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Digital practices in Cambodian EFL classrooms: Teacher Narratives from Remote Learning

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Abstract: *This study investigates the transformation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching practices in Cambodia during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on teacher narratives from both urban and rural contexts. Through a narrative-based review of peer-reviewed literature, government and non-governmental organization reports, and firsthand teacher testimonies produced between 2020 and 2024, the research explores how Cambodian educators adapted to digital instruction amid significant infrastructural limitations and socio-economic disparities. The study is guided by three interrelated theoretical frameworks: Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge, narrative inquiry, and critical pedagogy. Findings reveal that digital competence among Cambodian teachers was not merely a matter of technological proficiency but rather a dynamic and context-sensitive process shaped by necessity, improvisation, and community collaboration. Urban teachers often blend online platforms such as Google Meet, YouTube, and social media, while rural educators employed low-tech approaches including radio instruction, mobile phone communication, and home-delivered worksheets. Teacher narratives illustrate innovation under constraint, emotional and professional resilience, and evolving pedagogical identities. These insights challenge deficit-based assumptions about teachers in developing countries and underscore the importance of participatory professional development, localized digital resources, and equitable policy frameworks. The study concludes that the future of English language education in Cambodia depends on sustained investment in teacher agency, culturally responsive pedagogy, and inclusive digital infrastructure that reflects the lived realities of classrooms across the country.*

Keywords: *Cambodian education; digital pedagogy; EFL teaching; teacher narratives; remote learning; COVID-19 education response*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

In recent decades, Cambodia's education system has undergone significant reform aimed at expanding access, improving quality, and aligning with regional and global development goals. English language education has emerged as a strategic priority in this process, seen as a key competency for regional integration within ASEAN, participation in global markets, and access to higher education and digital content (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat, 2019; MoEYS, 2021). Within the Cambodian school system, English is taught from Grade 4 onward, with increasing emphasis placed on communicative skills and multimedia use. However, structural inequalities between urban and rural schools, a shortage of trained English teachers, and limited infrastructure have long posed challenges to equitable and effective English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction (Bredenberg, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic radically disrupted educational delivery across Cambodia. When schools closed nationwide in March 2020, educators were forced to transition abruptly to



remote learning with little to no preparation. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), in collaboration with NGOs and private partners, initiated various digital learning interventions, ranging from televised lessons and radio broadcasts to online platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, Telegram, and Facebook Live (Huot & Em, 2025; MoEYS, 2021). These interventions brought Cambodia's EFL educators into uncharted territory, where they had to integrate technology into their pedagogy, often without prior training or adequate digital infrastructure. For many Cambodian teachers, especially those in rural or resource-constrained settings, this shift was both a logistical and pedagogical challenge. It exposed long-standing disparities in access to devices, electricity, internet connectivity, and digital literacy. At the same time, the crisis catalysed innovation. Teachers improvised digital solutions, reconfigured lesson plans, and engaged with students and communities in new ways (Huot & Em, 2024; Ngel, 2022). The pandemic thus acted as both a stressor and a stimulus, revealing vulnerabilities while also igniting new forms of teacher agency and resilience.

Understanding how Cambodian EFL teachers navigated this transformation is vital for several reasons. First, it provides empirical insight into digital adaptation in the Global South, where most edtech research remains underrepresented (Selwyn, 2020). Second, it foregrounds teacher voices, a dimension often neglected in policy and research that prioritize top-down technological interventions. Third, it offers an opportunity to rethink post-pandemic pedagogical models that are not only technologically enabled but also contextually grounded and equity oriented.

1.2 Aims and Scope of the Review

This review aims to critically examine the digital practices adopted in Cambodian EFL classrooms during the remote learning period (2020–2023), with particular emphasis on teacher narratives as a lens for understanding pedagogical transformation. It synthesizes qualitative data from academic studies, NGO reports, and firsthand teacher testimonies, employing a narrative synthesis approach to identify recurring patterns, challenges, and innovations. Specifically, the review seeks to: (1) map the range of digital tools and pedagogical strategies employed by Cambodian EFL teachers during school closures, (2) capture and analyse teacher experiences, including emotional responses, creative adaptations, and professional learning, in transitioning to online and blended learning environments, and (3) assess how these experiences have influenced teacher beliefs, classroom practices, and pedagogical identities in the evolving educational landscape of post-COVID Cambodia. In doing so, this study positions Cambodian teachers not merely as users of educational technology, but as active agents of pedagogical change, whose lived experiences provide critical insights into sustainable, context-sensitive digital education models.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study holds significant relevance in the intersecting fields of digital education, teacher development, and language pedagogy, especially in the context of Southeast Asia. By foregrounding the narratives of Cambodian EFL teachers, the research contributes to a growing body of literature on localized digital pedagogies and educational equity in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Graham, 2021). It challenges dominant narratives of digital



transformation that often prioritize high-tech solutions over culturally grounded and human-centred practices. Moreover, the study aligns with global calls, such as UNESCO's 2023 Global Education Monitoring Report, to centre teacher agency and community engagement in educational technology discourse. It provides actionable insights for policymakers, teacher educators, NGOs, and school leaders interested in building resilient, inclusive, and contextually appropriate digital learning ecosystems.

By documenting how Cambodian EFL teachers adapted under pressure, the study not only preserves valuable educational memory from a critical historical moment but also helps inform future training, policy, and research agendas that prioritize narrative inquiry, critical pedagogy, and localized innovation.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The conceptual foundation of this study is informed by three interrelated frameworks: the TPACK model, Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge, narrative inquiry and teacher agency, and critical pedagogy with an emphasis on digital equity. Together, these frameworks offer a multi-dimensional lens for understanding how Cambodian EFL teachers navigated the sudden shift to digital instruction, adapted pedagogical strategies, and reflected on their evolving roles amid a crisis.

2.1 TPACK Framework (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge)

The TPACK model, originally developed by (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), provides a valuable framework for analysing how teachers integrate technology, pedagogy, and subject content in their instructional practice. In the context of remote English language teaching in Cambodia, the TPACK framework helps explain how teachers negotiated the dynamic interplay between digital tools (e.g., Zoom, Facebook Live), EFL pedagogy (e.g., communicative approaches), and content knowledge (e.g., grammar, vocabulary). During the pandemic, many Cambodian EFL teachers were introduced to technology under conditions of urgency and constraint, requiring them to experiment with and balance new platforms, traditional pedagogies, and curriculum requirements often without formal training (Bredenberg, 2022). TPACK supports the understanding that successful digital instruction is not solely about mastering tools but about aligning them with pedagogical goals and language learning objectives. This triadic knowledge system is particularly important in EFL contexts, where instructional efficacy depends on interactive engagement, visual/auditory learning modalities, and scaffolded language exposure, all of which must be adapted for online environments (Koehler et al., 2014). The TPACK model also foregrounds contextual adaptability, making it suitable for analysing how teachers in rural vs. urban Cambodia employed different digital strategies depending on access to infrastructure, student needs, and community resources.

2.2 Narrative Inquiry and Teacher Agency

The second theoretical strand draws from narrative inquiry, which values teacher stories as legitimate and insightful forms of educational knowledge. Narrative inquiry, as articulated by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is rooted in the belief that teachers make sense of their professional lives through the telling and retelling of their experiences. These stories offer



access to teacher identity, emotional labour, pedagogical innovation, and the broader socio-political structures that frame classroom practice.

In the Cambodian EFL context, teacher narratives serve not only as accounts of instructional adaptation but also as acts of agency and resilience during a time of global uncertainty. Amid infrastructure deficits, pedagogical uncertainty, and professional isolation, many teachers demonstrated remarkable creativity and moral commitment, designing low-tech solutions, reaching out to families, and experimenting with new forms of student engagement (Huot & Em, 2024; Ngel, 2022). These stories provide qualitative data that illuminate how teachers positioned themselves as facilitators, content curators, and emotional anchors in digital classrooms. Furthermore, narrative inquiry recognizes that teachers in postcolonial and developing contexts often operate under systemic constraints, yet they exercise agency through improvisation, reflection, and community-oriented thinking, dimensions that are not always captured in traditional education research (Barkhuizen, 2011; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007).

2.3 Critical Pedagogy and Digital Equity

The third framework draws on principles from critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2025) particularly as they relate to digital equity, access, and inclusion. Critical pedagogy emphasizes that education is inherently political, and that learners and educators must be empowered to question and transform unequal structures. In the digital realm, this involves asking who has access to technology, what content is available, and whose voices are being amplified or silenced.

Cambodia's rapid shift to online learning during COVID-19 revealed stark digital divides, between urban and rural schools, private and public institutions, and teachers with varying levels of digital literacy (Chea et al., 2022; Huot et al., 2025). Critical pedagogy enables this study to go beyond descriptive accounts of technological usage and interrogate the power dynamics, systemic inequities, and cultural assumptions embedded in digital education. It also offers a lens through which to evaluate the relevance of digital tools to learners lived realities, particularly in rural areas where electricity, stable internet, and digital devices remain scarce. Teachers in these settings often responded by developing low-tech or hybrid pedagogies, such as delivering worksheets via motorbike, teaching via phone calls, or using radio broadcasts. These practices, though often overlooked in edtech discourse, represent radical forms of context-responsive pedagogy rooted in empathy, community engagement, and cultural knowledge.

By applying critical pedagogy, this study highlights the need for digital education policies that are not only technically efficient but also socially just, linguistically inclusive, and culturally grounded as depicted in table 1.

Table 1: Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks Guiding the Study

No.	Framework	Core Focus	Application to the Study
1.	(Technological Pedagogical	Integration of technology, pedagogy, and	Used to understand how Cambodian EFL teachers balanced digital tools (e.g., Zoom),



No.	Framework	Core Focus	Application to the Study
	Content Knowledge)	content knowledge in teaching.	pedagogical methods, and English content during remote instruction.
2.	Narrative Inquiry and Teacher Agency	Emphasizes teacher identity, reflection, and agency through storytelling.	Captures teacher experiences during the pandemic, highlighting improvisation, emotional resilience, and professional growth.
3.	Critical Pedagogy and Digital Equity	Focuses on power, access, and inclusion in education.	Used to analyze digital divides, urban-rural, infrastructure gaps, and culturally relevant responses to tech challenges in Cambodia.

3. Methodology of the Review

This study adopts a narrative review methodology to examine how Cambodian EFL teachers adapted to digital instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Rather than conducting a systematic review or meta-analysis with quantitative metrics, this approach emphasizes qualitative synthesis, contextual richness, and attention to teacher narratives as lived experiences. The goal is to understand not only what digital tools and practices were used, but also how teachers experienced, interpreted, and transformed their pedagogical identities through technology.

3.1 Scope and Inclusion Criteria

This review focuses exclusively on literature and testimonies that capture EFL, teaching and digital learning practices in Cambodia between 2020 and 2024, a period that includes the onset of COVID-19 school closures, the transition to remote instruction, and the early phases of post-pandemic educational recovery. The inclusion criteria were defined across four dimensions. First, the geographic scope is limited to sources that specifically address the Cambodian educational context, ensuring cultural and systemic relevance. Second, the temporal frame requires that all materials be published, collected, or disseminated between March 2020 and February 2024, to ensure that findings reflect the dynamics of pandemic-era and immediate post-pandemic instructional realities. Third, the topical relevance of the sources includes focus areas such as EFL pedagogy, digital technology integration, teacher experiences, instructional equity, and pedagogical adaptations related to the COVID-19 crisis.

Finally, the type of source considered eligible includes peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, government and NGO reports, and firsthand teacher narratives, whether published through formal academic platforms or featured in practitioner networks and local educational media. Sources were excluded from the review if they lacked methodological clarity, did not specifically address EFL instruction, or treated digital transformation in Cambodia solely at a policy level without direct attention to classroom-level experiences or pedagogical implications. This ensures that the review remains grounded in both empirical rigor and the lived realities of Cambodian teachers.

3.2 Sources and Databases



The data corpus for this review was developed through a comprehensive, multi-source strategy that integrated both academic literature and grey literature to ensure breadth and contextual relevance. Searches were conducted across a range of platforms and institutional repositories to capture diverse perspectives and documentation on digital EFL teaching in Cambodia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Peer-reviewed academic studies and open-access articles were retrieved through Google Scholar, focusing on topics related to Cambodian education, EFL pedagogy, and technology integration. The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) was also used to identify research specific to digital learning, English language instruction, and teacher development in Southeast Asia. In addition, ASEAN regional research databases were consulted to access comparative education studies and policy analyses relevant to digital transformation across the region. To obtain government and institutional perspectives, the review incorporated documents from the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), including policy briefs, national COVID-19 response plans, and evaluation studies of remote teaching initiatives (MoEYS, 2020). A significant portion of the literature also came from NGO publications, particularly from organizations such as World Education Cambodia, The Asia Foundation, and Room to Read, which have played active roles in supporting EFL and digital capacity-building efforts at the grassroots level.

Finally, media sources and teacher networks were included to access narrative accounts, interviews, and blog reflections published by or about Cambodian EFL teachers. These sources provided authentic, first-person insights into the practical challenges and innovations experienced during the rapid shift to online learning. This blended approach enabled the inclusion of both formal empirical research and context-rich, grassroots narratives, resulting in a more holistic and grounded understanding of the Cambodian EFL teaching landscape during and after the pandemic.

3.3 Narrative Synthesis Approach

To analyse the gathered materials, the study employs a narrative synthesis methodology as outlined by Popay et al. (2006) and expanded by Greenhalgh et al. (2018). This approach is well-suited to education research that seeks to synthesize findings from diverse qualitative sources without reducing complexity. The analysis followed three key steps:

- 1. Thematic Coding:** All textual data were read and manually coded using inductive thematic analysis. Codes were generated around common experiences, tools used, pedagogical shifts, emotional responses, equity challenges, and expressions of agency. Coding was iterative and interpretive, allowing themes to emerge and evolve through immersion in the data.
- 2. Cross-source Synthesis:** The coded narratives and studies were compared across types of institutions (e.g., public vs. private schools), geographies (e.g., urban vs. rural), and teaching conditions (e.g., synchronous vs. asynchronous instruction). This enabled the identification of both recurring themes and contextual contrasts.
- 3. Interpretive Integration:** Emergent themes were organized into overarching categories, such as innovation under constraint, emotional resilience, evolving digital pedagogy, and concerns around equity and assessment. These categories were then



interpreted in dialogue with the study's theoretical frameworks, particularly narrative inquiry and critical pedagogy.

The narrative synthesis approach enabled the research to preserve the voice, complexity, and emotion embedded in teacher testimonies, while drawing out patterns and insights that speak to broader educational questions in Cambodia and similar contexts.

4. Digital Practices in Cambodian EFL Classrooms: A Review of Literature

4.1 Pre-Pandemic Digital Infrastructure and Pedagogy

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Cambodia's digital education infrastructure was characterized by limited technological access, minimal training opportunities for teachers, and a heavily textbook-oriented instructional model. English language teaching followed a traditional, grammar-translation approach in most public schools, with a strong reliance on printed materials and blackboard instruction (Bredenberg, 2022; MoEYS, 2020). Digital integration in classrooms was sporadic, largely confined to elite urban institutions and donor-supported pilot projects. Surveys conducted by UNESCO and the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) prior to 2020 reported that only 35% of public-school teachers had received any form of ICT training, and fewer still had regular access to computers or internet connectivity within their schools (UNESCO, 2020). This created a substantial digital preparedness gap that would soon be exposed during the emergency shift to online learning.

4.2 Transition to Remote Learning During COVID-19

The closure of schools in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic prompted a nationwide transition to remote learning, facilitated by rapid policy responses and cross-sector collaboration. MoEYS, in partnership with international donors and NGOs, launched emergency digital learning programs that utilized a wide range of tools, including Zoom, Google Meet, Telegram, Facebook Live, and radio or television broadcasts (Chea et al., 2022; MoEYS, 2021).

Teaching models ranged from synchronous online classes using video conferencing, mostly in urban and private schools, to asynchronous modes in rural areas, where lessons were delivered through pre-recorded videos or mobile messaging platforms due to bandwidth limitations. NGOs such as World Education Cambodia, The Asia Foundation, and Room to Read were instrumental in training teachers, distributing tablets, and developing Khmer-language digital resources. However, this transition was not uniform. While some schools and teachers quickly adapted, others, especially in rural provinces, struggled due to lack of infrastructure, training, and support. The transition revealed deep structural inequalities, even as it fostered experimentation with new forms of digital pedagogy (Huot & Em, 2024; Ngel, 2022).

4.3 Common Tools and Platforms Used in EFL Instruction

The literature reveals a diverse range of digital tools and platforms used in Cambodian EFL classrooms during remote learning. Mobile learning emerged as the most accessible form of digital education, especially given the widespread use of smartphones among both teachers and students. Messaging apps like Telegram and Facebook Messenger were used to distribute assignments, share audio files, and facilitate teacher-student interaction in informal but effective ways (Huot & Em, 2024). For schools with stronger digital access, platforms such as Zoom,



Google Classroom, YouTube, and Kahoot! were utilized to conduct interactive lessons, distribute content, and assess student understanding. YouTube was particularly valuable for delivering pronunciation and listening exercises, while Facebook Live enabled teachers to livestream lessons for larger groups of learners, often reaching beyond their enrolled classrooms. These tools were often combined in blended or hybrid models, tailored to local conditions. For example, some teachers used Zoom for real-time lessons, followed by Telegram for homework submission and Facebook for feedback or motivational messages, a creative merging of high-tech and low-tech tools to meet varied learner needs.

4.4 Pedagogical Shifts in Teaching and Learning English

The shift to digital platforms necessitated significant pedagogical reorientation, prompting teachers to adopt new practices and competencies. One key change was the focus on developing digital literacies, both for students, who had to learn to navigate virtual learning environments, and for teachers, who had to transition from content deliverers to facilitators, content curators, and digital communicators (Bredenberg, 2022). English instruction during remote learning increasingly emphasized listening, speaking, and vocabulary acquisition using multimedia formats. Teachers used videos, audio clips, and online games to engage students and compensate for the lack of face-to-face interaction. These strategies were especially critical for beginner learners, who relied heavily on auditory and visual input to build foundational skills. Importantly, remote learning also encouraged more student-centred practices, such as project-based learning and peer feedback through group chats or recorded presentations. While these approaches were unevenly adopted, they marked a departure from traditional rote-based instruction and introduced opportunities for more interactive, communicative, and autonomous learning.

4.5 Technological Challenges

Despite these innovations, Cambodian EFL teachers faced persistent and well-documented technological challenges. A major barrier was the lack of consistent access to electricity, internet connectivity, and digital devices, particularly in rural provinces. According to (MoEYS, 2021), nearly 30% of students in public schools lacked access to a smartphone or tablet, and many teachers reported having to borrow equipment or share devices with family members. Digital skill disparities further compounded these challenges. Teachers with limited ICT training often struggled with basic troubleshooting, online classroom management, and digital content creation, leading to increased stress and decreased instructional confidence (Chea et al., 2022). Urban teachers generally had greater exposure to technology, more support networks, and better infrastructure, resulting in a significant urban-rural divide in digital readiness and student outcomes. Additionally, the lack of clear assessment strategies and limited ability to monitor student progress online led to concerns about learning loss and educational inequality (Huot & Em, 2024). Teachers reported difficulties in maintaining engagement, ensuring attendance, and differentiating instruction in digital spaces, issues that remain unresolved in many schools entering the post-pandemic period.

5. Teacher Narratives: Insights from the Field



The heart of this review lies in the lived experiences of Cambodian EFL teachers who were thrust into unfamiliar digital teaching environments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on teacher testimonies from both urban and rural areas, this section presents case narratives and thematic reflections that illuminate the complexity, creativity, and resilience that characterized their responses. The accounts provide rich qualitative data that go beyond policy documentation, revealing how educators navigated uncertainty, adapted to new tools, and reshaped their pedagogical identities in the process.

5.1 Case Narratives from Urban Classrooms

In urban settings, many EFL teachers were able to adapt relatively quickly to remote learning, supported by better access to internet infrastructure, institutional guidance, and peer collaboration. Teachers working in public schools and private language centres in Phnom Penh and other cities described initial difficulties with digital unfamiliarity, but noted that school-based support structures, including ICT staff and in-house training sessions, facilitated their transition. A recurring theme was the use of blended digital tools, teachers combined formal platforms like Google Meet or Zoom for synchronous sessions with more accessible tools such as Facebook groups, Messenger, and Telegram for asynchronous engagement.

One urban secondary school teacher reported, *“My students would not log into Zoom consistently, but they were active on Facebook. So, I recorded my grammar explanations and posted them there.”* Such hybrid strategies reflect a pragmatic and student-centred approach, optimizing engagement within the limits of students’ digital habits and technological capacity. Teachers also described informal peer-learning networks, where colleagues shared video tutorials, lesson templates, and emotional support. These narratives point to the role of collegial solidarity and bottom-up innovation in shaping successful adaptation, especially in the early stages of remote teaching.

5.2 Case Narratives from Rural Classrooms

In contrast, rural educators faced substantial challenges in transitioning to digital instruction. Teachers in provinces such as Kampong Thom, Prey Veng, and Ratanakiri frequently cited poor internet connectivity, lack of devices among students, and absence of formal ICT training. Yet, their responses highlight profound creativity and local resilience. Many teachers turned to low-tech or no-tech solutions, such as delivering worksheets via motorbike, conducting lessons through phone calls, or recording short audio lessons broadcast through local radio stations. These methods were often community-supported, with parents and village leaders assisting in the coordination and distribution of learning materials.

One rural primary teacher described, *“I couldn’t rely on Zoom, but I used my mobile phone to call groups of students. Sometimes, I had to go to their homes and explain the homework in person.”* These strategies underscore the communitarian ethos of rural Cambodian education, where the boundary between school and village dissolves, and teaching becomes a shared responsibility. Teacher narratives from these contexts illustrate how pedagogical adaptation was deeply rooted in local knowledge, resourcefulness, and care-driven practice, even in the absence of formal technology.

5.3 Themes Emerging from Teacher Voices



Across both urban and rural contexts, several core themes consistently emerged from teacher narratives. The first is innovation under constraint. Teachers demonstrated remarkable digital improvisation, repurposing platforms such as Facebook Messenger for instruction, using mobile data to conduct lessons, and finding ways to sustain learning continuity despite severe limitations. Secondly, the narratives reveal emotional and professional resilience. Many teachers spoke candidly about anxiety, burnout, and self-doubt during the early transition to online teaching. Yet, they also expressed growth in confidence, new digital skills, and a sense of achievement in overcoming adversity. This duality of stress and empowerment reflects the emotional labour involved in sustaining student engagement under unprecedented conditions. A third theme is the evolution of teacher identity. The shift to remote learning prompted many educators to reconceptualize their roles, not merely as instructors, but as facilitators, content creators, and technological mediators. Teachers described themselves producing videos, managing chat groups, and moderating online discussions, functions that extended their traditional duties and introduced new forms of pedagogical agency.

Finally, the narratives expressed persistent concerns about learning loss and assessment. Teachers reported difficulties in monitoring student progress, assessing oral skills online, and ensuring attendance, especially among disadvantaged students. The lack of standardized tools and digital assessment literacy further complicated efforts to measure learning outcomes during remote instruction. These stories collectively suggest that while digital transition in Cambodia was uneven and fraught with systemic challenges, it also became a transformative moment for many teachers. Their narratives reflect not only adaptive survival, but also a redefinition of pedagogy, technology, and professional purpose in the evolving landscape of Cambodian EFL education.

6. Discussion and Recommendations

The teacher narratives and reviewed literature in this study underscore not only the constraints of remote learning in Cambodia but also the creativity, resilience, and pedagogical innovation that emerged during a period of crisis. These insights call for a reframing of digital competence, a reimagining of teacher training, greater attention to digital equity, and long-term strategies for sustaining innovation. The following discussion highlights key findings and offers actionable recommendations for educational stakeholders:

1. Digital competence in Cambodia should not be measured solely by access to advanced tools or formal certification. Instead, it must be recognized as a context-sensitive and adaptive process, evolving through necessity, peer support, and local ingenuity. Cambodian EFL teachers demonstrated the ability to leverage familiar platforms, such as Facebook, Telegram, and YouTube, to deliver instruction in ways that were accessible to their students. This challenges deficit-based views and emphasizes pedagogical improvisation and relational knowledge as key components of digital literacy in resource-constrained environments. Policymaker should invest in scalable infrastructure, including affordable data plans, solar-powered devices, and rural internet access, while also supporting the creation of localized digital curricula that integrate Khmer language and culturally relevant examples.



2. The digital divide between Cambodia's urban and rural schools remains stark. Unequal access to electricity, mobile devices, and the internet continues to impede inclusive learning. Equity must extend beyond access to include linguistic inclusion and pedagogical relevance. The schools and NGOs should foster teacher communities of practice to exchange context-appropriate digital strategies and co-create materials. NGOs can act as bridging institutions, localizing edtech tools and supporting Khmer-language content development.
3. The shift to remote learning catalysed a transformation in teacher identity, from instructor to facilitator, content creator, and tech mediator. Many teachers have continued to apply blended strategies, such as using Telegram for feedback or YouTube for homework, even after returning to physical classrooms. These hybrid practices present opportunities for long-term reform grounded in blended learning and community-based knowledge systems. Researchers should conduct qualitative and participatory studies that examine teacher experiences, emotional labour, and innovation across diverse Cambodian contexts. Research should explore gender dynamics, linguistic diversity, and the sustainability of grassroots approaches to digital pedagogy.

This study underscores the limitations of top-down, one-off digital training initiatives and emphasizes the value of peer-led, narrative-driven professional development as a more effective and sustainable model. Cambodian EFL teachers adapted to remote instruction not solely through formal workshops, but through storytelling, informal peer exchanges, and collaborative problem-solving rooted in their own teaching communities. These experiences point to the need for a fundamental shift in teacher education, toward participatory training models that center teacher agency, foster reflective storytelling, and provide ongoing mentorship. Such training should also incorporate critical digital pedagogy, enabling educators to evaluate the ethical, cultural, and equity-related implications of their technology use.

In sum, Cambodia's adaptive and locally grounded response to remote EFL instruction during the pandemic presents a compelling blueprint for equitable, culturally responsive, and teacher-driven digital transformation. By recognizing educators as innovators and anchoring reform efforts in the lived realities of classrooms, Cambodia is well-positioned to build a resilient and inclusive English language education system for the digital age.

7. Conclusion

The unprecedented shift to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic catalysed a profound transformation in Cambodia's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy. What began as a crisis response quickly evolved into a period of experimentation, adaptation, and pedagogical reinvention. Teachers across both urban and rural Cambodia demonstrated remarkable agility in navigating technological limitations, rethinking classroom roles, and reshaping instructional delivery in ways that were grounded in local realities and student needs. This study has shown that remote learning was not merely a temporary disruption but a



transformative force that reshaped how Cambodian educators understand teaching, technology, and their own professional identities. From using low-tech methods like phone calls and radio broadcasts in rural areas to integrating hybrid models with tools like Google Meet, Facebook, and Telegram in urban schools, teachers embraced a diverse range of strategies. These practices reflected not only technological adaptation but also deep care, ingenuity, and a commitment to inclusive education.

Central to this transformation were the narratives of teachers themselves. Their voices provided essential insight into the lived complexities of digital pedagogy, revealing not only logistical challenges, but also emotional labour, pedagogical creativity, and professional growth. These stories offer more than anecdotal evidence; they are critical sources of knowledge that illuminate how innovation and resilience emerge under constraint. They also expose persistent gaps in infrastructure, digital equity, and training support, underscoring the need for sustained context-sensitive interventions.

As Cambodia moves beyond emergency education measures and toward long-term reform, it is imperative that policy, training, and research initiatives remain grounded in the realities of those who teach on the front lines. Sustainable digital transformation in education cannot be built on imported models or high-tech solutions alone, it must be rooted in community engagement, local knowledge, and teacher agency.

In conclusion, the future of EFL education in Cambodia depends not only on infrastructure and tools but on recognizing and empowering the teachers who are already innovating from within their classrooms and communities. Their stories are both testimony and roadmap, pointing the way toward a more equitable, responsive, and resilient digital education landscape.

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