used to compare the news articles in both newspapers. These methods helped me to learn grammar and vocabulary.

I believe learning may not occur until and unless we are ready to learn. I applied different strategies to learn English, like rote learning, using a dictionary, reading newspapers, reading articles, etc. Here, it indicates that learners search for a way of learning themselves and learn. In this supporting, Oxford (1990), the metacognitive strategy helps me to identify my learning style and helps me to learn. I was curious about how I could learn English. I thought that English was only for boarding school kids. Although I struggled to learn English in the beginning, slowly, continuous efforts built confidence, and different strategies helped me learn the English Language.

My experience underscores the role of language learning strategies (Oxford, 2010) in overcoming linguistic barriers. I employed cognitive strategies (e.g., rote learning and vocabulary acquisition), social strategies (e.g., seeking support from friends and colleagues), and metacognitive strategies (e.g., self-monitoring progress through watching movies and engaging in conversations).

### **Influenced by Surroundings and Friends, Circle to Learn English**

Moving abroad was the second point where I learned the importance of the English language. As I already shared, I faced several problems and humiliation for

not understanding English. I vividly remember the day I went abroad to work in a school as a caretaker. My supervisor took me to the market for the first day,

*Supervisor: What are the things you need in the accommodation?*

*Me: Ummm (only smiling with hesitation because no word comes from my mouth)....*

*Supervisor: (smiled at me and randomly took the kitchen appliances, mattress, pillow cover, bed sheet, etc).*

I was not able to tell the names of household items. Similarly, I had another experience in the same workplace. One day, one of my colleagues, Bai Monera, and I went shopping.

*I had to buy a pair of shoes, and I told her I wanted to buy a pair of shoes, but she looked at me with confusion. Hum and said, Sus. What's that?? I saw humiliation in her facial expression. I was hesitant to pronounce the same word again. I just smiled at her. There, I found that instead of /Suz/, I pronounced it /sus/, which my friend found difficult to pronounce.*

After a month, I gradually started learning English from the teacher and students in the school (my workplace). A Nana (elder sister in the Tamang language) from Nepal who is working as an English teacher supported me in learning English. I told her that I couldn't speak English and couldn't work for long. I said to her I wanted to go back to my country. But she provided the hope of learning English. She motivated me to learn English. She used to tell me not to worry. She also suggested I return to my country for a bachelor's degree in English language teaching. Similarly, I returned to Nepal and joined a bachelor's program in English language teaching.

My experiences confirm the importance of language in adjusting to new surroundings. Failure to properly communicate basic needs or pronounce words correctly led to embarrassment and ineffectiveness. Incidents like not knowing household items and pronouncing "shoes" indicate the challenges faced by non-native English speakers in the dominant English-speaking cultures. These incidents represent what Norton (2000) termed as an investment in language learning," that motivation for learning a language was highly related to one's desire for recognition, membership, and access to resources. This inability to communicate in English presented a confusing dilemma, challenging my current world perspective and capability.



These difficulties called for reflective self-examination, a cornerstone of Mazirow's Transformative Learning Theory. Seeking help from a Nepali peer, *Nana*, and learning a language demonstrates my immediate action in the face of these difficulties. Mezirow (1997) elaborates that transformative learning is initiated by a disorienting dilemma, followed by reflection, dialogue, and, ultimately, action. In this case, embarrassment caused by language difficulties served as a catalyst that pushed me toward higher education and raising my English proficiency. The encouragement and nudging offered through *nana* (sister in Tamang) show the role of an interlocutive relationship in fostering the process.

### **Choosing Kathmandu University as the Best Option**

After completing my bachelor's degree, I planned to pursue a master's degree. I planned to join Tribhuvan University, but one of the lecturers, Krishna Khatiwada, suggested Kathmandu University as the best university in Nepal. He also provided the cell phone number of the professor, Dr. Laxman Gnawali. I called him and went to meet him as he called me there.

*I: Sir, Namaste! It's me, Ranju Thami. I was sent by one of the lecturers.*

*Sir: Yes, how can I help you?*

*I: Sir, I wanted to join a master's degree here at KU.*

*Sir: Okay! (told in detail about KU, teaching method, research, and grants)*

*I: (I thought I was in the right place after listening to him. I was searching for similar types of learning platforms.*

I joined KU as the best option. My journey at KU significantly contributed to my professional development. While pursuing a master's degree in English language teaching, I gained numerous insights that enriched my career as an English teacher. KU also equipped me with essential knowledge about conducting research. This compelled me to engage in research and taught me valuable research skills. I have researched the English language learning experiences of Thangmi speakers; however, studying at KU while being a full-time worker was not easy. There were many challenges to overcome. I found it challenging to submit assignments on time. In the early days, I struggled to attend classes after work. I often felt sleepy because I wasn't habituated to evening classes. Another challenge was maintaining quality in assignments. Due to limited study time, it was hard to submit perfect homework. Besides these challenges, a significant hurdle was completing the research as our final requirement for the master's degree. I vividly remember the day I began working on

my research. I could finish and submit it on time. However, my supervisor, Prof. Laxman Gnawali, PhD suggested that I either leave my job or work part-time. I still recall my professor's words, '*dubai hat ma laddu tah hunnani ho*'; thus, I began working as a part-time teacher and focused on my research. I completed my master's research on time. I began my master's program in 2017 and finished in 2019.

The lecturer's guidance and my interaction with Prof. Laxman Gnawali, PhD highlight how mentorship and institutional reputation enhance students' learning. According to Terenzini et al. (1996), academic mentorship and institutional reputation are important in taking up educational routes for students. Joining Kathmandu University indicates an academic institution's role in developing intellectual curiosity and professional interests.

Studying at KU provided a platform for both theoretical and practical learning. This aligns with Kolb's experiential learning theory, which emphasizes integrating theoretical knowledge with practical application (Kolb, 1984). My journey demonstrates how research-oriented programs can empower students to engage in inquiry-based learning and develop critical thinking skills. In the past, I had carried different thoughts in my mind regarding the education system, but when I joined KU, as a transformative learner, I came with a new belief that the academic journey is not only theoretical; rather, it has to go through both theoretical and practical parts together.

I remember when I was doing my master's degree in 2018; I wrote a poem as an assignment to submit to poetry and drama class. I also published the poem on an online forum. Now, the poem has taken me to the Thangmi community where I belong. Therefore, I extract the poem here.

***Doktheli (Name of the Place)***

*Hey, wake up, wake up*

*This is your turn to do up*

*Not always working as a slave*

*You also should get good behave*

*Oh, SANSARI AKANMI, sister*

*Mother and father*

*You always work*

*For others harder*

*Now you need to do yourself  
Need to think of own self  
Why do you always make YOMARI for others?*

*Not always sitting under others  
Oh, brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers  
Hey, wake up! this is the time for do up!*

*RANJU THAMI*

*September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020*

This poem tells the Thangmi people to wake up from the socio-economic barriers. This assignment took me back to the community where I belong. The incident helped me as a catalyst to remember the past situation of the Thangmi people. However, there is a slight change, but not completely. The Thangmi community has slightly improved from the situation, but not completely. Still, a similar situation can be found in the community. Therefore, being a daughter from the Indigenous community is challenging for becoming an English teacher.

### **Being Proud English Lecturer for the First Time**

In 2079 BC (2021 AD), after my first child, one day, one of my friends called me and asked me about teaching at the bachelor's level at one of the institutions. I was in a dilemma as to whether to start teaching, as my child was only five months old. But after getting the suggestion from my husband, I planned to teach at the college. In my first class, I was more nervous than excited. I was nervous because it was my first time teaching at the bachelor's level. However, when I entered the classroom, I found a cozy environment, as the students were very supportive. Along with nervousness, I was happy to teach because it was my dream to teach at the bachelor's level.

I was proud to be a lecturer because fewer people had passed elementary school in our generation and our surroundings. Bezanson et al. (2007), in their study, the majority of Aboriginal people are of school age, yet Aboriginal people have the highest rates of school dropout in the nation. Of those who do complete high school, only a small percentage go on to post-secondary education. Similarly, in my relative circle, no one has completed SLC. My cousins, sisters, and brothers only studied until grade seven. Therefore, my surroundings have a poor educational background. But I

came out of the situation and evolved into higher education. My friend circle also hardly completed +2. I was also about the educational journey after the +2. But there was a reason behind it, which was why I came towards higher education, which was also in the English language education. When I moved abroad seriously, I felt the importance of the English language. As I already shared before, I faced many problems, such as humiliation for not understanding the English language. Another reason for going abroad was, obviously, the economic condition of my family. I vividly remember the incident when I had difficulties understanding the English language. When I went abroad to work in the school as a caretaker. The supervisor had taken to the market for the first day,

*Supervisor: What are the things you need in the accommodation?*

*Me: Ummm (only smiling with hesitation because no word comes from my mouth)....*

*Supervisor: (smiled at me and randomly took the kitchen appliances, mattress, pillow cover, bed sheet, etc.).*

I was not able to tell the names of household items. Similarly, I had another experience in the same workplace. One day, one of my colleagues, Bai Monera, and I went shopping. I had to buy a pair of shoes, and I told her I wanted to buy a pair of shoes, but she looked at me with confusion. *Hum!!* And said, *Sus*. What's that?? I saw humiliation in her facial expression. I hesitated to pronounce the same word again. I just smiled at her. There, I found that instead of /Sus/, I pronounced it /sus/, where my friend found pronunciation difficult.

After a month, I gradually started learning English from the teacher and students in the school (my workplace). There was Nana (elder sister in the Tamang language). Everyone used to call her *Nana* as she belonged to the Tamang ethnic group from Nepal, working as an English teacher to support me in learning English. I told her that I couldn't speak English and couldn't work for long. I told her I wanted to go back to my country. But she provided the hope for learning the English language. She motivated me to keep learning, telling me not to worry. She also suggested that I return to my country and pursue a bachelor's degree in English language teaching. Eventually, I returned to Nepal and enrolled in a bachelor's program in English language teaching. Thus, these kinds of incidents have brought to the stream of English language education. I am a lecturer in the English language now.

It shows that the decision to begin teaching at the bachelor's level with a five-month-old child underlines the tension between personal and professional identities, especially in women. Evans et al. (2014) mention that the study portrays the struggles of mothers in balancing the dual roles of caregiver and professional growth. Besides this, I was proud to teach at the bachelor's level. The apprehension of teaching at the bachelor's level versus a caring classroom environment, an ideal, is a good example of Mezirow's (1999) transformative learning: The process of undertaking new experiences leads to reflection and adaptation that foster personal and professional growth. The experience reflects the systematic educational inequities in my community, where very few individuals had access to or completed basic schooling. This resonates with Bourdieu's (1986) notion of cultural capital, wherein individuals from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds face additional challenges in accessing higher education. Despite these barriers, my success signifies resilience and self-efficacy, key factors in achieving educational milestones. The two contrasting experiences are brought together because there is some correlation between the stories. If the second stories had not taken place, the first stories would not be present here. Therefore, the transformation is from a rural girl to an English lecturer in the city.

### **Chapter Summary**

The journey in this chapter was one through adversity and incidents when I went through many challenges to understand what shaped me as a person and professionally. In this paper, the story is narrated about how I struggled through the barriers in learning the English language, overcoming social biases and educational biases, and adjusting to new environments. It elaborated in detail how I overcame those obstacles, which included reading newspapers, practicing pronunciation, and getting support from mentors and peers. The chapter further elaborated on the role of the environment and the friend circle in motivating me to work for the improvement of my command of English, along with my transformative decision to pursue higher education at Kathmandu University. The chapter underlined self-belief, mentorship, and continuous effort toward overcoming adversities in achieving personal and professional goals.

## CHAPTER VII

### REFLECTIONS, INSIGHTS, THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Finally, the girl, 'I,' near the end, mirrors my journey with a dual role: Researcher and the researcher from the beginning of my research, draw insights from the experience, and identify the implications of my journey. Looking back to the point I started my journey and contemplating where I stand today makes me feel that I am transforming as an individual, a teacher, and a researcher. It is the essence of every journey in our lives.

#### **Research Journey**

I completed my Master's in ELT in 2019 and then joined the MPhil in ELE in 2020 without a gap. I attended the first semester of the MPhil program in person, but I did not get that opportunity in the second and third semesters. In 2020, the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, and I was not free from its impact. Consequently, the classes were shifted to an online mode. I did my second and third semesters online. Even though the classes were shifted to remote mode, they were still interactive, and it felt almost the same as attending physical classes.

Furthermore, I think by the grace of Bhummya Deva, the God of Thangmi, I got married in 2020 during my second semester. I completed my third semester after marriage. Similarly, I had my first baby while working on my thesis in 2021. Therefore, getting married and having a child only increased my life responsibilities. I started writing my dissertation proposal and successfully defended it in June 2023. Progress on my proposal halted when, after 18 months, I had my second baby, further increasing my responsibilities. Consequently, work on my thesis was paused at that stage. Once my daughter was eight months old and eating solid food, I resumed working on my thesis.

I planned to conduct my research through an ethnographic approach within the Thangmi speech community, targeting grade 8 students. However, I was quite challenged in bringing my thesis to an autoethnographic study. Given my situation, I could not get into ethnographic study because it required a minimum of three months in the field with two little children. Then, these inspirational words by Prof. Dr. Hem

Raj Kafle influenced me: "Ranju, you are real evidence- why not do autoethnographic research?" This quote influenced me to do autoethnography research.

I started writing my dissertation in January 2024. I read quite several research studies, including Bhandari (2022), Bohara (2021) and Gurung (2018). Even after that, I was confused for almost a month, not knowing where and how to start. After a long discussion with Prof. Dr. Laxman Gnawali, I followed his suggestion and started writing about my childhood experiences. I documented my experience as data text through the use of different genres. First, I chronologically organized my experiences. Then, I underlined important incidents related to the teaching and learning of ELT. Afterward, I related these experiences with existing research studies by analyzing and integrating the data with relevant literature. However, as I was meaning-making and analyzing the data, I struggled to link my findings to the theoretical framework. Although I did have some knowledge about linking theory to data from my master's, it was all a bit foggy. Only later, through reflection on these experiences, reading varied literature, and engaging with theories such as transformative learning and critical social theory, I eventually found clarity. These efforts eventuated in theoretical implications and a rounded conclusion for my dissertation.

### **Drawing the Insights from the Experience**

I am involved in autoethnography as transformative research about the journey of becoming an English teacher. Being a daughter from a highly marginalized Indigenous community has been like a locker that opens a hidden window to view unseen things. Therefore, as the window opened towards my new learning, understanding, and awareness, I would like to take this section as an opportunity to open the window for my readers towards my learning, understanding, and awareness. I illustrate the discoveries of the answers to the three research questions explored in chapters four, five, and six, respectively: a. How have I evolved in English language learning and teaching as a daughter from an Indigenous community? b. What kind of challenges have I faced in the journey of becoming an English language teacher? c. How have I overcome many challenges in English language teaching/learning? Every experience leads to discoveries, learning, and insights.

Similarly, as I journeyed into the 'becoming' of self in every chapter, it led me to explore and discover different issues of becoming an English teacher being an Indigenous woman. My exploration of how a Thangmi girl 'I' evolved in English language education has been discussed in chapter four by addressing this question

with my autoethnographic experiences. My stories as a learner at the school level, graduation level, and as a teacher, too. I developed as a critical self-reflector by being less judgmental of myself. While doing this, I explored myself as a self-motivator who considered critical self-reflection the major for transformation. Those stories and experiences might be empathized with by readers of similar contexts. Encountering English language education as a daughter from a highly marginalized community has been a challenging journey. My reflection shows that, though there is increasing awareness among parents regarding education, the pathways of non-Indigenous and Indigenous children are far from being equal. Often, Indigenous children face economic hardships, social barriers, and linguistic problems that hinder their way to a good education. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2016) adds that, commonly, there exist systemic barriers to poverty, cultural exclusion, and linguistic differences in access to quality education. Being a girl from the Thangmi community complicates access and success even further. I have navigated and persevered through these multidimensional challenges, thus showing how complex it is to pursue an English education as an Indigenous girl. The second question of this research, "What kind of struggles have I been going through on becoming an English teacher being a marginalized Thangmi woman?" is covered in Chapter V, which discusses various struggles I have experienced as a Thangmi girl. Even though the problems related to English learning remain almost similar, girls have other social problems and limitations. Chapter V, therefore, discusses challenges that I, as an Indigenous Thangmi woman, had to overcome to receive an education. I, being a Thangmi girl, was experiencing social and economic hardship.

Due to this, I had to work in others' agriculture to earn money. Although this provided some support, it limited my access to additional learning opportunities. Added to this, being an Indigenous woman meant that I had to struggle with most of the socio-linguistic barriers: humiliation, bullying, and inquiries into my ethnic identity. My experiences at school, college, and university are unforgettable. They are unforgettable because they made a pathway for me into the mainstream of education. Had it not been for those challenges, I may not be in the position I find myself in today. In retrospect, my past experiences have been transformational to my journey and growth as a learner. The last question, "How have I overcome the many challenges in the journey of English language learning and teaching?" is answered in Chapter VII. The chapter shares strategies, experiences, and personal growth that



helped me overcome all the obstacles while learning and teaching English as an Indigenous woman. This deals with the barriers of having no resources, societal expectations, language barriers, and cultural pressures and how I have handled and overcome them. It underlines the most important moments of resistance and resilience, such as finding a mentor, making strong contacts with the community, and acquiring a greater understanding of the language and my cultural identity. It also tells how these experiences transformed me into the English teacher I am today, inspiring and empowering others in their educational journey. Being an English teacher was not easy for a Thangmi girl. Against all the odds, I succeeded and became an English teacher, which remains an unattainable dream for many Thangmi women with similar socio-economic status.

### **Conclusion**

This transformative theoretical and critical social theory-informed autoethnographic qualitative research study concludes with some major findings. The autoethnographic section can provide insight into the typical Nepali scenario of an ordinary woman learner/teacher from an Indigenous community. In the stories within this section, it is not only my experiences that are represented, but the reader from a similar context does. As long as going through them might make a belief and practices-questioned Indigenous woman who has ever faced bully in school and economic crisis out of domination. I experienced it while wearing a lens as an autoethnographic researcher steeped in critical social theory: domination, marginalization, and resistance.

As a transformative learner, I look back into the past: socioeconomic structures in rural Nepal have relegated Indigenous communities to exploitative labor conditions and denial of access to quality education, as the broader of Indigenous people's exclusion in a global context. It is against such systematic barriers that I resolve to resist through studying and supporting my family. In trying to challenge the structural impediments through education, I exemplify Freire's (1970) notion of conscientization, in which the oppressed develop an awareness of and question the state of marginalization they have endured. From a disorienting dilemma: an inability to perform consistently well, say, at school, college, work, and university become self-actualizing. So, despite failure here and now, my journey shows iterative growth. Mezirow (1997) has also pointed out that transformative learning is a process rather than an event. If faced with reflection, practice, and support, the challenges hold the

possibility for transformation. In this regard, the iterative process of learning and growth brings out the underlying role of resilience and optimism in dealing with disorienting dilemmas. My journey follows the principles of transformative learning in my embracing opportunities for feedback and self-improvement and augments values of persistence in personal and professional development.

This autoethnographic work is evidence of how the structures of society and discrimination converge with language learning in shaping the identities and trajectories of learners and teachers alike. To ELT professionals, my reflection is to challenge and look for ways to work through barriers at the systemic level, most typically inhibiting learners from marginalized ethnic groups. It calls for culturally responsive pedagogy, appreciates linguistic diversity, and enhances equitable participation of participants in English language learning.

However, the transformation from ‘village girl’ to lecturer is more of an identity and self-perception change. It demonstrates how education and determination can rewrite one's journey in life, especially for a woman born into a traditionally subordinate role.

### **Implications and the Way Forward**

The research study opens pathways toward critical reflection on the interplay among education, identity, and systemic inequality for learners and educators who live in the margins. A transformational journey for the learner carries implications and, thus, actionable insights for the learner, educator, policymaker, and institution as all move forward. Key implications and focus areas that will bear consideration as the way forward is charted in ensuring education serves as a transformative tool for marginalized communities include the following.

The framework tends to inspire resilience, self-awareness, and the art of nimbleness. The specific hope for learners from poorer backgrounds may lie in adversity being used as an opportunity for growth. Through iteration in learning processes and opportunities for self-improvement, learners start breaking systemic barriers. Approaches that encourage peer collaboration, reflective practices, and language acquisition with various resources, such as media, mentorship support, and community, help learners take ownership of their learning processes.

The role of educators is quite significant to cultivate an environment that will make learning equitable and inclusive. My study identified culturally responsive pedagogy that considered the learners' diverse linguistic and cultural identities.

Teachers should create a class environment that respects diversity while preparing students to face systemic barriers. Professional development programs must train teachers to support students from the most marginalized communities by emphasizing empathy, equity, and empowerment.

The study will ensure that policy-level interventions address the systemic barriers to accessing quality education and the marginalization of Indigenous communities.

The study also opens up possibilities for further research where education, language learning, and identity meet. Further studies may investigate how systemic injustices configure educational journeys for other women from the periphery. A comparative case across various regions or communities can also afford more nuanced details of how schools' practices are to be adapted to best suit the needs of a diverse learner population.

The journey does not stop here. Neither is the transformation from a rural girl to an English lecturer an achievement but one step toward systemic change. These insights gained from the research stir further motivation toward fostering inclusive education.

I will continue advocating for culturally responsive teaching practices as a teacher, engage in further research to amplify marginalized voices, and mentor students to stand up and reach their potential within societal challenges. This should inspire others to accept change and challenge injustices, creating pathways that offer opportunities for a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

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