

Living and Evolving as Women English Language Teachers

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Abstract

This paper explores how women English Language teachers evolve, navigating personal and professional struggles in their teaching careers through their lived experiences. We adopted narrative inquiry as a research method and conducted in-depth interviews with the participants, which allowed us to delve into their stories. We highlight the hindrances they encountered and the motivation and resilience that enabled them to remain committed to the profession. The analysis of their lived experiences, informed by the post-structural feminist perspective, reveals how sociocultural responsibilities, institutional expectations, and personal initiatives shape the identity of women teachers. They are pursuing higher studies to keep up with the evolving demands of the time and prove themselves; they are no less than males. Despite the obstacles posed by family responsibilities, the women teachers demonstrated their strengths in navigating challenges through determination and hard work. This research paper contributes to understanding the lived experiences of women teachers and how they grow, implying the supportive environment they require to foster their professional development.

Keywords: *Identity, women teacher, narrative inquiry, post-structural feminist theory*

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Introduction

I often feel like I am unheard of major decision-making matters.

When a male teacher offers support and helps me with teaching methods and any other kind of assistance, other male teachers often link his name with mine, relating a

connection between us, and at times gossip about our illicit relationship, which saddens me.

These anecdotes represent the predicaments of women English language teachers in Nepal, particularly how women teachers are systematically targeted, cornered, marginalized and silenced. Historically, girls lacked access to formal education, and their roles were primarily confined to household responsibilities. Their senior family members encouraged them to learn domestic skills rather than pursue an academic degree. At this pretext, the dream of becoming a woman English language teacher was beyond imagination. Furthermore, as Poudel and Shrestha (2024) argue, English education was initially confined to a privileged few, rather than being designed for wider public access. Elitism and social prestige were closely tied to the English language. Additionally, traditional Nepali society did not envision a future for women outside of their household boundaries. Poudel and Shrestha (2024) argue that Jung Bahadur Rana, the first Rana Prime Minister of Nepal, who is considered to have introduced English in formal education, used to say, "Ladka [boys in colloquial Nepali language], you use the English language because you are unique from others." Patriarchal ideology that was pervasive in social psychology influenced his English language preference for male over female. Only male members from the Rana family were allowed to go to Durbar High School (the first publicly funded school in Nepal that taught modern education), and the Rana families did not allow girls to attend school. This context defines a deeply rooted gender discrimination where males occupied professional careers.

Girls, who envisioned professional lives, had to overcome challenges first within their families and then in society. However, people have gradually recognized the value of education for women over time, resulting in a significant paradigm shift. Dhakal (2022) examines how societal perceptions of women, their roles, and their significance in social activities have evolved. It is undeniably a truth that the condition for women in society has somehow improved in comparison to the past; however, discriminatory practices in terms of gender still exist. The increasing trend of girls' enrollment in education and their participation in career growth is crucial to women's empowerment. Awareness among women regarding their self-recognition and professional identity empowers them to be independent in rural areas. Dhakal (2022) points out that patriarchal norms are particularly widespread in rural regions and among marginalized groups, where male dominance in household decision-making is common, especially in communities with lower literacy levels. Similarly, Shrestha and Gartoulla (2015) emphasize that ensuring women's participation in local governance decision-making processes remains challenging. Similar to local governance, the field of education remains untouched by efforts to address gendered hierarchies, where women teachers often face limited opportunities for professional growth and leadership roles.

To our knowledge, males occupy the majority of the prominent positions in many sectors, which shows that women face biased or unfair treatment in terms of knowledge and skills. Gender bias is rooted in social structure. Connell (2002) argued that gender should be viewed as a social structure rather than something rooted in biology or a simple binary. It reflects patterns found in societal organization and the daily behaviors shaped by those structures (p. 9). In fact, gender is a socially conceptualized system rather than a biological creation. In addition, gender does not refer to biological differences between males and females, but rather to a concept created by cultural norms and social practices that directly and indirectly influence our behaviors, roles, and identities. Gender and identity are evolving concepts. According to Simon-Maeda (2004), teachers' professional identities are shaped through an integration of wider sociocultural factors and continuous personal and social interactions that occur both inside the classroom and in the broader community.

It's crucial to comprehend the concept of identity before delving into how women teachers from Nepal evolve and grow. Gee (2000) suggests that identity serves as a valuable lens for understanding teachers. According to Norton (2000), identity refers to "being recognized as a certain kind of person" (p. 11). She also asserted that identity explores a person's understanding of their relationship to the sphere, encompassing the construction of relationships among past, present, and future possibilities. Pennington (2015) presents teacher identity as a mental image or construct, representing the conception of a teacher that directs teachers' practices and actions in specific instances of teacher identity. Similarly, Block (2015) presents the idea that identity development is viewed through the lens of how teachers perceive themselves in their job and how their coworkers position them. This also depends on one's connectivity to surrounding communities. Similarly, Barkhuizen (2016) notes that experiences are transformed into narratives when shared with others, and these narratives become part of narrative inquiry when studied for academic purposes or used to convey research findings. Therefore, narrative inquiry is crucial for investigating the identity construction of women teachers.

There has been a growing interest in the field of educational research on how gender, family roles, and social responsibilities intersect to shape the experience of women teachers. Hardy-Witherspoon (2020), for instance, reveals the complexities faced by African American female educators, highlighting how women educators experience discrimination, underrepresentation, and financial illiteracy. Likewise, Sun et al. (2022) found that burnout is prevalent among Chinese female school-level teachers, primarily due to overwork, family conflict, insufficient societal support, and classroom management complexities, compared to their college-level counterparts. Xing et al. (2024) discuss the challenges faced by women English language teachers in the context of China and conclude that the identity of women teachers is shaped by both professional and personal components, including multiple responsibilities as mothers, wives, and daughters-in-law. Simon-Maeda (2004) examined the identities of the nine women teachers in Japan and found that their identities were constructed by various factors, such as their personal roles, lives, and gendered inequalities. Similarly, Xiong and Li (2020) found that a woman teacher's identity tends to be constantly evolving, contradictory, and fragmented, and is heavily influenced by gender.

A few studies concerning "female teachers' identity" can be seen; however, trends in this area are increasing in the context of Nepal. Pokharel's (2021) research, entitled "Being and Becoming a Female English Language Teacher," from a phenomenological perspective, suggests that female English language teachers experience their world in a way that reflects their being female and becoming English language teachers, which involves different phenomena. In a similar vein, Neupane and Bhatt (2023) suggest that the interplay of micro, meso, and macro environments, along with agency, influences teachers' identity construction. The research highlights the intricate relationship between personal agency, institutional pressures, and systemic structures in shaping professional identities.

While discussing macro policies, the Nepal School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) (2016–2023) explicitly emphasizes gender equity and the promotion of inclusive education (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2016). However, we have noticed an inconsistency between policy formulation and actual practice. In many cases, the practice of equality is not reflected in the lived realities of women educators, who continue to face subtle biases, limited leadership opportunities, and societal expectations that hinder their professional growth. The gap between the written policy and its implementation suggests a need for monitoring and supporting gender responsive practices in schools. This study contributes to policymakers and practitioners in designing more effective and actionable policies to ensure proper implementation. In addition, the article contributes to the existing

literature on how women English language teachers navigate these struggles, remain in the profession, and advance professionally. This paper fills this gap by highlighting their personal journeys to better understand their challenges and what can assist them in achieving success in their careers within the context of Nepal. The paper primarily aims to explore the personal and professional experiences of women professionals in English language education. The following research question guided this study:

- How do women English language teachers experience and navigate their personal and professional lives within the teaching profession?

Life History Approach as a Research Method

We adopted life history approach of narrative inquiry as a research method. This research method allows us to examine and understand the experiences of women teachers through their stories, listening to their personal narratives provides a deep understanding of the broader social and cultural contexts they encounter. Narrative inquiry is based on the idea that people understand random experiences by turning them into stories. We achieve this by selecting specific aspects of the experience to focus on and then arranging them in a story-like manner (Bell, 2002, p. 207). Teachers' identity is understood as a unique picture of each teacher's stories to live by, which are "multiple, fluid, and shifting, continuously composed and recomposed in the moment-to-moment living alongside children, families, administrators, and others" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 9). Narrative inquiry is a valuable approach for exploring teachers' professional lives and careers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Similarly, postmodern feminist scholars (e.g., Davies, 1991; Simon-Maeda, 2004) have demonstrated its effectiveness in revealing how female teachers negotiate their identities within the dominant discourses of gender and education.

Participants

We interviewed three women of various castes, ages, cultural backgrounds, and family backgrounds who teach English language in different geographical areas of Nepal. Manita represents the Madhesi community, currently serving as a principal in a government school, who has contributed over 17 years of service as an English language professional in both non-governmental and government academic institutions. Sadhana has over twenty years of teaching experience at a public university and currently holds a senior role. Both research participants are currently pursuing higher education. Jasuda works at a private secondary school with over a decade of teaching experience. She also has two years of part-time experience as a pre-primary English language teacher in China. She belongs to one of the hilly regions in Nepal.

Table 1

A Brief Overview of the Participants

S.N.	Participants	Teaching Experience	Contextual Background
1	Manita	Seventeen years	Born and raised in the Yadav ethnic group from the Tarai region of Nepal
2	Sadhana	Twenty-one years	Belongs to the inner Madhesh of Nepal
3	Jasuda	Thirteen years	Represents the rural and hilly region of Nepal

Story Generation and Data Collection

As an in-depth interview would be beneficial for a deep understanding of the narratives shared by participants, we employed interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and informal conversations to generate stories. Semi-structured data collection tools enabled us to remain flexible, allowing us to ask further details and probing questions, thereby adapting to the circumstances. Throughout these conversations, we made a conscious effort to maintain the natural flow of their storytelling, ensuring they felt comfortable and uninterrupted. In doing so, the participants and we collaboratively co-constructed their narratives of learning and teaching as English language teachers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Before the interview, we engaged in informal conversations with them to build rapport. We recorded the interview and informal conversations, obtaining consent from the participants, which were later transcribed and translated into English for further processing of meaning-making.

Constructing Meaning from Data

The stories collected from participants through interviews and informal conversations were analyzed thematically, adhering to the thematic analysis approach developed by Brown and Clarke (2006). The story interpretation approach included familiarization, initial coding, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing the report. First, we read and re-read the transcripts to familiarize ourselves with the data. Then, we began coding, which represented recurring ideas, events, and sentiments expressed by the participants. During the coding process we conducted block coding not to split the stories into the fragments. After that, we organized these codes under the different categories and themes during which we tried to repair the fractured stories. Finally, we developed the narrative report and restored the stories of our participants.

Insights from the Life History Narratives

A rigorous analysis of the life histories of women English language teachers revealed that participants faced multiple struggles, challenges, sociocultural influences, and motivations that drove their personal initiatives and development. In this article, we highlight four themes that appear particularly salient in constructing the identities of women teachers. We emphasize that gender was just one factor among many, though a powerful one, that played a crucial role in shaping their lives and professions. Gender and other contextual elements influenced how female teachers experienced their journeys of becoming and working as English teachers in a challenging traditional environment. We observed a clear pattern of past and present experiences, as well as their influences on career trajectories, across the interviews.

Imagined Identity Turns into Reality

Participants' stories revealed that their imagined identity played a crucial role in shaping who they are now. According to Norton (2013), imagined identity refers to the future self that individuals aspire to become within an imagined community they wish to join. It is our vision of what we might be and what we might achieve, shaped by our desires, beliefs, and access to opportunities. Our childhood dreams show the path to our passions and potential. Our passions reveal our pure desire, free from social boundaries, and dreams, indeed, are free from any societal expectations or pressure. Intrinsic motivation is a common aspect of human behavior, particularly evident in children's play, where they eagerly participate in activities without needing external incentives or encouragement (Deci et al., 2017). This concept resonates with the childhood aspiration to become an English language teacher. All the research participants were driven to pursue a career in English language teaching because they perceived English as a means of empowerment, social status, and

financial gain. Manita revealed that she was influenced by the spoken skills of her school principal during her childhood, which motivated her to become an English language teacher. She further expressed that whenever she played *bhadakuti* (a traditional Nepali children's role-playing game) with her childhood friends, she would always take on the role of the teacher, while her friends would play other roles. Later, she married a man from the teaching profession. He inspired her to pursue a degree in the education stream, which led her to become an English teacher. We relate this to Wenger (2010), who maintains that during engagement in communities of practice — such as schooling and teacher education programs — participants construct their images, locate and orient themselves from different perspectives, and explore new possibilities for the future. In a similar vein, another participant, Jasuda, shared her childhood experience:

I grew up in a village surrounded by teachers. My father was also a teacher in a government school. As I became more conscious, I began to hear that if I were to become a secondary-level English language teacher at a government school in the future, I would gain greater respect, financial rewards, and recognition.

She explained that she witnessed her mother's struggles with handling the household chores. She felt that she did not wish to endure the same hardships in her life. Therefore, she was determined to create her own space and achieve financial independence in society after becoming an English teacher. Witnessing every male member of her own family in the teaching field as a teacher during her formative years, she also had a good learning environment. The sociocultural background of Jasuda's upbringing, grounded in a dominant ideology, guided her and her parents in making choices they viewed as natural and typical (Darvin & Norton, 2015). Jasuda benefited from a sociocultural environment that valued and prioritized education. Likewise, Sadhana, being a member of Brahmin family, her father prioritized education. She also received a good educational environment and parental support. Her father had a good social network in the community, and his regular supervision further enhanced her learning. She noted:

When I was a young girl, the study of the English language was considered a technical subject because it was the language of technical fields, such as engineering and medicine. I had a desire to enroll in technical fields, believing they offered a promising future in the job market.

Sadhana joined the teaching profession immediately after completing her higher secondary education to support her family, as they were facing financial constraints. She was also known as a “*helmet teacher*” (a colloquial term in the Nepali language referring to a part-time teacher who moves from one school/college to several others for earning) and was in high demand among several tuition centers, which is why she was approached for coaching classes. As time passed, she found greater satisfaction in her profession and realized that teaching was the field where she could grow and enhance both personally and professionally. The narratives of our research participants demonstrated that motivation and childhood learning environment were crucial in developing who they are. Their childhood dreams and imagination of becoming financially independent motivate them to pursue a career in teaching English. Furthermore, the role of motivation and the environment they received was indeed crucial in overcoming hindrance factors, advancing their professional careers, and enhancing their skills. The inspiration the research participants received from their childhood teachers, who had a good command of the English language, great respect for people who majored in English, and a childhood dream of becoming a professional, influenced their development. Manita imagined her identity in terms of someone she met during her childhood (Wenger, 1999, 2010), which further inspired her to work hard and become the person she

aspired to be. Her imagined identity as a fluent English language teacher motivated her to challenge traditional gender roles and work hard toward becoming the person she aspired to be. In this sense, her identity construction emerged through both personal agency and the influence of social structures that often define what women can be or cannot be. Post-structural feminist views identity formation as a process of resisting dominant gendered discourses and creating spaces where women can redefine themselves beyond prescribed social boundaries.

Financial Contribution to the Family

Financial independence is crucial for women, as it enables them to make significant contributions to the financial stability and overall well-being of their families. When women are financially self-reliant, they can contribute to a higher standard of living for themselves and their families. In this context, education plays a pivotal role as a transformative tool for empowering women with knowledge, skills, and opportunities that can lead to sustainable livelihoods. In our research context, participants took the teaching profession as a safe route for achieving economic independence. According to Tamboukou (2000), women viewed teaching as a socially acceptable means to redefine themselves beyond the roles of wives and mothers, or as a way to escape poverty and advance to a higher social class. Reflecting on the journey of our research participants, Jasuda, Sunita, and Sadhana, we found that the teaching profession empowered them to take on multiple responsibilities and overcome the challenges life threw at them. For instance, Jasuda stated:

I was the second-oldest daughter in my family. My father was the only person who had a regular income. However, his income was insufficient to meet our needs. My mother, a homemaker and farmer, had to work tirelessly. Witnessing her struggles inspired me to pursue a professional career.

Due to economic hardships, she began working at one of the private schools as an English language teacher immediately after passing the S.L.C. in 2015. She continued both her profession and her education. At that time, teaching English was considered the safest and prestigious profession for women. McKinney (2007) describes English as the language of power, where learners bring up status and prestige. Similarly, Sadhana shared:

In 2000, I started working to offer financial support to my family immediately after completing grades 11 and 12, as my father was unemployed. I recall an incident when I received a salary from my school. My father used it right after to buy my brother a bicycle. That was a moment that made me feel like I was the backbone of the family.

Women English language teachers contribute to the financial well-being of their families, which in turn developed their confidence and further empowered them. Another research participant, Manita, also has a similar experience. She stated:

I was the second-born daughter among four siblings in my family. I worked as an English language teacher and took pride in supporting the education of my younger brothers. Because of this, my father told me, “You are my son, not my daughter.” This made me feel proud and happy.

Manita’s experience aligns with Grumet’s (1988) view that women teachers’ experiences can be empowering and creative, influencing both their teaching practices and their professional development. In many cases, professional growth can be directly linked to economic growth, enabling women English language teachers to support their families financially. Therefore, their evolving roles not only help with professional development but also contribute to the economic sustainability of their families. Our research participants — Manita, Sadhana, and Jasuda — reconstructed their identities as caregivers. From a post-

structural feminist perspective, women's engagement in economic activities challenges the dominant discourse that positions men as primary earners and women as caregivers (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1987). Through their financial independence, they negotiate new subject positions, receiving recognition both within their families and society. Their economic contribution to the family empowers them to redefine their sense of self, asserting agency and resistance against traditional gender expectations.

Juggling with Space and Time Restrictions

Women teachers often juggle multiple responsibilities. They have to manage multiple duties, including caring for their children and preparing them for school each day, and allocating time for their own lesson preparations. Steedman (1992), referring to her participant's stories, highlights the challenges women teachers face in balancing their professional and personal lives, describing how the demands of school work can dominate their existence and make it difficult to separate work from home life: "I loved my children and worked hard for them, lay awake at night worrying about them, spent my Sundays making work cards ... My back ached as I pinned their paintings..." Steedman, 1992, p. 53). Balancing these overlapping roles, as both caregivers at home and professionals in the workplace, and managing time for their own higher education, is tough for them. Despite these challenges, they consistently embrace their multiple roles as providers, learners, teachers, and housemakers with resilience and determination to sustain their personal and professional identities. Our research participants also shared similar stories regarding time management and not receiving recognition for their hard work. Manita reflected:

It has been a year since I was promoted to principal of a government school. I worked from early morning until late at night to prove myself as a capable female leader. I hardly had time to prepare the kind of food my family wished for, which left me feeling both guilty and exhausted.

When she became the principal, she joined a university for her MPhil program. At that time, the school had only 250 students. Determined to bring about change and leave her family life behind, she encouraged teamwork among staff and went to the community to convince parents that their school would surpass the private school. In the same year, the school committee, under her leadership, adopted English Medium Instruction (EMI), making every effort to increase the number of students. An English-medium education is discursively viewed as quality education (Phyak et al., 2022). Sah and Li (2018) argue that an increasing number of public schools in Nepal are adopting EMI starting from lower grades. Fortunately, the number of students increased surprisingly and reached 650. However, she received no motivational words about her efforts to increase the number of students from the management community, and it saddened her. Sometimes, inspirational words are like medicine to fuel our energy. Our society usually does not acknowledge or entertain women in leadership positions; instead, they are often viewed as enablers (Jones, 2017). Hard work and the social structuring of a world that recognizes them only as belonging subjects, usually wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters, confined to enclosed spaces, such as those of their families (Tamboukou, 2000). Regarding the struggle for having time and space, Jasuda claimed, "*It has been tough for her to balance professional life and family responsibilities.*" Her stories indicated that women English language teachers are regarded as time-poor due to the abundance of responsibilities they face. She added:

My husband went to abroad to pursue his higher education. I live with my four years old daughter and father-in-law, who is 65 years old and cannot look after him. I have admitted my daughter to a Montessori school to handle things.

Jasuda is a dedicated mother and teacher who carries heavy responsibilities every day. Jasuda sometimes has to bring her daughter along. Even a short delay in the morning can make her entire day stressful. Though she thinks of quitting her job, she needs to support her family financially. When schools assign extra tasks for her, she must rely on others for help in caring for her daughter. She further expressed that the situation frequently occurs when there are holidays at her school but not on her own, and sometimes she keeps her daughter in the reception hall at her school. The situation becomes even more critical when her father-in-law falls ill and needs to be hospitalized. If she quits her job, there will be a financial crisis. Her story reflects the emotional and physical challenges of balancing work and family life. It illustrates how working mothers must juggle multiple roles, often feeling pressured and exhausted from trying to do everything for everyone. Another participant, Sadhana, has also been through the same situation. Her family, including three children, her husband, and two in-laws who are almost 75 years old, depends on her care and support, which adds to her daily responsibilities and emotional pressure as she tries to balance work and home life. She also holds important positions at her college and is pursuing further education for professional growth, which shows that she has very little time left for her family.

Manita's narratives demonstrate that, despite having limited time due to family responsibilities, she was able to increase the number of students at her school, thereby allocating more time and effort to her professional work. On the other hand, Jasuda's contributions to handling the whole family and her professional career demonstrate her resilience and perseverance. In addition, Sadhana's distinct responsibilities make her life more complicated and harder to manage, both socially and professionally, due to the assigned roles. In a magical way, they can combine housework, child-care, and a senior position in adult education. Within the confines of a workday, they continually shift between personal and public boundaries. Women have been described as 'time-poor' (Edwards, 1993, p. 64). It highlights the temporal pressure they encounter in their daily experiences and roles. From a post-structural feminist perspective, the challenges women teachers face in balancing their home and work lives are shaped by social and cultural discourses that define what is considered "appropriate" for women. These time and space restrictions are not just personal struggles, but also a result of power relations that expect women to take care of the family while working. Yet, women teachers try to resist and reshape these expectations by managing both spaces and creating new meanings of being an English language teacher and a woman.

Caught in Gendered Constraints But Moving Forward

The lived experiences of these women teachers demonstrate that their sense of self develops through continuous interaction with social, cultural, and institutional structures. Their identities evolve as they engage with these contexts and respond to gendered expectations. Wenger (1998) views identity as socially formed through mutual relations, and Menard-Warwick (2004) emphasizes that gender negotiation plays a key role in this process. Our identities are shaped by gender, which, in turn, is influenced by sociocultural norms and expectations. However, drawing on Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, gender is not an inherent or biologically determined trait but rather a set of behaviors, actions, and performances that are socially constructed and repeatedly enacted within specific cultural contexts. Tamboukou (2000) states that "women's identities follow a different trajectory than men's to gender issues, especially in contests like education, language teaching, migration, or professional development. Gender discrimination was once widely accepted as a social norm in Nepal. Although there have been gradual improvements in how male colleagues perceive women, the change has not been significant. The field of teaching has not remained untouched by such gendered attitudes. Women teachers are often preferred for lower grades, as these classes demand emotional qualities such as care, love, and sympathy more than

subject knowledge. Additionally, women teachers are often persuaded to work for lower pay. Our research participants are secondary-level English language teachers and university-level teachers, also holding leadership positions. The narratives of Jasoda, Manita, and Sadhana reflect the strength and determination of women educators navigating gendered challenges in their professional lives. Each of them, in their own way, has demonstrated resilience in environments shaped by a male-dominated society. Regarding gender discrimination in the workplace, our research participant, Manita, shared her experience when she was engaged solely as a secondary-level English language teacher.

I was ready to take on all the complex tasks, even working extra hours at my workplace. However, my principal did not select me for the professional development opportunities. Only the Vice Principal, sir, was prioritized because he is his own brother.

Manita was also excluded from important decision-making with regard to organizational welfare. Mutiso (2012) suggests that despite having graduate degrees, women still face discrimination and limited opportunities for employment, promotion, and upward mobility due to societal expectations of their roles as housewives. She added that a particularly painful moment occurred when she was denied the examination allowance by the coordinator, who blamed her for not contributing, although she had equally contributed. The Vice Principal publicly insulted her, saying, “*Tero aukat k chha?*” [“What’s your worth?”]. She felt that if she were a man, he would not have dared to say that. Additionally, she belonged to the Madhesi community, a marginalized group, and as a result, she felt that she faced ethnic discrimination. Similarly, Sadhana shared her experience:

I currently hold a leadership position among a group of lecturers throughout my district. However, many of the male members in the committee do not listen to me or take my decisions seriously. They make it even more difficult for me to carry out my responsibilities because they clearly prefer men in leadership roles.

Sadhana was deeply hurt when she heard that one of the male members had said, “*Pothi baseko ramro hudaina*” (It is not good when a hen crows). It has a contextual meaning, which means that it is not appropriate for a woman to take the lead. This phrase reflects patriarchal attitudes and often undermines women’s authority or discourages their leadership. She further shared, “*I have to work twice as hard to prove myself that I am equally competent to males*”. As a woman, we admire Sadhana’s determination to take on a leadership role. Her efforts to challenge the constraints of a male-dominated society and her perseverance in overcoming struggles to establish herself as a woman in the field of English language teaching were praiseworthy. Jasoda also shared a similar predicament regarding the gender issue. She shared: “*In my school, there is a kind of culture where male teachers’ voices are prioritized, being female, I often feel invisible*”. Even though she proposed good ideas, they were either ignored or later taken by male colleagues as their own. Whenever she had ideas for the betterment of the organization, she was discouraged by her male coworkers underestimating her thoughts. However, she put her thoughts in louder voices. Davis and Skilton-Sylvester (2004) argued that examining gender discrimination also means refusing to tolerate inequitable practices operating within educational institutions and professional organizations. A post-structural perspective highlights that identity is not seen as fixed or biologically determined, but rather as constructed through discourse, power relations, and social practices (Weedon, 1997; Butler, 1990). Women English language teachers’ experiences of being excluded from leadership, treated as mere listeners, or judged as overspoken when expressing their views reflect how gendered power structures shape discourse in educational institutions.

Consequently, these narratives highlight how gendered challenges persist in education settings. Despite the challenges they face, such as insults, exclusion from decision-making, and less value in leadership roles, Manita, Sadhana, and Jasuda continue to demonstrate their resilience and establish themselves as women leaders and educators, challenging traditionally held social expectations of women.

Conclusion and Implication

This study explored how women English language teachers experience and navigate their personal and professional lives within the teaching profession. From these lived experiences of distinguished women scholars, we can conclude that the identities of women teachers are influenced by multiple elements, such as gender roles and social inequalities. After examining their stories, we realize that we should challenge outdated ideas and create empowering, inclusive situations for women teachers. This study focuses on the stories of three women teachers who have resisted an unfair system and prepared themselves for the upcoming challenge. For example, Manita not only faced gender discrimination but also ethnic discrimination and nepotism at her workplace. Even though the school management community did not appreciate her hard work and contributions, she remains determined to improve the educational institution.

Similarly, other research participants, Sadhana and Jasuda, challenged the patriarchal system supporting their families to overall growth and development before marriage and after marriage. Jasuda's determination to become an English language teacher dates back to her childhood, when she dreamed of securing a job, inspired by her mother's difficulties with household work. She challenged our traditionally assigned role of women as housekeepers, creating a path for herself in a professional career. She also fulfilled her parents' desire for a son by handling the challenging responsibilities thrust upon the family. At the same time, the stories of these participants reveal that they sought help from the teaching profession to break free from the confines of their families and prove themselves as independent individuals.

Manita redefined traditional perceptions by demonstrating that women can not only possess the nurturing and caring qualities associated with teaching but also exhibit decision-making capabilities in a leadership position, such as principal, proving their all-rounder capabilities. Both Manita and Sadhana continued their further education to remain updated and adapt to the demands of the teaching profession, proving themselves to be equally competent as their male counterparts. Women teachers faced multiple challenges and hindrances while evolving and growing as women teachers in their careers. Despite their difficulties, they continue to challenge the social belief that women belong in the private sphere and men in the public sphere.

This study contributes to a small but growing body of TESOL research projects that use narrative inquiry to "present experience holistically in all complexity and richness" (Bell, 2002, p. 209). Our research paper not only advocates for gender equity but also empowers women teachers to enhance their professional development. The stories collected from women English language teachers focus on the resilience and coping strategies adopted by women teachers as they evolve in both their personal lives and the professional field. If we talk about the scenario of our country, women teachers remain in a marginalized category who request help in providing women-friendly policies from the government. We believe it will contribute to inspiring further research and bring meaningful change in the teaching field regarding women teachers' issues.

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