

# Reaching out to marginalised populations in under-resourced countries

Agnes Kukulska-Hulme, Saraswati Dawadi,  
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and Abdou Niane

An outcome of

  
**ReMaLiC**  
Reaching out to marginalised populations  
in under-resourced countries

In collaboration with

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# **Widening Participation**

Reaching out to marginalised populations in under-resourced countries

**Agnes Kukulska-Hulme, Saraswati Dawadi,  
Ram Ashish Giri, Mark Gaved, Rubina Khan,  
Amna Bedri, Kamal Raj Devkota and Abdou Niane**

# Executive summary

This report summarises findings from the gathering and analysis of primary data collected on the ReMaLIC project (*Reaching out to marginalised populations in under-resourced countries*). The study explored the ways in which young people aged 13–15 from marginalised communities in four low-income countries (LIC) in Africa and Asia (Bangladesh, Nepal, Senegal and Sudan) access technology and opportunities to learn English, and the ways in which schools, teachers and parents provide access and support children in their respective contexts. Access to technology and English language learning, and associated support, are governed by a mixture of factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, and affordability. The communities involved in the project are composed of students, their teachers, parents and schools. The data obtained from interviews, focus group discussions and class observations reveal that despite limitations in access, there is growing use of technology and English in the four countries, and the combined use of technology and English is becoming the prime way to seek information. This synopsis provides an analysis and some comparison of the technology- and English-using behaviours of the participants, who represent diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

The findings of the study have been organised into three themes: English language, technology and gender.

## English language

### English and its roles

- The target population of the project regards English as an essential language of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and education that enhances their learning.
- English is perceived favourably as indispensable for education, employment and better lives, as it plays a crucial and positive role in social mobility and survival in the globalised and interconnected world.
- As an important language of communication in formal and academic settings and a prerequisite for education and professional jobs, learning English is seen as a source of self-improvement and as a means of career success domestically as well as globally.

### English: Its relationship with technology

- English and technology are seen as complementary to each other as they are closely connected.
- Functional knowledge of English is extremely important because most digital devices require functional knowledge of English for the users to successfully operate them. English, thus, makes the use of technology easier, while technology facilitates the learning of English.
- Students could face challenges in using technology because of their low proficiency in English.
- However, some parents were of the opinion that it is not necessary to know English to use technology (for example, they could use Arabic).

### English and marginalisation

- Limited knowledge of English can be a barrier to use of technology, thereby limiting education.
- While the ability to use English earns respect and social prestige, not having adequate English is a barrier to employment and career progression and may jeopardise young people's chances of participating in mainstream life.

## Technology

### Attitudes towards technology

- Students expressed positive attitudes towards the use of technologies and recognised their importance in today's world. They believed technologies can facilitate their learning, make their lives easier and create better job opportunities.
- Teachers, parents and students expressed some negative attitudes towards technology and its possible misuses as well. Lack of know-how, together with practical problems such as electricity outages during class time and cost issues, could lead to negative attitudes. These attitudes could affect technology use and rules or customs around its use.

### Experiences of using technology

- Technology use is dependent on network and device availability.
  - Urban schools tended to have better digital access (networks and devices) than rural schools, but that was not always the case.
  - Few schools had networks that enabled students to use mobile digital devices. Some schools had networks only for teachers' use.
  - Where schools have a small computer lab with desktop computers, use of the lab was often infrequent, and students shared computers.
  - Access to devices and networks varied, with some children having their own devices, others borrowing from family members, and some drawing on extended social networks for internet connections. Students sometimes found ways to support their education both in and out of school, for example, by borrowing devices from friends. Some had access only at home.
- Technology use is also dependent on other factors such as skills, rules, and external events.
  - Students recognised that gaining the skills to effectively use devices is important.
  - Outside of school, students' use was affected by family rules. They may have access to technology only when they have school assignments.
  - The global pandemic accelerated the use of mobile technologies to support learning, for example, by using the Messenger instant messaging app.

## Gender roles

- Gender inequality in terms of access to technology at home exists in some families for social reasons though such inequality does not occur in schools. Some female students have fewer opportunities to use mobile phones at home than male students: girls have certain duties at home and may not be allowed to go to internet cafes.
- Parents are more concerned about how their daughters use technology than their sons. They put more restrictions on daughters in the use of mobile phones, particularly in Bangladesh and Nepal, and take extra measures to monitor how their daughters use technology.
- Girls and boys use technology for different purposes. Girls use it mainly for doing research and sharing content on social networks (for example, making videos for YouTube and TikTok), whereas boys use it for group chats with friends and playing online/video games.
- Findings related to gender equality in terms of students' opportunities to learn English are inconclusive, though a few examples suggest that male students get better opportunities to learn English than female students.
- Female students are perceived by teachers to be usually more active and motivated to learn English than male students. Furthermore, female students appear to have higher aspirations for their future and are therefore keener to learn than male students.

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# Research project team

This collaborative project involved researchers in the UK, Australia, and in partner universities in the four target countries:

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More people joined the team in phase two.

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For more information about the team and the project, please see our blog (<http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/REMaLIC/>) or contact Agnes Kukulska-Hulme (Agnes.Kukulska-Hulme@open.ac.uk)

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## Part 1

# Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the project

The ReMaLIC research project (*Reaching out to marginalised populations in under-resourced countries*) funded by the British Council, was part of their Widening Participation programme which aimed to facilitate the production of academic research in the context of Official Development Assistance (ODA). All research projects undertaken as part of the scheme had to be ODA compliant, with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as their main objective. The ReMaLIC project focused on four ODA countries: Bangladesh, Nepal, Senegal and Sudan. These four countries have faced similar challenges in reducing marginalisation in education. Marginalisation has been a significant phenomenon in all four contexts, particularly in certain remote and underdeveloped regions. The rationale for the selection of the four is described in further detail in Section 2.2 Participants and recruitment process.

Educational marginalisation has been defined in various ways and by using related terms. For instance, the term 'inequality' is used to indicate an unfair, favoured or biased distribution of learning facilities and resources (Messiou, 2012), while 'exclusion' is used to describe low participation of marginalised student communities in mainstream education (Mowat, 2015). Children can have low participation in, or be excluded from, education due to 'multiple

factors: sexual orientation, natural disaster, geography, ethnicity, religion, displacement, conflict or disability. Poverty is both a consequence and a cause of being marginalised' (UK Aid, 2017, p.1).

In order to explain educational marginalisation in our target countries, a two-point conceptual framework – access to learning (Spaull and Taylor, 2015) and zones of exclusion (Lewin and Little, 2011) – has been employed. Access to learning in low-income countries (LICs) refers to the educational policies and procedures through which schools ensure students of all backgrounds have equal and equitable opportunities to learn. As there are several educational, socio-cultural and personal factors involved and often intersecting, access to learning is measured through societal and institutional policies and systems put in place to ensure students' equal access and successful completion of learning. 'Zones of exclusion' enables understanding of inequalities in terms of learning opportunities. The model focuses on students who are 'silently excluded' for some reasons (Lewin, 2007, p. 10) and hence cannot continue learning or achieve the required level of knowledge or competence. For example, in the Bangladeshi education system, 'zones of exclusion' relate to students who (a) drop out of school, (b) work as child labour and have low attendance at school, (c) belong to a marginalised group (such as 'untouchables'), (d) do not have access to technology and digital devices at home, and (e) complete school education but learn very little because of barriers to learning opportunities at home and/or low attendance at school.

The ReMaLIC project has looked into three factors that contribute to educational marginalisation, namely gender, ICT and English, as common zones of exclusion or contributory factors to educational marginalisation across the target countries. For instance, the research literature indicates (Kirkpatrick, 2011; Meighan, 2023; Pennycook, 2013, 2020) that English, as the language of former colonial power, carries a hegemonic capacity and maintains dominance in economy, politics and education. As an instrument of power and a dominant language, it can marginalise speakers of minority and indigenous languages. In most of South Asia, for example, despite the fact that the nation-states have their own national languages, speakers of English are relatively privileged. They aspire to high level bilingualism with English in order to have full access to national life and to participate in the global sphere. Speakers of minority and/or indigenous languages are triply marginalised because they are one step removed from participation at the national level, and two steps removed from access to international resources (Mohanty, 2010; Tom-Lawyer and Thomas, 2019).

Similarly, even though ICT (Information and Communication Technology) provision is seen as a positive contribution to education, enhancing teaching and learning for children (for example, UNESCO, 2015), in reality, access to ICT varies, and it can create barriers to effective engagement as households may not be able to afford the right device or network provision. Often, those already marginalised in society are the most likely to be further excluded or disadvantaged when ICT is added to educational provision, as they find themselves least favoured in access and least able to participate. While digital divide discourses emphasise that access is only the first of several layers that may exclude or enable full digital participation (Loh and Chib, 2021), this 'first level divide' is often the easiest to measure and most often analysed and reported. ICT provisions

may also vary geographically, and economically vulnerable groups are least able to use personal resources to overcome shortfalls in educational provision. Further factors that may impact the access and use of ICT include lack of training, teacher/family support, lack of ambition, and cultural factors.

Furthermore, girls in most LICs are exposed to different forms of social inequality issues, gender-based violence, biases, gender stereotypes, and discriminatory gender norms which create a barrier to their education or career development (Paul, 2019). In many South Asian developing contexts as well as in some African nations, girls are more likely to be out of school (GEC, 2018). Reasons for this vary and are considered to be a consequence of socio-economic factors. These factors include poverty (financial constraints), religious beliefs, early marriage, lack of gender responsive curricula and teenage pregnancy (Buckler et al., 2022). The disadvantaged girls are those who come from poor families, are from internally displaced families, are victims of violence, live in remote villages, and/or have special needs. Despite the rhetoric of educational benefits for girls and governmental initiatives to bring them into mainstream education, girls and boys are often subject to differential treatment (Rodgers and Nairn, 2021). Without education, these girls are deprived not only of life chances but also of a secure future. Furthermore, technology seems to remain a heavily gendered space. As Tam et al. (2020) point out, gender stereotyping in ICT is a long-standing issue in most LIC countries. Girls have fewer opportunities to learn about ICT, and this affects their education overall. Consequently, they may have lower self-efficacy and interest in using technology (Bao et al., 2013). This, in turn, might negatively affect their learning practices and academic achievement, and limit their future career opportunities.

## 1.2 Literature on marginalisation in education

Literature reviewed for the purpose of this project suggests that language and technology contribute to educational marginalisation. The speakers of dominant languages, such as the national languages and/or English, receive more attention and better services than those of the indigenous/minority languages. Similarly, digital technologies, combined with English, add another layer to the risk of being disadvantaged.

### Languages

This section provides a brief review of some of the available literature examining social and educational forms of language- and technology-based disadvantages faced by children in low-income countries. The literature indicates that inequality and marginalisation, as multidimensional concepts, are discussed in terms of how they are perceived, experienced and constructed. Inequalities within communities mean that individuals in these communities are perceived as lacking desirable linguistic and/or digital traits that result in the exclusion of such individuals from existing systems, thereby limiting their means of accessing learning resources and life opportunities. In terms of experiences, exclusion or marginalisation is a process by which a group or individual is denied access to deserving positions and socio-economic, lingual-cultural or educational opportunities (Marshall, 1997). As to the construction of marginalisation, Messiou (2012) has noted that it is constructed and exercised at individual, group and community levels. Perceptions, experiences and constructions are all factors in 'access to learning' (Spaull and Taylor, 2015, p. 134), which refers to the educational policies and procedures through which schools ensure students of all backgrounds have equal and equitable opportunities to learn. As there are many educational, socio-cultural as well as personal factors involved and often intersecting, access to learning is measured through societal and institutional policies and systems put in place to ensure students' equal access and successful completion of learning.

Minority or indigenous languages that are not used or taught within education systems are variously denigrated as languages of the backward, the

uncivilised and the uneducated, while national languages, along with English as a global language, have become the languages of the economy, power and politics (Liddicoat and Heugh, 2014). When a language is not recognised for a certain function or not accorded space in the linguistic landscape of a context, it is marginalised. Speakers of these minority or indigenous languages are, by default, denied equal access, discriminated against or oppressed. Language discrimination may include any action or attitude, conscious or unconscious, that subordinates individuals or groups of individuals based on their language. Subordination, which normally consists of being placed in or occupying a lower class, rank or position, can be enacted individually or institutionally (Tollefson, 1991). The subordination model focuses on children who are 'silently excluded' from education for these reasons (Lewin, 2007, p. 10) and hence cannot continue learning or achieve the required level of knowledge or competence. Therefore, to be excluded or marginalised is to be limited in scope and space, which also involves discrimination as well as rejection, omission, and isolation.

As far as English is concerned, as the former colonial language and the language of economic, political and educational dominance, it often becomes an instrument of power that serves to marginalise speakers of local languages in post-colonial states (Liddicoat and Heugh, 2014). For example, in India, although speakers of Hindi, the national language, are relatively privileged, they aspire to a high-level bilingualism in both Hindi and English in order to enjoy full citizenship and to participate in the global sphere. Speakers of regional (state) languages are one step removed from participation at the national level, and two steps removed from access to international possibilities. Coleman (2011) demonstrates that access to the international language, English, in countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan is limited to students from middle class homes in private schools. Although lower income families do all in their power to facilitate students' access to English, there are socio-political constraints and ill-fitting educational programmes that result in the further marginalisation of students who do not have efficient access to English education. Those already marginalised in society are the most likely to be further excluded and disadvantaged when ICT is added to educational provision, with device and internet/telecoms access posing several layers or barriers – including the use of English – that may exclude or enable full digital participation (Loh and Chib, 2021).

## Technologies

There has been a rapid increase in the adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) or digital technology in education, even in some of the remotest areas of developing countries (Huang and Chiu, 2015). Technology has often been found to exert a positive influence on students' knowledge, skills and attitudes, and it can also help bring reformation in pedagogy, school innovation and community services (Kozma, 2005). However, several challenges have been reported (Dawadi et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021; Laudari and Maher, 2019; Lee and Sparks, 2014; Rana et al. 2021) that impede the use of technologies in schools. In LICs there is a clear rural and urban distinction in how schools use technologies, making location a significant factor in differences in technology use. Furthermore, children from disadvantaged communities in these countries are limited in their access to technology to support their education. The key barrier is cost, though there are other significant challenges, including linguistic, social and cultural barriers. More recent developments like smartphones and the internet may be harder to access for poorer, more marginalised communities.

Scholars have identified barriers to using ICT in education in under-resourced contexts at several levels. Khan et al. (2021), for example, identified that the barriers included lack of supported ICT infrastructure, insufficient funds, and lack of proper plans to integrate technology in education, which can be grouped into school level barriers. Laudari and Maher (2019) described barriers at multiple levels. They found that school level barriers included absence of ICT infrastructure, old or poorly maintained hardware, and lack of suitable educational software. Teacher level barriers were lack of ICT skills among teachers, lack of teacher confidence, lack of

time, and lack of pedagogical teacher training. System level barriers also affected the use of technology in education; these barriers included pedagogical approaches, assessment regimes and the school's bureaucratic organisational structure. In addition, they mentioned corruption practices such as misuse of government funds, which can be considered a system level barrier.

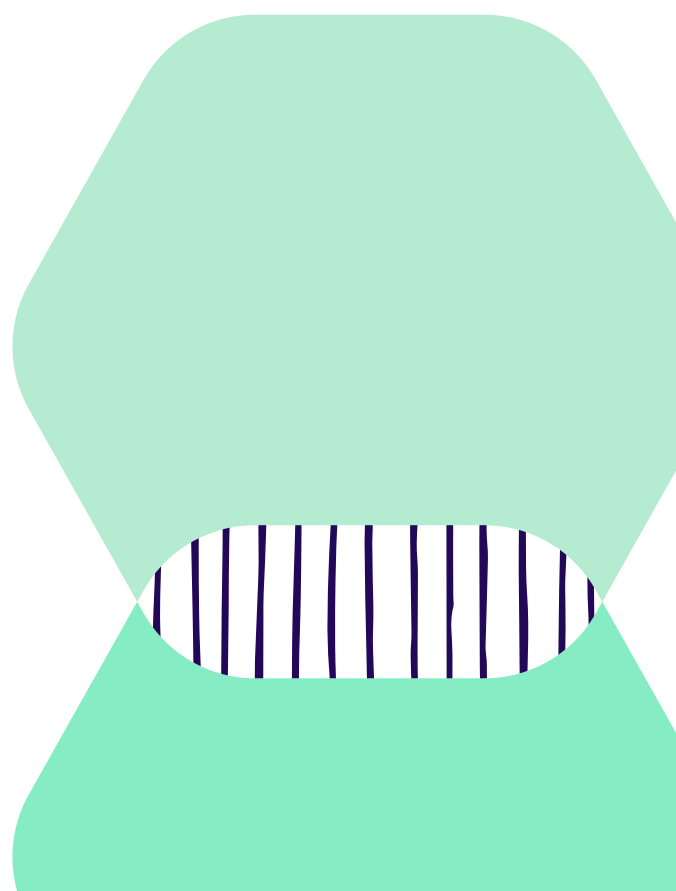
However, rigorous studies to evaluate the impacts of ICTs in educational settings in developing countries, particularly in LICs, are limited (Laudari and Maher, 2019). The available literature generally points out the constraints and limitations under which developing countries use technology in education. Subedi (2020) contends that a society can be polarised due to technology and making technology accessible to all is a significant challenge. Rana et al. (2019) suggest that ICT impact on learner outcomes vary, while the perception of various stakeholders is mostly positive. Other scholars argue that schools in developing contexts are making changes beyond just the use of new tools; they are developing new practices and new beliefs about learning, new strategies to engage with content and novel ICT tools for learning (Dawadi et al., 2020).

To sum up, the literature indicates that ICTs and English are contributory factors to the divides and systemic inequalities in LICs. Their access and usage vary, and barriers to effective engagement are multifaceted. Often, those already marginalised in society are the most likely to be further excluded and disadvantaged when ICT is added to educational provision. What the literature does not generally show are the actual educational experiences of marginalised young people in disadvantaged communities. This is the gap our research aimed to fill.

## 1.3 Introduction to the research contexts

The four research contexts — Bangladesh, Nepal, Senegal, and Sudan — though they have their own unique characteristics, may be divided into two groups in terms of their commonality of research issues. Nepal and Bangladesh, both present a complex picture of marginalisation. In these South Asian countries, social, cultural, economic, educational, and linguistic factors deeply intersect in marginalising a large section of the population (Chavez, et al., 2020; Khanal, 2017; Sah and Li, 2020). For instance, educational marginalisation in both of these countries is deeply associated with culturally constructed caste/class categories, gender stereotypes, and linguistic hierarchy. The people of the lower strata of the social hierarchy, namely *Dalit* or untouchables, are discriminated against in more than one way. They are not only treated differently in social settings, but at the same time, they are denied equal access to educational provisions and opportunities (Devkota, 2018). Similarly, uneven school policies and pedagogies built up around private vs. public schooling practices, and unequal English learning opportunities in school spaces, have forced many children, especially those from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds, to experience social inequality.

Gender is another social dimension connected to marginalisation in these contexts. Looking into how young girls in Nepal access education, Chavez et al. (2020) make an appeal to expand their access to literacy, numeracy and life skills, and argue that the traditional understanding of adolescent girls' roles solely to take care of siblings, home and family has seriously marginalised them. Thus, marginalisation needs to be understood as a 'mosaic' of social, cultural, educational, economic, linguistic and digital inequalities. Sometimes, these factors intersect in several ways while shaping life and learning opportunities.





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Senegal and Sudan also present educational marginalisation as a multisectoral phenomenon as social, cultural, economic, educational, and linguistic factors intersect deeply, marginalising a large section of the population (Mfum-Mensah, 2018; UK Aid, 2018). Even though gender stereotyping seems to be diminishing in these two African countries, girls' education is challenging for many reasons. From an early age, children learn about the sexual division of labour and roles, i.e. girls are family helpers, and the boys are financial supports of the family or engage in agricultural activities to help their fathers. Despite some attitudinal changes towards gender roles, the image of a woman as a wife, mother and housewife (Odaga and Heneveld, 1996) is still relevant. Some parents in Senegal, for example, especially in remote areas, consider that girls do not need to go to school, since a woman's ultimate and natural duty is to marry and have children (COSDPE, 2021).

Geographic remoteness and food insecurity caused by climate change and internal conflicts are contributory factors to educational marginalisation (UNESCO, 2020a), along with uneven access to technology and learning resources. There is a digital divide between the haves and have-nots (Dia, 2013), with the majority of the population in low-income contexts on the wrong side of the divide (Upadhyay, 2020). Although the class division, gender stereotypes and linguistic hierarchy are less visible in Senegal and Sudan than in Nepal and Bangladesh, education has largely failed to include the history, language, and culture of the ethnic minorities and therefore it mainly serves to indoctrinate youth with a hegemonic national identity (Breidlid, 2013; Plonski, Teferra and Brady, 2013; Tom-Lawyer and Thomas, 2019).



The four ReMaLIC project countries, although situated on two different continents (Bangladesh and Nepal in the South Asian region of Asia, and Senegal and Sudan in Sub-Saharan Africa), are similar in linguistic setup in several respects. First of all, all four nations are multilingual, with several languages as national and regional lingua francas. In Bangladesh, for example, Bangla, Arabic, Urdu, and Hindi are among the 36 or more local languages that are used in various socio-economic or socio-cultural lives of Bangladeshis, with Bangla as their sole official/national language since the 1970s (Sultana, 2024). Other indigenous languages are either not officially recognised or not in the education system. Similarly, Nepal is linguistically one of the most diverse nations in the region. Nepali, the language of the elite, is the only official/national language and medium of

instruction. Though 16 other languages are given some space in basic education, Nepali (along with English) remains the preferred language in education (Shrestha, et al., 2024). On the other side of the globe, Senegal has 36 African languages, but French is the official language and other lingua francas include Wolof, Serer, Fula, Diola, and Mande. Of the 21 languages that are officially recognised as national languages, the majority are not part of their education system. Sudan's two official languages, namely Arabic and English, are the two most dominant and compulsory languages of their bilingual education system. Though the number of languages indigenous to Sudan is estimated at a hundred and fourteen, none of them are officially recognised or given space in education (Schleicher 2014; UNESCO, 2020b; UNICEF, 2020).



Secondly, all four countries have experienced some form of colonisation. While Bangladesh, Senegal, and Sudan have faced external colonisation, Nepal has undergone internal colonisation. As part of their colonisation strategies, the colonisers adopted what is known as the 'language reduction strategy' which promoted the languages of their choice and restricted the use and education of other indigenous languages. As a consequence, most indigenous languages are either extinct or on the verge of extinction (Mohanty, 2017; Mohanty and Skutnabb-Kangas, 2022).

Additionally, although literacy rates and enrolment have gone up in all four countries, the standards of English remain low due to inadequate resources and poor infrastructure. This is reflected in their sharp decline in the global English Proficiency Index (Sultana, 2024). According to Khan (2024), English is a subject of study as well as a medium of instruction. English as a subject is often introduced at an early level of education and is increasingly adopted as a medium of instruction in many core subject areas at all levels of education. Finally, the increasing trend of monolingualism (either with English or the national language), bilingualism (with English), or translanguaging between English and the local lingua franca indicates the colonial influence and politico-ideological impact on education in all four countries (Bisai and Singh, 2019; Cenoz and Gorter, 2021). Skills in the national language and English are expected to provide better career prospects and choices. However, not all students have equal opportunity to learn the language and it seems that boys have more access to English education than girls in many contexts. In Nepal and Bangladesh, for example, boys are perceived to be caretakers in their parents' old age and are sent to private, English medium schools (Devkota, 2018). Girls, on the other hand, are considered to be a liability and are educated in general, vernacular schools (Sosnowski, 2021). As a result of increasing preference, English displaces local languages and according to Liddicoat and Heugh (2014), as the former colonial language, it is used as the language of economic, political, and educational dominance. As an instrument of power, English serves to marginalise speakers of indigenous languages (Erling, Adinolfi, and Hultgren 2017; Giri, 2019).



## 1.4 Research questions and report structure

The ReMaLIC project aimed to capture the experiences of marginalised young people in the contexts of their school and family settings, with a focus on technology and the English language and an interest in whether gender plays a part in their experiences. It was important to understand their experiences in relation to access to technology for education (including English language education), as well as dominant attitudes of marginalised students, their teachers and parents towards technology and English. Lastly, the project sought to capture any strategies employed by the students, teachers, and parents that could help reduce marginalisation and provide better opportunities for learning.

The project was therefore guided by the following research questions:

RQ1. What **access** do marginalised students, teachers and parents have to technology that may be used for educational purposes?

RQ2. What are marginalised students', teachers' and parents' **attitudes** towards the role of technology and the English language in their career progression?

RQ3. What are the **experiences** of the groups (students, teachers, parents) in **using technology** for student learning?

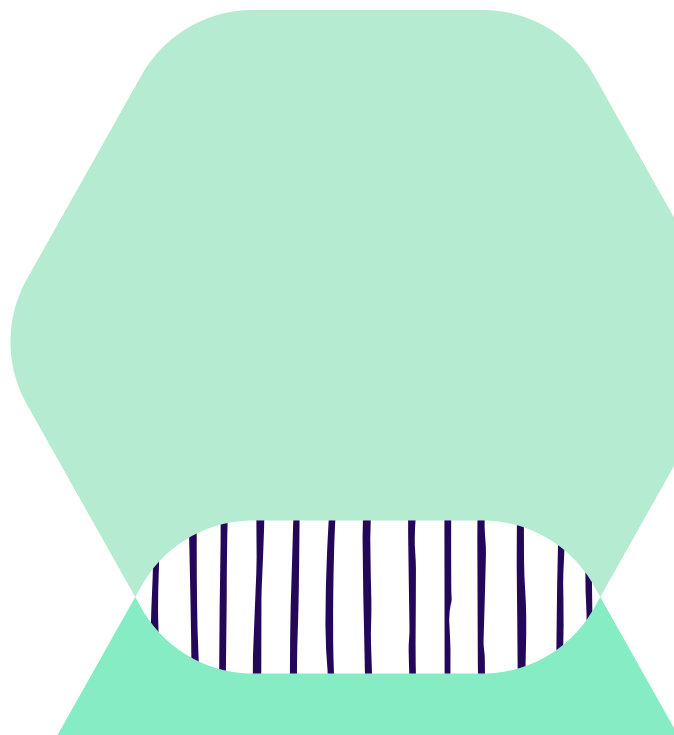
- a) To what extent do they use technology for student learning?
- b) What factors affect girls' opportunity and motivation to use technology in support of their education?
- c) Is there gender equity and equality in technology use?

RQ4. What are the **experiences** of the groups (students, teachers, parents) in **using English** for student learning?

- a) To what extent do they use English and other languages for student learning?
- b) What factors affect girls' opportunity and motivation to learn and use English?
- c) Is there gender equity and equality in English language learning and use?

RQ5. What **strategies** do the students, teachers, and parents suggest that can be employed to reduce marginalisation and provide better opportunities for learning?

- a) What strategies are associated with the use of technologies?
- b) What strategies are associated with the use of English in education?





In the following sections, we present the methods used in the study, covering our theoretical stance, ethical aspects of the study, participants, research tools, data collection and analysis. Next, we present our research findings. The findings are organised into five sections. In each section, general findings from all the four research countries are presented, followed by country-specific examples. The project's key findings were used to plan and carry out diverse impact activities in each of the countries with the aim of influencing education policies and practices, for example, through discussions with policy makers and teacher training. These events and other initiatives organised by partners in each country are described in the section on impact activities. In the final part of the report, we consider the implications of our study and put forward recommendations for further research as well as key messages for concerned authorities and agencies that would be able to effect change in their countries.

## Part 2

# Research methodology

## 2.1 Theoretical stance and ethical processes

Employing Activity Theory (Engeström, 1999) as a theoretical lens to design the research, the ReMaLIC project worked with children, their parents and teachers ('subjects' in terms of Activity Theory), and their access to tools (technology and English) to explore the interactions or relationships between rules or social norms, community and division of labour. Such interactions may produce a range of contradictions which are a driving force for change. We used semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion (FGD) as our main methods of data collection to facilitate conversation and participant engagement. The methods are informed by Creswell (1998) who argues that a qualitative researcher 'builds a complex holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting' (p.15).

Furthermore, having considered Lansdown's (2004) argument that researchers often misjudge children's voices because 'they assess children from an adult

perspective and through an adult filtering process which diminishes children's contribution' (p.5), we wanted to fully understand the situation of the marginalised children and enable their voices to be heard. Hence, during the data collection, our focus was on creating an environment that enables children to express their views freely to an adult researcher. Indeed, we made every effort not to impose our views on our research participants, but to encourage them to share their lived experiences of using technology and the English language in their learning. All the local researchers that were involved in fieldwork activities were trained to understand this perspective and to ensure that the research met high ethical standards.

The study was carried out in accordance with the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018) and ethical approval for the conduct of the study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at The Open University. The research team made intentional efforts to protect the participants of the study from any kind of possible harm in relation to their participation in this study. Measures were taken to protect their safety, privacy and confidentiality.

## 2.2 Participants and recruitment process

The British Council call was for research in ODA (Official Development Assistance) designated countries in different regions across the world. The research locales were chosen in four LICs, two in Asia (Bangladesh and Nepal) and two in Africa (Senegal and Sudan), offering a range of situations, contexts, and experiences to be explored.

In **Bangladesh**, 18.7 per cent of the population live below the poverty line (World Bank, 2023). Bangladeshi schoolteachers have poor levels of English, which has a knock-on effect on the overall quality of English language instruction at schools. This is reflected in the sharp decline of Bangladesh in the global English Proficiency Index. Furthermore, gender inequality still exists between male and female students at home and at school. Many rural areas have minimal access to the internet and educational resources.

**Nepal's** geographic variation makes access to education difficult and resource distribution uneven. Internet service providers are almost non-existent in the outlying hilly and mountainous regions and there are high data charges for mobile phones (Phuyal, 2020). Socio-cultural hierarchy restricts girls' access to participation in educational opportunities and

facilities (Cunningham and D'Arcy, 2017).

**Senegal** is classified by the United Nations (UN) as a least developed country (LDC). Every second household with children lives in poverty (<https://www.unicef.org/senegal/en/children-senegal>). Many girls do not have access to education because of social contingencies such as early marriages and ideas transmitted from generation to generation which stipulate that women should stay at home. English is often a third or other language for children, after local mother tongues and national languages (e.g., Wolof, Diola, Serere); and the official language, French. Only 34.1 per cent of schools have access to electricity (Gray et al., 2021) which limits access to ICT in education.

**Sudan** has struggled with war, poverty, and political and tribal conflicts, which have negative effects on the provision of educational services. Private education caters for 48 per cent of basic education and prospects are limited by families' economic capacity. Gender discriminatory attitudes among parents and families are reported as a key barrier to adolescent girls' educational attainment. Digital literacy is low among teachers, education officials and students and access to quality internet connectivity in schools is rare (World Bank, 2021).

The selection also drew pragmatically on the Open University's research team's existing access and research contacts.

Since the project aimed at capturing marginalised children's and their parents' and teachers' lived experiences of using technology and accessing education in developing contexts, it was important to ensure that we collected data from marginalised communities. Hence, we targeted such communities in each research country. In Sudan, participants were from the suburbs of Omdurman (inhabited mostly by war-displaced people) and White Nile (nomadic tribes and Hausa); in Senegal, the research took place in Taïba Moutoupha and Ndindy, where the GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) for girls is the lowest, and the dropout rate for both girls and boys is the highest; in Bangladesh, we were able to involve slum children in an urban area and in Bandearban, a remote part of the country where the literacy rate is 34 per cent; while in Nepal, participants were from a squatter community (urban setting), and the Tharu ethnic community in a rural location.

In each country, four state schools (two from rural and two from urban settings) were purposively selected and then Grade 8 students (aged 13–15 years) in these four schools were selected using the following criteria:

- They are 8<sup>th</sup> Graders
- They have little or no access to technology at school
- At least 50 per cent are female
- Parents are illiterate or simply literate (i.e. with low education).



In addition, one or two other criteria were used in each country. For instance, in the context of Nepal, the added criterion was: *'At least 10 per cent belong to Dalit families'* and in Senegal it was: *'At least 50 per cent of students are Wolof'*. A total of a hundred and sixty students (40 from each country, ten in each school) took part in this study. Additionally, the students' parents (n=64, 16 from each country) participated in this study. In each country, parents were purposively selected by using the following criteria:

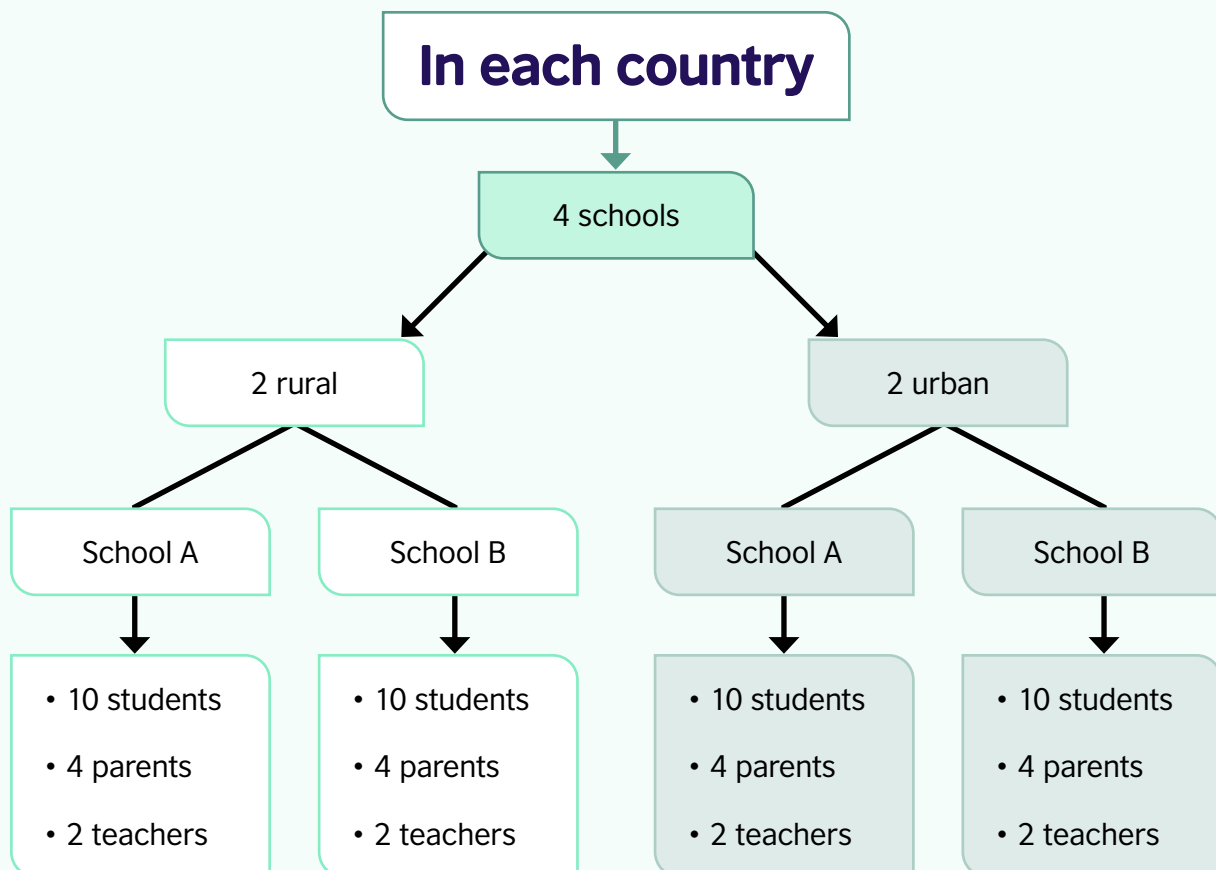
- They are the parents of children who took part in the focus group discussions.
- They represent a range of occupations, e.g., farmers, teachers, business owners, housekeepers, rickshaw pullers, seamstresses, labourers in the Middle East, domestic help.
- Half of them are from an urban context and the other half from a rural setting.
- Gender balance.

A total of 32 teachers (eight from each country) also participated in this study. They were selected by using the following criteria:

- Teachers of different subjects: one teaching English, one teaching a different subject where some English is used (for teaching and/or in software programs used for teaching and learning).
- Teachers to be interviewed are those whose classes have been observed.
- Gender balance.

A total of two hundred and fifty-six participants (64 from each country) therefore took part in this research. Figure 1 summarises participant information.

Figure 1: Research participants





## 2.3 Research tools

Three main tools were used for the data collection: Interview prompts, classroom observation schedules and FGD guidelines. Researchers also kept field notes.

## 2.4 Processes of data collection

Five main data collection procedures were followed in each country:

- First, the research team (team members in their respective countries) selected schools and participants for the study.
- Second, observations of two classes of each teacher took place.
- Third, FGDs (n=2 in each of the schools) were conducted with students. Each FGD included five student participants. They were chosen using the recruitment criteria mentioned.
- Fourth, eight of the FGD students (one from each FGD) were each invited for a follow up individual interview. They were selected on the basis that they showed more interest and seemed to have more to contribute to the study.
- Fifth, teachers and parents took part in individual interviews.

## 2.5 Data analysis

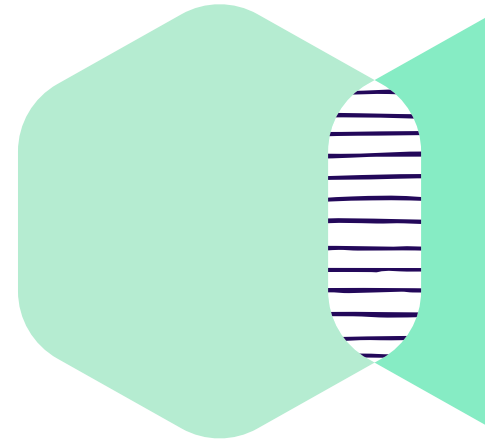
All the FGDs and interviews were transcribed and translated into English for the analysis, and the responses along with classroom observation notes were coded into themes employing a semi-directed thematic analysis approach. The approach is semi-directed since the coding scheme followed activity theory (Engeström, 1999) domains which guided this study. However, this does not mean that the coding overlooked aspects of interviews that are not covered by the framework. Thus, while being directed by activity theory, the coding was open to new categories. Activity theory codes included: access (to technology), community of practice, division of labour, rules (on using digital tools and the English language) and contradictions/challenges. Two new codes were added: attitudes towards the English language and technology, and strategies suggested by participants to reduce marginalisation and provide better opportunities for learning. Nevertheless, a few other sub-nodes emerged through the analysis as we also followed inductive coding.

As thematic analysis is an iterative process (Braun and Clarke, 2021), NVivo 12 was employed to systematically organise the themes emerging through the analysis. To minimise subjectivity of coding and to increase reliability of the findings, 16 interviews/FGDs (nearly 10 per cent of the data) were independently coded by a project team member and an independent researcher. The mean percentage agreement of 92.5 per cent showed a good reliability level.



## Part 3

# Findings



Findings of this study have been organised into five sections. In each section, general findings from all the four countries are presented, with some country specific examples.

### 3.1 Access to technology

Findings indicate that almost all the households included in our study in the target countries have access to some forms of technology. Students mentioned having smartphones (at least one), radio and televisions: *We have a television (TV) at home. We watch programs. There is also a phone* (student in Senegal); *We have a TV and many phones in our house* (student in Sudan). We also found that in the families where there is limited access to technology, parents lend phones to their children to access the internet and students reported sharing devices with their parents or siblings. However, in the context of Senegal, two of the students reported not having access to any form of technology at home: *Unfortunately, these tools or devices [digital devices] that you have just mentioned are not available to our children* (parents in Senegal).

The households that do not have access to the internet borrow or buy internet time from their neighbours: *I have connected with the neighbours. Network is not working properly these days* (parents in Nepal). In comparison to students and parents, teachers reported to have better access to technology and the internet at home. Phones are the most frequently mentioned devices for connecting to networks though some teachers have access to multiple devices with a laptop and smart TV.

There is little school-provided technology in most contexts in our study. This was particularly true of schools in Sudan: *At this school, we do not have technology; we primarily rely on textbooks only. [...]* *The only available technology is our mobile phones* (teacher in Sudan). However, eleven of the schools reported to have multiple devices; school owned devices include laptops, PCs, tablets, and overhead projectors. Nevertheless, such devices are usually available only for teachers or administrators, and not students, in schools: *There are computers in the principal's office, but we students don't have access to them, it's for the administration's work* (student in Senegal).

Network access at school varies. While four of the teachers report no internet access, the rest of them report that they can access the internet on their own mobile phones. There are no internet facilities for students in most schools, and in one Bangladeshi school, there is a fixed landline internet connection connecting computers in laboratories but no Wi-Fi. The quality of the internet access can also vary: *Since many devices are connected to the internet connection, it is slow* (teacher in Nepal). In some schools, there are computers with no internet connection: *At school there are computers but there is no connection* (teacher in Senegal).

There are some indications that students and parents usually do not have access to technology outside school or outside the home: *I don't use mobile phones outside home* (student in Bangladesh); *No, we don't use technology outside the school* (student in Sudan). Two of the parents regretted being unable to educate their children in technology. For instance, one of the mothers said: *If there was any facility to use computers, I would send my daughter to learn too* (parent in Bangladesh).

## 3.2 Attitudes towards the role of technology and the English language in career progression

This section first analyses the participants' attitudes towards the role of technology in career progression, and then investigates their attitudes towards English. Each group's views have been discussed in separate paragraphs.

### 3.2.1 Attitudes towards the role of technology in career progression

Participants have a favourable attitude towards technology in that it helps them find information they need for education and will help them in employment. Despite their concerns about its potential misuse, they thought that technology either at home or at school is absolutely essential these days. They indicate three major benefits of using technology:

- Facilitating and/or improving learning. Some students think that it helps them understand the contents taught at school better: *The teacher may not explain the lesson clearly. So, we could use our phones to do research on Google so as to better understand the lesson* (student in Senegal). The students also think that technology helps them remember information: *We do not forget the story of the film we watched. We remember your words, but we do not remember the content our teacher teaches us* (student in Nepal).
- Making people's lives easier: *I want to learn about technology in order to benefit from it in our daily lives* (student in Sudan).
- Creating better job opportunities: *If we learn to use a computer, we could get a job easily* (student in Nepal).

However, lack of understanding of the effectiveness of integration of technology and proper know-how regarding its use leads teachers to have negative attitudes towards the use of technology for teaching. Some teachers hinted at a chaotic classroom atmosphere due to failure of the internet connection and/or electricity outage during class time. Some parents expressed negative attitudes mainly because of the cost associated with the use of technology and their concerns that their children may misuse it.

### 3.2.2 Attitudes towards the role of English in career progression

The data of the study mainly show that the attitudes children, their parents and teachers have towards the role of English are positive. There are social factors (e.g. peer groups, students' parents and their teachers) affecting students' attitudes positively. The positive attitudes towards learning English are largely driven by the desire of individuals to become bilingual, and/or bicultural. The prospects of better life opportunities domestically, as well as internationally, play a role in their instrumental attitude. Hence, the participants' attitudes towards English are guided by practical/utilitarian purposes, such as meeting the requirements for school or university, applying for a job, reading learning material, translation work or achieving higher social status, despite the fact that no social integration of the learner into a community using the target language takes place, or in some instances, is even desired.

Participants frequently expressed the view that functional knowledge of English is essential for the sake of using technology. Not knowing English at all can hamper using technology, as expressed by several students in a focus group in Sudan:

Student 1: *There are difficulties in using technology without English.*

Student 2: *It is difficult to use the computer if you don't know English.*

Student 4: *It is important to know English and then use the computer.* (Students in Sudan)

Functional knowledge of English is also important because it is required by most digital devices for the users to successfully operate them. English has become the language of technology, and it opens

avenues for education and economic success. Not knowing English can put people in difficult situations. A few participants reported that they are marginalised because of their low proficiency in English: *It is so important to learn English because if they learn how to speak and write in English language it makes them connected with the outside world. We are marginalised because we do not know how to speak the English language* (parent in Sudan).

Teachers also expressed concerns that they are in a disadvantaged position in using technology because of their low proficiency in English: *The use of technology, of course, needs the knowledge of technology. The English language is an integral component of technology. Having no knowledge of the English language represents a huge challenge for me when it comes to the use of technology* (teacher in Sudan).

To sum up, attitudes towards English are closely connected with learning the language. These attitudes may, in turn, influence success in learning English. In other words, while the learning experience children have in learning the language at school and at home determines their attitude, their attitudes towards the language are likely to determine how they are going to use the language at school and at home in the future. The participants interviewed for this project also expressed the view that English was instrumental for their career and educational progression, and consequently their better lives. In addition to its key role in social mobility, survival in the globalised and interconnected world, English is a prerequisite for advance education, research and employment as it is one of the *de facto* languages of communication in formal and academic settings. For them, English is a source of self-employment as well as well as a means of career success domestically as well as globally.

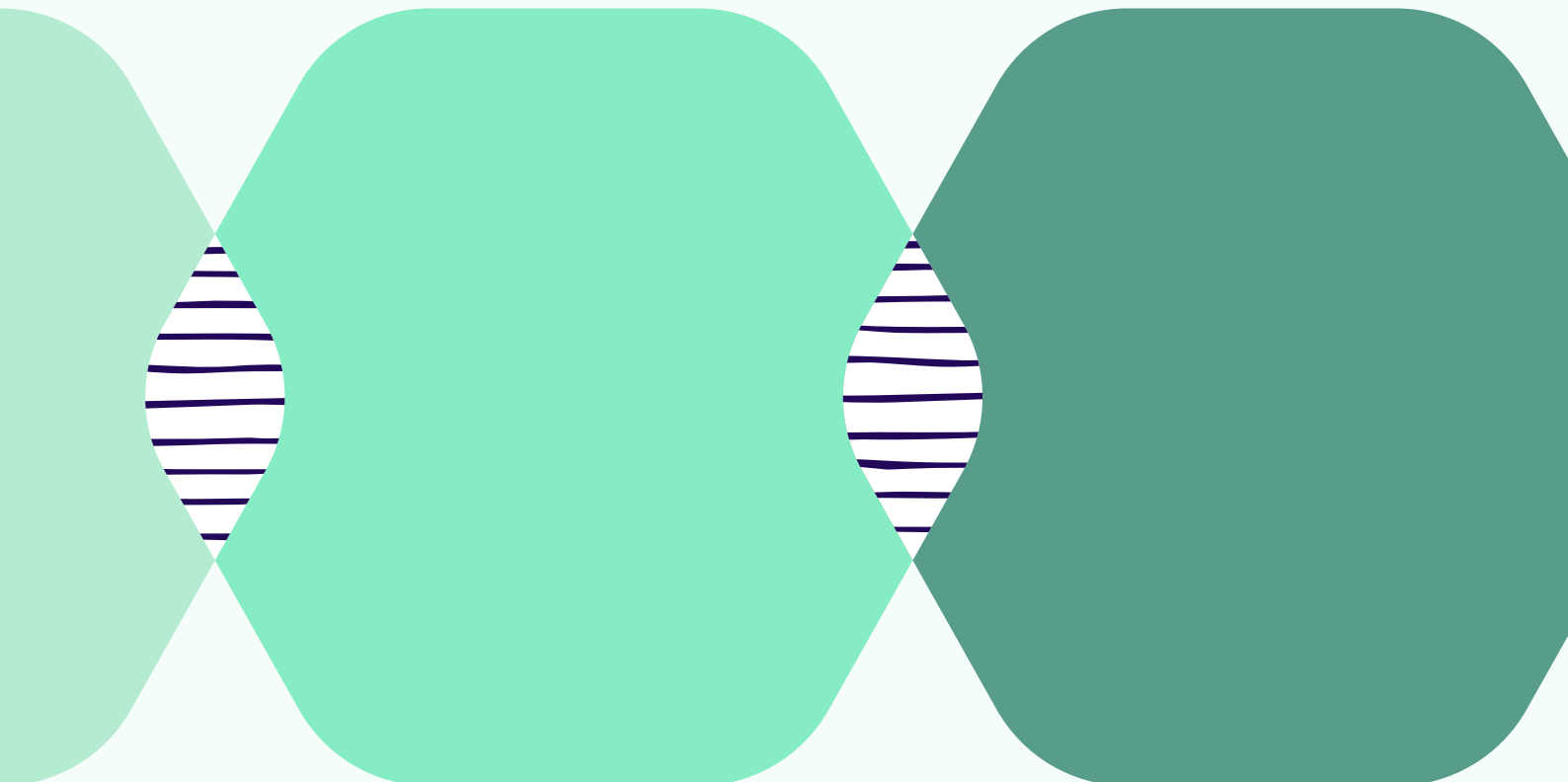
Children understand the value of English in their education and believe it will help them get a better job when they leave school. For example, for a Senegalese student, *Not knowing English can make it difficult for you to do research in English*. Similarly, a Bangladeshi student said, *If I don't know English, I can't use them, and if I can't use them, you won't get a good job*.

Parents echoed their children's views regarding the role of English in their educational and career progression. A parent from Bangladesh said, *My son has interest in learning English because English is needed for job and communicate with others*. This is in line with a parent from Nepal who said, *If my son had a better education, he would get a better job*. This parent was referring to education provided by the private schools in Nepal which are often English medium and supposedly provide 'better education'. Other parents from Nepal shared this sentiment by saying, *It is easier to get job opportunities. Even to do household works, they ask for academic qualification and that to go abroad also English is important*.

Notwithstanding, Sudanese parents, while agreeing with its role for their children, also suggested that: *English language is very important to us not only for children. I applied for a job in some company as private driver, but I could not get the job because of my knowledge of English, and We are marginalised (in education and employment) because we do not know how to speak English language*.

Some gendered contradiction could be seen in what parents from Bangladesh had to say about providing equal opportunities to boys and girls for learning English. A female parent's son went to an English medium school while her daughter goes to Arabic school. *My family is different, so the girls just only want to study but not to get the job. We will usually get married and live in a normal way*.

Teachers supported the views of the children and parents that English plays a significant role in education and work: *80 per cent information nowadays is in English. As English is the international language, without knowing English we can't communicate with foreign countries. Good job or good salary is not possible without it and getting a good job or good salary is not possible without it*.



## 3.3 Experiences of using technology for student learning

In this section, findings related to the extent to what or how technology is used for student learning and the factors that affect girls' use of technology are presented. Additionally, gender equity issues in technology use are highlighted. We explored students', teachers' and parents' experiences, and findings from each group are summarised below.

### 3.3.1 Experiences of using technology for learning

#### Students' experiences in using technology

Findings of this study indicate that despite having positive attitudes towards the use of technology in learning, most students do not use technology for learning very often. The limited use of technology for learning is due to several barriers. Deficiencies and constraints of technological instruments, lack of financial support, lack of information about how to use various types of technological equipment and programs, and lack of effective training/orientation posed challenges that discouraged and prevented students from utilising technology in their learning. Despite students thinking that the use of technology is important for their learning, most of them are not allowed to have their own devices and/or use technology.

Family rules and school practices are barriers to students' use of technology. Parents make strict rules for their children to use technology at home for the following **eight** main reasons:

- a. They do not seem to believe that their children use technology for learning: *My mom thinks I'm calling or using it to connect to YouTube or some other malicious site, so that's why she won't lend it to me* (student in Nepal).



Above © image British Council

b. Technology distracts students from their study: *I don't want to give him the smartphone in his hands till his exams are over* (parent in Bangladesh).

c. Children may waste their time by using technology: *They think that if I use a mobile, I will waste time chatting with friends and not pay attention to studying. But that is not true. I want a mobile for learning new things* (student in Nepal).

d. Parents do not seem to consider that technology could help their children in learning: *I don't see many good effects of the internet. In my perspective, I'm not liking it because I see him doing assignments, while doing the assignments, he doesn't need the smartphone* (parent in Bangladesh).

e. Children may misuse technology and it can be harmful for them: *Many people don't want to give their*

*mobile phones to their children, as they are getting spoiled by using mobile phones* (parent in Bangladesh).

f. Children may damage the devices: *My mom has a smartphone, but she won't lend it to us. She says we will damage her phone* (student in Senegal).

g. Parents, particularly in the context of Bangladesh, are worried about their children's security associated with the use of technology: *She [daughter] doesn't use any [technology]. You can see, this age/era is a very bad time, where bad things are done through the internet. The internet has much more dark sides than positive sides* (parent in Bangladesh).

h. The cost associated with technology use is high for most parents: *Some of them [students] didn't even have mobile phones. They didn't have money to afford mobile balance* (parent in Nepal).



Above © image Abdou Niane

In the context of Senegal and Bangladesh, some students reported that their parents and family members do not allow them to use technology at home: *My mom has a phone and so does my dad, but they don't let me use the phones* (student in Senegal); *Brother doesn't let me use it [...] They have this ego problem that if you give technology to kids, they will ruin it* (student in Bangladesh).

Like the home environment, schools make strict rules for students' use of technology. For instance, students are not allowed to bring their digital devices to school: *All technological items are prohibited by the school rules. If you are found with a phone or a tablet, it is confiscated* (student in Senegal). This means that students are not allowed to use mobile phones in their classrooms. However, we found that students in a rural school in Senegal are allowed to use mobile phones in classrooms: *In any case, the students who have smartphones have access to the internet because if you ask them what they do with their phones, they tell you that they connect to do research* (teacher in Senegal). Similarly, teachers in the target countries are able to use technology and the internet in schools, for example, as reported by a Bangladeshi student: *No, we can't [use internet in school]. But teachers can* (student in Bangladesh).

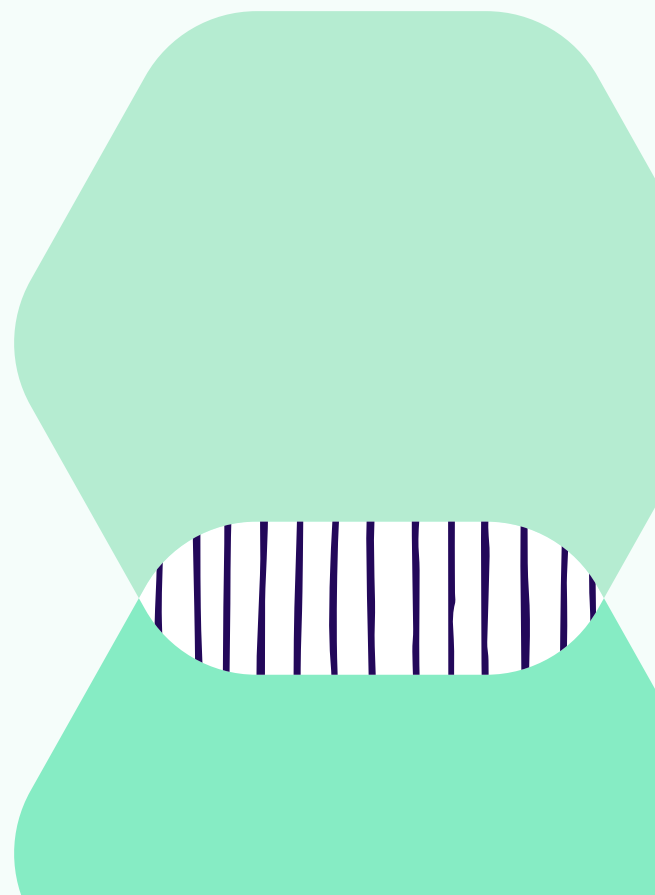
Furthermore, we found that in the schools that have a computer lab, students are sometimes taken to the lab, particularly for their computer subject. However, students usually have to follow certain rules to visit the lab. At the same time, the rules are not always followed: *We have a rule to go to the computer lab twice a week, but we hardly get a chance to go there once a week* (student in Nepal).

Nevertheless, there are some instances where students use technology to improve their learning. Using some form of technology for learning, such as doing homework, searching for information, watching YouTube clips, or searching for translations of English words in the local languages, was found to be a common practice among students in the target countries. As mentioned above, some students have their own (smart) phones or are allowed to use laptops/smartphones that belong to their siblings or parents to access the internet and find the information they need. There are several examples to indicate that students use technology for learning English, maths and other subjects and to do their assignments, for instance one student explained: *I use it [mobile phone] to watch videos and do homework. I also google difficult English words to learn the pronunciation. I use it for English and science homework given by teachers* (student in Nepal).

Students also use their mobile phones to find places during travel and to read e-books, as reported by Bangladeshi and Nepali students: *If I don't know a location while travelling or if I forget the way of my home, then I take help from Google map or GPS [...] if I go for vacation, like in my hometown, or remote area, then it is not possible to carry books. Then mobile phones are used* (student in Bangladesh).

There are also instances where students sometimes use technology outside home and school for entertaining themselves or just for fun, such as taking photos, making TikTok videos, listening to music, playing games, and getting connected with friends: *I used it [mobile phone] while going to the temple. I take photos, make videos [...] I went to Rocket Tower to make TikTok videos* (student in Nepal); *Sometimes they [children] use it for entertainment on YouTube* (parent in Sudan). A few students use technology to carry out group work.

Though career progression at this stage of education is a remote concept for these children, it should be pointed out that they perceived technology to be a valuable means of access to further education and job opportunities.





## Teachers' experiences in using technology

Findings of the study suggest that teachers feel happy about using a variety of digital devices. Digital artefacts such as multimedia computers, internet, web pages, email and YouTube clips are often used by teachers. Teachers reported using the artefacts for their learning improvement and preparing their lessons: *I need to have documentary information online to be able to compare data, especially in geography. This allows me to update and refresh the information contained in the courses* (teacher in Senegal); *I use it [mobile phone] for lesson planning before starting my class* (teacher in Sudan). Teachers also use apps to access teaching resources: *I have used the app sikne thalo (learning space). It is an app all about teaching kids and making them learn different things like English, Maths, etc.* (teacher in Nepal).

Additionally, seven teachers (three each from Nepal and Senegal and one from Bangladesh) reported using technology for teaching: *I have used [internet] for demonstrating to students how to search vocabulary items. For learning vocabulary, I did a demo of [www.wordhippo.com](http://www.wordhippo.com)* (teacher in Nepal); *My maths teacher uses a tablet during his teaching. He usually uses it with specific applications* (student in Senegal).

During our class observations, we did not generally find teachers using technology in their classes; either a blackboard or a whiteboard, marker, chalk and textbook were the only teaching materials used in most classes. Indeed, we did not see any technology available for teaching in the schools, particularly in Sudan, as confirmed by this teacher: *There's no technology devices to be used in this school* (teacher in Sudan). However, during interviews teachers reported using mobile phones to prepare their lessons. Interestingly, one of the teachers from Nepal had a specific reservation about using technology: *If we use technology to teach each and every class, it is difficult to complete the course on time* (teacher in Nepal).

However, in a rural school in Nepal, we saw a teacher using a mobile phone to explain the concept of compass and directions. Furthermore, in the context of Senegal, we noticed that teachers in three schools were using a tablet and personal smartphones in their classrooms. Their lesson plans were stored on those devices. In one of the schools, we learnt that students (though not many) had connected their smartphones to the internet by using data connections.

Findings further indicate that technology is rarely used to evaluate student learning. Neither our classroom observation nor interviews with teachers and students provide evidence of teachers using technology for student evaluation. However, one of the teachers from Sudan claimed that he uses technology for that purpose: *I use it [technology] to evaluate students' performance.*

In the context of Senegal, a couple of teachers highlighted that they use technology to carry out research: *I use new technologies to do thematic research, especially in relation to certain new developments in the teaching program of my discipline* (teacher in Senegal).

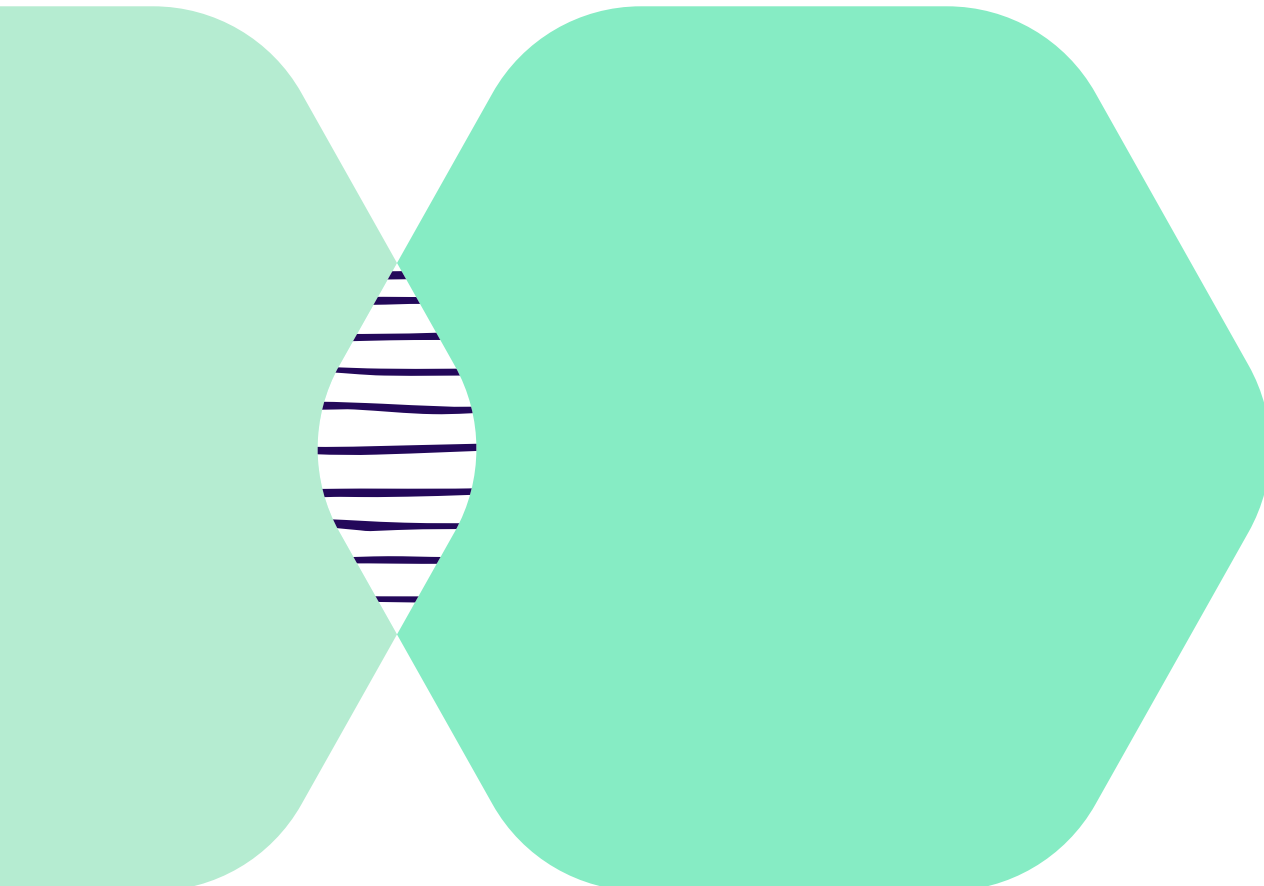
Some schools have technology available for their teachers and students. For instance, there are computer rooms where teachers can bring their students to teach various computer skills. However, teachers describe using their own technologies in schools to offer technology enhanced learning. They mostly use smartphones (and their own data plans) and laptops. However, we found that teachers' use of their own phones to enable technology enhanced learning is dependent on the quality of commercial services, which can vary: *I do not find difficulties in using technology but using it in such remote areas is a big problem unless I find a place where there is an internet* (teacher in Sudan).

## Parents' experiences in using technology

We did not find any evidence to suggest that parents use technology for student learning. However, there are some examples where parents use technology to communicate with others, use their social network and run a business: *I have some work on my farm. To do that, we use the internet [...] Most of the time, we see the rate of eggs in some districts of Bangladesh. To see this, we use it to know the rate of chicken. Besides, my daughter lives there. We use the internet to see her or to talk to her. That's it* (parent in Bangladesh).

Findings further indicate parents' concerns that their children may sometimes misuse technology as they think that children can be addicted to playing games or watching non-educational programs: *As you know, boys are involved in many things. When you are around, they may pretend to be motivated but in reality, they are interested in other things* (parent in Sudan). Indeed, parents think that unmonitored or unsupervised use of technology may lead to undesirable uses, or misuses, and children can be exposed to unsuitable material or can fall victim to some pranks.

Therefore, parents control their children's use of technology or allow only their restrictive use: *I constantly check up on her if she is using mobile excessively. I ask my wife to check on her if she is using mobile phone for her classes, studies, some other research or is she playing games and using mobile phone just for entertainment* (parent in Nepal).



### 3.3.2 Factors that affect girls' opportunity and motivation to use technology in support of their education

Findings of the study suggest that cultural norms or rules sometimes affect girls' opportunity and motivation to use technology in support of their education, particularly in the context of Bangladesh and Nepal where patriarchal values are highly prevalent. There are some indications that female students have less time to use technology at home compared to male students, as they have to do household chores:

*At present, many girls get to use the phone, but the number is less compared to boys. Especially for boys, they get to use mobile phones. Girls have a duty towards their home, so they don't get the opportunity like that (student in Bangladesh).*

*We have equal opportunity, but boys get more time to use it. We need to do more household chores at home (student in Nepal).*

Additionally, a few teachers reflected that boys enjoy more opportunities compared to girls because of the culturally constructed image of 'son' and aim of capacitating sons for the emerging labour market in foreign countries:

*Boys are given a little more chance [to use technology], because in our village parents have intentions to send their son to foreign country for work (teacher in Bangladesh).*

Indeed, findings suggest that it is the parents who create gender differences in using technology. They seemed to be more concerned about how their daughters use

technology than their sons. So, they either do not allow their daughters to use technology or they take extra measures to monitor how their daughters use technology:

*Parents generally do not provide mobiles to daughters in the threat that they abuse it, but they do not care about sons; so sons overuse that (teacher in Nepal).*

*For girls, I think that it would be good for them to have computers, but phones may not be appropriate for them. Because girls may use their phones for other things than learning (parent in Bangladesh).*

Some parents, particularly in Bangladesh, are very much concerned about the security of their daughters. So, they do not allow their daughter to use mobile phones:

*In the case of girls, usually guardians do not want to give mobile phones. Mobiles have negative contents. Almost all boys use mobile phones [...] Parents do not feel it is safe to give a mobile phone to a girl child, because of negative contents or because of having love affairs with others (teacher in Bangladesh).*

*They [her parents] don't give the phone to girls. What if we do bad things (student in Bangladesh).*

One of the parents in Bangladesh even reported that they have not bought any mobile phone yet, though they can afford it, as they want to ensure that their daughter does not have access to it:

*It is better to go without a mobile and it's also safe [...] We have the opportunity to buy the mobile phone, but we don't buy it because we are very careful with the girl. Don't you understand if Allah destroys honor, (i.e. If she does something unethical using internet/smartphone) (parent in Bangladesh).*



### 3.3.3 Gender equity in technology use

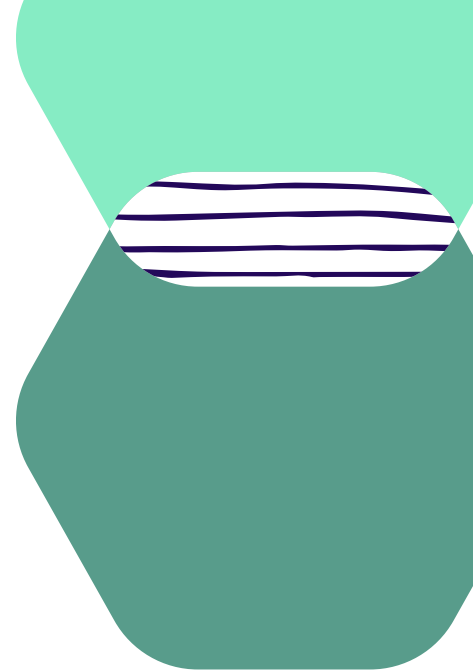
Gender equity in the use of technology may be explained in terms of socio-cultural norms or rules and gender (in)equality that are in practice in the target countries.

Some participants reported that there is a gender difference in terms of children's use of technology at home, namely that boys get more opportunities than girls do: *I do not think girls and boys have the same opportunity to use technology at home, but girls have passion for using technology* (parent in Sudan). However, in the context of Senegal, four of the teachers reported that girls get more opportunities to use technology than boys: *I think they [girls] have more opportunities to get the technology tools ... for boys it's rare* (teacher in Senegal).

Parents seemed to be more concerned about how their daughters use technology than their sons, so they took extra measures to monitor how their daughters use technology: *If I see girls with phones, I ask them about how they got those but with boys, I don't ask them such questions* (parent in Senegal); *Boys and girls are the same, but you have to be cautious about what the girl is studying* (parent in Bangladesh); *Parents are also strict to provide mobile phones and internet to their daughters. But they are careless to their sons* (teacher in Nepal).

The comments of two parents from Bangladesh raise a serious issue of gender equity in using technology in their family space. One parent said: *Girls should not use a smartphone. It's only for my son* (parent in Bangladesh), while another parent of a female child said, *She [daughter] doesn't use any [technology]. You can see, this age/era is a very bad time, where bad things are done through the internet. The Internet has much more dark sides than positive sides* (parent in Bangladesh). Both of these parents were concerned about a lack of security, abuse of technology and possible harms to the female children.

Such a difference in the treatment of girls and boys is not only found in Bangladesh. In Nepal as well, a few female children reported that they are not allowed to use smart phones when they go outside their home. A Tharu girl said, *My parents do not allow me to use the mobile phone freely* (student in Nepal). Another girl from a squatter family in the city reported that she is not allowed to visit a cyber cafe and her brother always asks her if she has 'unwanted' chats: *They [family members] even watch what I see and who I talk to, they feel I may make unwanted talk with the boys* (student in Nepal).



## 3.4 Experiences of using English for student learning

This section addresses research question four. The intention of research question 4a was to find out what kind of access children have to English and then to explore how they use it for learning in their home and school contexts. In the following sections, we present our findings on their access to English followed by how they use it. We then examine the factors that affect girls' opportunity and motivation for learning and using English. Finally, we present our findings on gender equity in the learning and use of English.

### 3.4.1 Access to the English language

The project aimed to explore the extent to which students have access to the English language at home, at school and outside school/home. Children usually do not have access to the English language at home as their family members use either the local languages or lingua francas in their everyday communications; English is rarely spoken at home in the four target countries. Thus, the English language behaviours of the children and the adults at home and outside cannot be clearly defined.

Findings suggest that schools provide a multilingual space for children – usually a minimum of two languages are used in classrooms. Most schools use their national language as a medium of instruction. Additionally, English or local languages are sometimes used. For example, in Senegal, French and English languages are mostly used in the classroom, but they also use Wolof for classroom discussions. However, in the context of Sudan, local languages are not generally used in schools. They mostly use Standard Arabic and English.

In many schools, we found that national and/or local languages are used in most classes, but they use both the English language and national/local languages in English classes: *Our teachers use English and Arabic language to make the students understand the lesson* [English lesson] (student in Sudan).

### 3.4.2 Use of English for student learning

#### Use of English at home

The English language is hardly spoken at home in the four target countries. Local and national languages are used for everyday conversations. In Nepal, languages such as Nepali, Tharu, Bote, Maithili and Nepali are used. In Sudan, mainly Arabic and other local languages or mother tongues, namely, Hausa, Randbook, Flata Mula, Nuba or Margo, are spoken at home. In Senegal, at home, children and their parents speak the local language Wolof, and Fula, Pulsar Fulani, and Serer are commonly used, while Bangla is used in Bangladesh.

The data also reveal that the parents and teachers do not speak English at home: *We are illiterate so we can't speak in English. Children use English sometimes* (parent in Nepal); *We use Nepali only at that time [...]* *The only thing is that we could not be able to speak English fluently* (parent in Nepal). However, one of the teachers from Bangladesh reported that they occasionally use English at home: *I talk to my sister in English and but not for all the time* (teacher in Bangladesh).

There are some indications that children *sometimes use the English language [at home]* (parent in Nepal). *They do. Sometimes, I can hear the older one speaks English a bit but he says he has difficulties in English* (parent in Senegal); *My children also don't speak in English. Maybe they do a little when they hang out with their friends* (parent in Bangladesh). Furthermore, very few students reported that they use some forms of English with their school-going siblings at home.

Interviews with parents suggest that most of them see their local/national languages as their own identity and take pride in speaking the language: *We speak more Serer and as we are of this ethnicity, so we only speak the Serer language in this house* (parent in Senegal); *We only speak Arabic Language at home; we don't [use English]. It is not our language* (parent in Sudan); *Yes, they need to learn it because it [Tharu] is our mother tongue* (parent in Nepal). Hence, they prefer to use the Tharu language at home.

The discussion above suggests that there is little or no use of English at home because most parents are illiterate or have low literacy, however, children may sometimes use some English when interacting with their siblings, friends and educated visitors. The parents also express their strong apathy for their national language and the preference to use their local/ethnic languages. Expressions like, 'our language', and 'our mother tongue' suggest that they value their languages. The data also indicates that, multiple languages are in practice at home in all target countries except in Bangladesh where only Bangla, their national language, is preferred at home.

## Use of English in the community

There is little or no difference between home and outside home in terms of the use of languages. Most students (as well as parents and teachers) in all the four countries use their national and local languages outside school. The use of English outside school is very limited. For instance, in the context of Bangladesh, only three students reported that they sometimes use English, yet it is just in the form of code-mixing: *Outside school, I speak Bangla but there are some English terms and words which I use* (student in Bangladesh). Another student remarked, *We don't need English while talking to people outside school* (student in Bangladesh).

However, one of the parents from Sudan reported that her children sometimes use English when they are outside their schools: *One day I took my son to the hospital – I talked to the doctors, they spoke to me in Arabic then they started to speak to each other in English – I – I felt like an ignorant man because I didn't understand what they said* (parent in Sudan). Similarly, a couple of parents from Bangladesh indicated that they need some forms of English when they (and their children) are outside home and schools: *In today's era, if you are in DHK City, it needs a little bit of English. Perhaps, it's not necessary to speak in English at home, but it is in case of outside usage* (parent in Bangladesh); *We also use it [English] outside. We use it for our business purpose, for transactions, sometimes a lot of English words come in the context of speech. [...] If our children go somewhere to give a speech, recently they went to a debate competition, people use English words there. It will work there* (parent in Bangladesh).

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## Use of English and other languages at school

The narratives collected from the four target countries and our classroom observations show that schools provide a multilingual space for children: a minimum of two languages are used in classrooms. Most schools use their national language as a medium of instruction and English is rarely used. Additionally, local languages are sometimes used in schools. For example, in Senegal, French and English languages are mostly used in the classroom but they also use Wolof for classroom discussions. However, in the context of Sudan, local languages are not generally used in schools. They mostly use Standard Arabic and English as the main languages of education. The following conversation between a researcher and a student reveals how schools provide a multilingual space where students circumnavigate more than one language on a parallel basis:

R: *What languages do you use at school?*

S: *We (students) speak Wolof a lot but sometimes we speak French.*

R: *Are these the only languages you use in your class?*

S: *No, we use French and English.*

R: *Doesn't the teacher sometimes speak Wolof in classrooms?*

S: *Yes, he often speaks it (student in Senegal).*

In some schools, English is used for greetings and as communication starters. Classroom procedures are usually carried out in the local language. Alternate use between the local languages and English could also be observed in some contexts. In Senegal, teachers use a combination of three or more languages – Wolof, French and English. In Sudanese schools, code-switching between Arabic and English is common. In some classes, English was being used for presentations, explanations, practice and assignments, while other classroom procedures were conducted in the local lingua francas.

In the context of Nepal, recent educational language policy in the federal system has encouraged local municipalities to use local languages in their school courses. For example, most of the students from the squatter community in Kathmandu reported that they study the Newari language called *Nepal Bhasa* in the school course, although they do not belong to the Newar ethnic group: *We normally use English and Nepali languages. Except in English class, we use the Nepali language. In Mathematics and Science classes we often use the English language. In Nepal Bhasa class, we have to read Newari language (student in Nepal).*

Outside school, it is mostly the local dominant languages that are commonly used, for instance, Wolof in Senegal, Arabic in Sudan, Bangla in Bangladesh and Nepali in Nepal. However, code-mixing and code switching between English and local languages is quite common: *Sometimes with my classmates, we speak English outside of school. I try to use the words I know. But I don't know everything. I know more in French. But I use the Wolof language more because I am Wolof (student in Senegal).*

In cases where children use English in the context of learning, their behaviours in using and learning English consist of looking for information on the internet for their assignments, accessing useful YouTube/audio clips, and occasional/casual practice. They contribute to their learning by taking responsibility for learning and using English, while their parents and teachers contribute to their learning by facilitating the use of English and technology and by providing access.





### 3.4.3 Factors that affect opportunities and motivation to use English

In this section we set out the factors that affect opportunities and motivation to use English.

**Limited opportunity to access and learn English:** Students reported that they do not have good access or enough opportunities to learn English: *Although I also like English, there is generally no one at home who can teach me English* (student in Bangladesh). A few students, particularly in Nepal, also expressed their unhappiness due to not getting an opportunity to practise English in school: *Our teacher speaks English, but we speak Nepali. We want to speak English, but our teacher does not encourage us to speak English* (student in Nepal).

Some parents reported that they are unable to afford the costs if they want to send their children to English medium schools: *Many people here send their children to boarding schools. They say their children will be good at English. But I could not send my sons there* (parent in Nepal).

**Low proficiency:** Some teachers reported that students have low proficiency in English: *In class 8, students do not understand English language more, they do not have capacity like that, students' level of English is not so good* (teacher in Nepal). Findings further indicate that because of their low proficiency in English, the students find it difficult to use technology: *In the lab in school, I was working and something in English appeared on the screen, and I didn't understand it* (student in Sudan).

**Medium of instruction:** If teachers in the target countries are unable to conduct lessons in English, the use of local languages has a detrimental effect on student opportunities and motivation for learning English.

Teachers in the target communities generally find it difficult to use English as a medium of instruction because of students' low proficiency in English: *After having tried to explain things in English many times using gestures and drawing on the board, if they don't understand I then resort to French to make them understand. The most important thing is to make a student understand* (teacher in Senegal).

Some teachers acknowledged that they do not have high proficiency in English: *In some cases, like I want to know one thing, I do not know English at all. It is a problem.* (teacher in Bangladesh).



### 3.4.4 Gender equity in English language learning and use

With regard to learning English, many participants expressed the view that both boys and girls get equal opportunities to learn English both at home and school: *Both girls and boys have the same opportunity to learn English* (student in Sudan). They argued that there was gender discrimination in the past, but the situation has changed now: *The environment for women has changed now. So, the prevailing discrimination has been eliminated to a great extent. In this case, my son and daughter both are equal* (parent in Bangladesh). However, one of the students from Bangladesh indicated that boys get better opportunities to learn English than girls do.

Interestingly, our data suggests that some girls are more active and motivated to learn English than boys: *At our school the attendance of girls is much more than the boys. As the boys are notorious that's why a group of them do well but others are not good at all. On the other hand, most of the girls are eager to learn English* (teacher in Bangladesh); *I've observed that my daughter cares about English more than the boy. She likes learning English more than him* (parent in Sudan).

## 3.5 Strategies suggested by participants to provide students with better opportunities for learning

In this section, findings related to participants' recommendations related to the use of technology and English language for student learning are highlighted.

### Strategies associated with the use of technology

Participants have suggested three main strategies that can be used to provide students (and teachers) with better opportunities to use technology for student learning.

First, as reported by students, technology should be used in classrooms and children need to be provided with an opportunity to use technology as it can support student learning: *We need either a personal laptop or a phone. Many times, if we fail to understand anything we can easily come up with the solution over the internet using our smartphone* (student in Bangladesh).

Second, there should be more computers in school labs and students should be provided with more opportunities to visit the labs: *School should have more computers in the computer lab; There should be a lab in a big room and students should be taken there* (students in Nepal).

Third, schools need to train students and teachers on how to use technology for learning: *We need to be trained on how to use mobile phones and other digital tools such as tablets, etc. If there were a computer room at school, they could teach us all this* (teacher in Senegal).

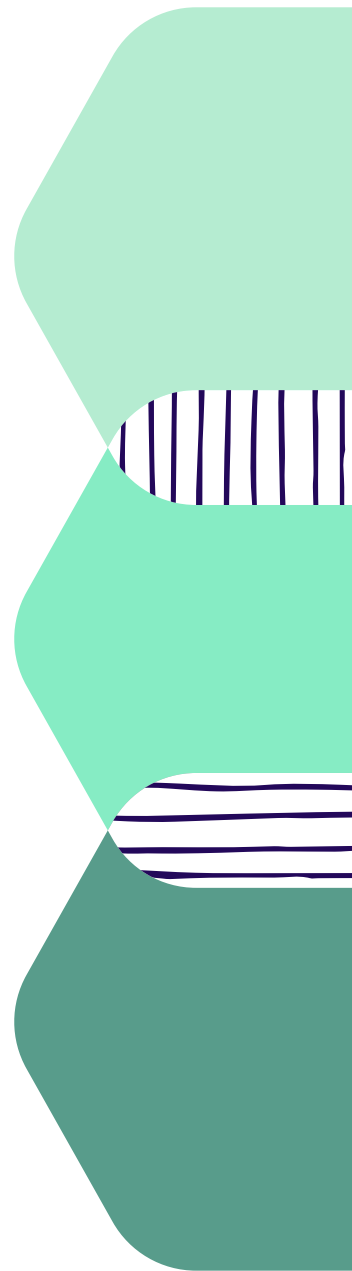
### Strategies associated with the use of English

Participants recommended two main strategies to provide students (and teachers) with better opportunities to use English for student learning:

First, many participants argue that more English should be used in schools: *There should be an English environment in the classroom. I mean students should interact in English with friends and teachers* (student in Nepal).

However, a few others think that local languages should be used as a medium of instruction: *It would be much easier for us if the education system were based on our own native language* (parent in Bangladesh).

Second, there should be more qualified teachers: *I think that for students to be motivated to learn English they need to have good teachers* (parent in Senegal); *Highly qualified teachers must be recommended for teaching. The teacher must use technology while teaching* (parent in Nepal).



## Part 4

# Impact activities

It was important for the ReMaLIC project team to ensure that the project has positive impacts on the researched communities. Therefore, in addition to sharing the research findings and other project information through peer reviewed papers, conferences and blog posts (<http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/REMaLIC/>), some impact activities were conducted in each target country.

### 4.1 Bangladesh

Five impact activities were carried out in Bangladesh. First, a hybrid event was held on 8 November 2022 at Dhaka University to disseminate the research findings. A total of 64 participants from different government departments and organisations attended, including: Ministry of Education (MoE), Directorate Secondary and Higher Education, National Academy for Educational Management, National Curriculum and Textbook Board, schools, NGOs, and community representatives. The findings were shared, followed by open discussion and Q and A. A participant commented, *I have found this whole discussion very insightful. We had interesting findings and messages from the study. But still, I think problems like gender roles and access to technology are universal and crucial.*

Second, two training of trainers (ToT) sessions were conducted onsite in Dhaka on 21 October 2022 and in Chittagong on 03 November 2022. A total of 63 secondary school teachers and head teachers participated in the sessions. The key project findings were shared followed by Q and A. The training sessions focused on ICT, English and gender issues in

teaching and learning. The participants found the training sessions informative and useful as indicated in the following excerpt: *This is indeed a thought-provoking workshop that has again motivated us to be aware of use of English and technology. It is time we thought about it and share my experience with my colleagues.*

Third, two discussion meetings with parents were held onsite in two underprivileged schools of Dhaka in December 2022. A total of 56 participants (parents, head teachers, NGO representatives) participated in these meetings. In both the events, activities comprised a video presentation (UNICEF produced Meena Cartoon on safe use of internet by children), project highlights, Q and A, debate, and discussion. A participant commented, *My daughter only does chat with her friends, which I do not like. I should talk to her and tell her to learn some new things, new skills on the internet.*

Fourth, we used print and social media to reach out to many more people in the country. The news of the dissemination of project findings, key messages and the ToT sessions were shared in different national newspapers, as well as Facebook sites and groups to reach a wider audience.

Finally, based on the research findings, a policy brief was developed with insights from researchers, and teacher educators to share the research inputs with the policymaking and implementing bodies in education. It highlights major issues related to the access and use of technology and English in teaching children from marginalised communities, and action points to be implemented by different educational bodies, NGOs and INGOs.



## 4.2 Nepal

In Nepal, two major impact activities were organised by Tribhuvan University (TU), one of the partner organisations in the project. First, based on the research findings, a policy brief was developed to provide the research inputs to policymaking and implementing bodies in education, particularly the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) and different tiers of government. In the process of developing the policy brief, researchers, teacher educators from the university and representatives from MoEST, Educational Training Centres (ETC), and British Council, Nepal, were involved. The policy brief has a key focus on the strategies to promote digital access, use and support in (schooled) learning for children from marginalised communities. The policy brief mentions major issues regarding the access to and use of technology and the English language for student learning. It also presents action points that different tiers of government need to carry out in collaboration with NGOs and INGOs including the British Council.

A policy brief dissemination event was also organised in the capital on 19 December 2022. In the event, a researcher from the OU and the National Coordinator presented the major findings of the research and the participants were requested to provide inputs on the policy brief. Around 40 participants, including representatives from the Ministry of Education, Universities, ETC, British Council, NGOs and INGOs, that are working in the area of technology and education, and girls' education, attended the event. In the programme, Dr. Shiva Lal Bhusal, the rector of TU highlighted that the collaboration between CERID/TU and the OU has been a great success through this research. A representative from MoEST remarked, *the policy inputs made based on the research findings here are valid for designing policies and programs for supporting the school children of marginalised communities in promoting their learning through English and technology.*

Second, two teacher training workshops were conducted in two research sites in December 2022 for orienting the teachers to integrate technologies and English while engaging students from marginalised communities in sustainable learning. The workshop

sessions were designed to address how teachers could integrate technology and the English language to engage in fruitful learning. Twenty teachers including the head teachers of two schools in research site one (Kathmandu), and 25 teachers including five head teachers of the neighbouring schools in research site two (Nawalpur) participated in the workshops. As the teachers reflected, they acquired some more 'hands-on skills' to use English and technologies in classrooms. The workshops were well received, as illustrated by a teacher participant: *The sessions like using flipped class, online learning portal, English learning websites including those of British Council and TeachingEnglish remained very motivating to change ourselves and our approaches to teaching children from poor families.* Besides these workshops, one more workshop was organised, and 20 teachers were offered some practical ideas for using technology and English in classrooms.

Additionally, a research team member from The Open University disseminated the research findings in different locations, including a few schools in remote areas of Lamjung and Tanahun districts. In total, she gave presentations in seven events (two in Kathmandu, three in Lamjung, two in Tanahun) in December 2022. Two of the events in Lamjung were organised by municipalities (Rainas and Beshishar), whereas the rest of the events were organised by the respective schools. The events organised by the two municipalities were attended by teachers and head teachers from several schools. A total of 172 participants (teachers and head teachers) attended the seven events. All the events were well received, as indicated in this excerpt from a head teacher participant: *The session has been eye opening for us. Honestly speaking, we have rarely used technology for student learning though we have some sort of access to technology and the internet in our school. I will provide more support to teachers in using technology in my school in the days to come.* Several head teachers that attended the events and the two municipalities have requested her to run training for their teachers on how to use technology for teaching and learning. The requests may suggest that there is a growing interest in integrating technology in school education. However, many schools are facing challenges in doing this as they lack experience and expertise.

## 4.3 Senegal

The Senegal team organised five major impact events in their country. First, the Association of Teachers of English in Senegal organised a two day-day seminar (3–4 December 2022) in Diourbel to share the research findings and provide training to teachers on how to use ICT in the classroom. Participants who attended the sharing sessions were teachers (20), trainers (seven), the regional head of the service in charge of education, heads of schools (four), the president of the association of heads of schools, and presidents of parent associations (two). The stakeholders appreciated the quality of the results and showed their commitment to finding both short-term solutions such as the use of phones in schools and long-term solutions such as modification of rigid internal regulations to facilitate better integration of ICT. As a follow-up activity of the seminar, the research team talked about the research and their impact activities in two local radio programs with the aim of reaching out to more people in the country.

Second, the team presented the research findings in an ATEs Annual Conference held on 10 December 2022, in Kaffrine, central Senegal. A total of 45 English teachers from different regions attended the session. The session was well received.

Third, a one-day capacity-building session was organised in the premises of CRFPE Diourbel for 20 students on 10 January 2023. It was a modular training on digital literacy to help them improve their online presence, forge their digital citizenship and promote their online research. The students' feedback on the events reveals that they were able to identify some ways to create an online presence, develop good security practices and protect themselves from hackers, scammers, cyberbullying, etc.

Fourth, ChildFund conducted two discussion sessions with headmasters, teachers, students, and parents (6–7 December 2022): one in a rural school of Ndindy and another in an urban school of Diourbel Tock where the research took place. Twenty-five participants attended each event. As an outcome of the discussions, the school administrations showed their commitment to equipping their schools with a Wi-Fi network.

Finally, ChildFund conducted two sessions for female associations in Diourbel and Taiba Moutoupha on 30 December 2022, and 19 January 2023. A total of 71 participants in Diourbel and 52 participants in Taiba Moutoupha attended the sessions. All the associations that attended the session promised to work with parents to stop school dropouts among girls at the middle and high school levels.

## 4.4 Sudan

A number of impact activities have also been conducted in Sudan. For instance, three five-day training workshops were organised in Kasala, White Nile and Omdurman in October 2022. The workshops were attended by 50 teachers, including four principals, from five schools. The workshops had a major focus on computer literacy, use of technology in the classroom and modern trends of English language teaching. All the workshops were conducted onsite, partly in one group and partly in smaller groups with hands-on activities. To study the impact of the workshops, we revisited two of the participating schools in Omdurman and carried out a survey, followed by classroom observation and a focus group discussion with students. We could not notice striking impacts of the events on classroom practices, which could be because of the very short time gap between the training workshop and the impact study. We also found that a few teachers were unable to transfer their knowledge as they did not have good access to technology.

For the purpose of the training workshop, a training manual in English was also produced by the research team and a consultant. It was used during the three workshops, then a few changes were made based on the feedback from the trainers and the principals that attended the workshops. It was written in English and implemented in Arabic. It has since been translated into Arabic. It is intended to be used mainly by primary school teachers/principals and IT staff.

A forum was held at Ahfad University for Women (AWF) on 5 November 2022 which was attended by about 25 participants including representatives from schools, NGOs, Ministry of Education (MoE), University of Khartoum, and Sudan University for Science and Technology. One of the recommendations from the event was to write a policy brief and present it to the MoE. A policy brief has been produced to be shared with MoE. Two articles and two news feeds have also been published in paper and electronic newspapers. Additionally, a flyer containing a summary of the project was produced and it was distributed to three schools. We have a plan to distribute it to some other schools. Our final presentation was for the staff of the School of Languages at AWF on 12 January which generated a long discussion. The event was attended by about 15 participants.

## Part 5

# Implications of the study and recommendations

The study has several key implications regarding: (a) students' access to and use of technology for learning; (b) the use of technology for teaching; (c) gender discrimination in terms of students' opportunities to use technology at home and at school; (d) roles of parents in student learning; (e) access to English language learning; and (f) the role of English in use of technology. For each aspect, we include recommendations for policy and/or practice.

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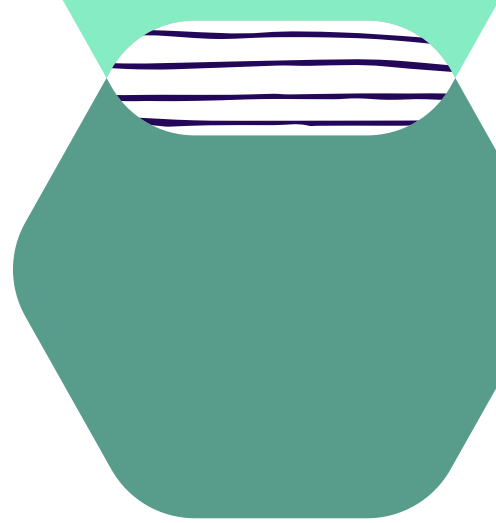


**Students' access to and use of technology for learning:** The findings reveal that the target communities are limited in their access and use of technology to support their education. Limitations in terms of access and use of technology make the marginalised children fall behind compared to others.

It is worth noting the contradiction that children find it easier to learn with technology, but they get few opportunities to use technology either at home or at school. In both contexts, they have little access to technology, and they must follow strict rules to use it. There are also indications that students in some families have good access to technology, however, their use of technology is heavily controlled by their parents. Parents expressed concerns about whether digital devices may expose their children to culturally inappropriate material, personal vulnerability, or enable distractions from studying

**Recommendation 1:** The use of appropriate tools in learning needs to be clearly spelled out, and their impact on student learning gains, teacher pedagogy, and accountability through community participation should be determined. Carefully planned and worked out interventions with well-defined purposes can lead to meaningful use of technology. Investments in measurable, sustainable, and scalable design solutions as part of the implementation framework will be an important way forward.

**Recommendation 2:** Schools and teachers need to run awareness programmes for parents to help them understand the roles of technology in student learning. The parents also need to be provided with some guidance on how they can support children in using technology for learning. The programmes should enable parents to discuss their concerns and advise on strategies to support their children, rather than just focusing on technical skills.



**The use of technology for teaching:** Technology is rarely used in schools for three main reasons. First, teachers rarely have good access to digital devices and a reliable internet connection in their school. In many schools, we found that there were not enough devices available, and internet connections were not available in classrooms. Second, some teachers are limited in their use of technology because of low digital literacy and proficiency in English, which may impact both their confidence and abilities to engage with digital tools. Third, some teachers are cautious about or even resist using technology even though they have access, due to lack of interest, or concerns about discipline.

**Recommendation 3:** Concerned authorities, such as education authorities, need to take action to address the lack of digital devices and unreliable internet connections in classrooms. They should provide opportunities for teachers to develop their digital literacy and associated knowledge of relevant languages (for example, English or French words used in interfaces to applications), and support teachers to discover valuable and appropriate ways of using technology for teaching and learning.

**Gender discrimination in terms of students' opportunities to use technology at home and at school:** Findings suggest that young girls are exposed to diverse forms of social inequality issues, biases, and discriminatory gender norms which create a barrier to their use of technology. Female students are disadvantaged when it comes to digital adoption as they have lower levels of access to and use of digital technology than boys. So, they are not benefiting from digital technology to the same extent as boys. A good quality education designed on the basis of female students' immediate and strategic needs to use technology for learning enables them to learn more effectively and better prepares them to seize opportunities in the public and private domains, leading to better careers in the future.

**Recommendation 4:** Concerned authorities need to ensure that a policy and provision are in place to provide all children with equitable access to technology. The issue of girls' technology access at home and at school needs to be openly discussed and gender roles reflected upon in the context of opportunities to use technology for learning.

**Roles of parents in student learning:** The gender-digital divide evidenced in this study draws attention to the roles of parents in student learning. Outside of school, the divide exists mainly because of parental restrictions and parental fear for girls' online safety. Parents are concerned that children, particularly girls, can misuse technology and it can be harmful for them.

**Recommendation 5:** Instead of controlling daughters' use of technology, parents could guide their daughters (and sons) on how to use technology for learning and make them aware of the negative sides of technology. For parents with little or no literacy, and who have little knowledge about the use of smartphones and other devices for learning, training might be offered via oral presentations by community educators in suitable settings, giving parents an opportunity to learn more, voice their fears, and be offered some tips on how to support their children.

**Access to English language learning:** Because of widespread use of English in domains such as the economy, business and employment, participants in all the research countries see English as a route to career success, both domestically and when considering overseas work. People from the four target countries often move to English-speaking places for employment, and research participants are aware that English skills can affect the chances of finding employment and getting a better job. If they lack adequate English proficiency, they are likely to be confined to low-paid jobs. The attitudes of the research participants to teaching and learning English are largely positive and they have a keen interest in learning the language. However, there are indications that the marginalised children do not get ample opportunities to learn English either at home or at school. Therefore, English must be discussed in the context of its indispensability in life and work opportunities and social mobility of the people concerned.

**Recommendation 6:** There should be better trained and qualified teachers in schools who are supported to provide better English learning opportunities for the children. Appropriate technology should be available for English language learning and practice, and teachers should be fully supported in using the technology.

**Role of English in use of technology:** Another pertinent implication of the study concerns the roles of English in using technology. Participants pointed out that the primary language used for operation of mobile and digital technology is English and low proficiency in English therefore not only hinders potential communication with English speakers, but also their ability to use digital technologies at home or at school. This affects students' capacity to take advantage of digital technologies for learning, and it also hinders teachers' and parents' ability to support students' learning.

**Recommendation 7:** If the children of the marginalised communities are to be given equitable learning and life opportunities, it is necessary to empower them by providing required literacy and skills in English to support their use of technology.

## Part 6

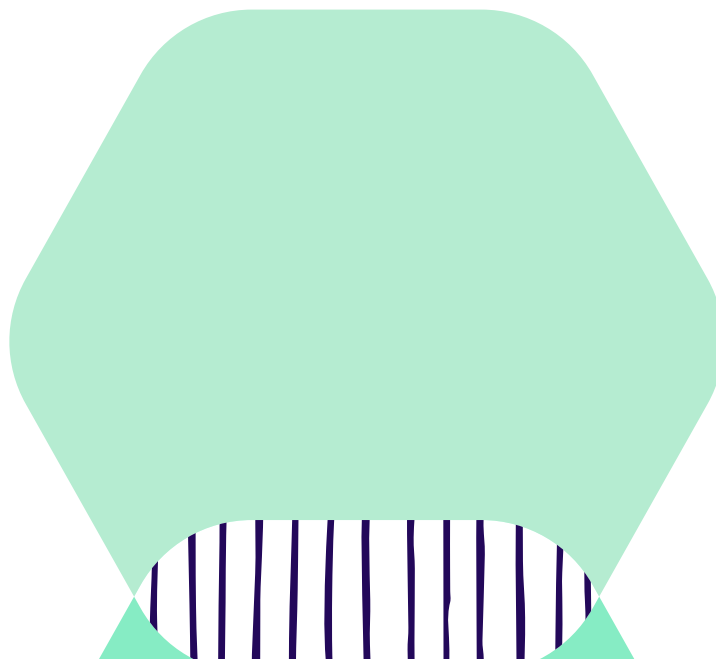
# Limitations of the study

Findings of the ReMaLIC project are not conclusive as this study has several limitations. First, the sample size was limited to 64 participants in each research country. Generalisation of the research findings to other contexts should therefore be approached cautiously. Future research in this area with a larger sample obtained from the same or similar populations is recommended to validate the findings of this study.

The second limitation considers translation of the data. All the interviews and FGDs were conducted in national languages of the research countries and then translated locally into English. Even though we tried our best to ensure translated data faithfully capture the original meanings that the participants expressed as a part of this study, the process is not without its drawbacks. Another limitation of the study concerns its methodology, particularly data coding. Despite taking great care in the data coding, there could be some inconsistencies since data coding was done by researchers who have limited familiarity with some of the local contexts (Dawadi, 2017).

Another more general methodological issue is the nature of data collection. Because of the time limitations for the study, we could not observe teachers' classes more than two times and could not discuss with the teachers (and students) multiple times. Had it been possible to do so, we would have been able to create a clearer picture of the use of technology and the English language for student learning.

Finally, the study's research questions had a strong focus on participants' experiences and attitudes. Further research could delve deeper into participants' daily practices and investigate their opportunities to use technology and English (including aspects of gender equality) in other ways, for example, through comparative research using specific measures and criteria.



## Part 7

# Conclusion

The ReMaLIC project worked with children, their parents and teachers to capture the participants' lived experiences of using technology and the English language for student learning. It suggests avenues for further research in the field of education to expand the findings of the study. There is a need for multiple research studies on the same research issues to validate the research findings and to produce a more comprehensive picture of technology use for student learning in marginalised communities. This study could also be extended to a greater number of participants and to other stakeholders of education including school heads, teacher trainers and policy makers.

Though this study was mainly interested in exploring how technology is used for student learning from children's (and their parents' and teachers') own perspectives, it would have been helpful to know what school heads' perspectives were, particularly on the management and use of technology for student learning in schools. It is hoped that future research takes care of such issues.

More evidence is also required on how parents from different geographical locations and occupations provide digital access to their children. This study has observed individual differences with regard to parental support to their children. For instance, while some parents make very strict rules for girls' use of technology and even restrict the girls from using it, some others do not make such rules or restrictions.

Hence, it is recommended that future research studies include more parents from different social strata and explore socio-cultural aspects associated with technology use for student learning.

It is also recommended that the British Council support further research and projects that work closely with marginalised communities, especially parents, to help them understand the role of English and digital literacy for the employment market and their daughters' future economic prospects in the age of the global economy. Enlisting the support of parents would improve enrolment and retention, especially among more marginalised groups.

The main message for the concerned authorities and agencies is that there needs to be a policy and provision in place which gives students equitable access to digital technology and English. English and digital technology must be a part of basic education. The respective authorities need to work out proportionally fair and justifiable implementation strategies in terms of resource distribution, teacher training and teacher orientations to provide marginalised children with equitable access to technology. Since the English language is closely linked to developing digital literacy, teachers should develop pedagogic practices that are designed to improve students' proficiency in English. While doing so, local and indigenous languages should not be undermined and should be made a part of education as far as practicable.



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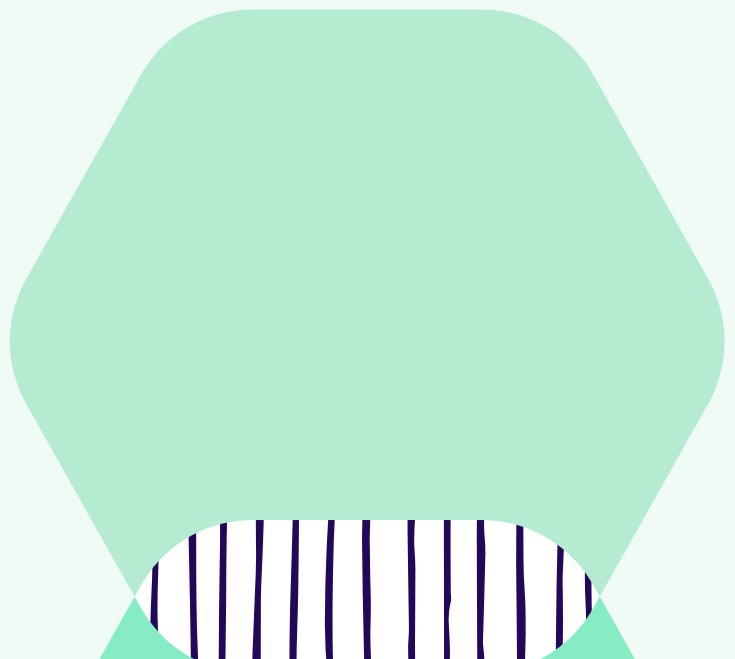
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