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Endline evaluation of the girls empowerment and mainstreaming project

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Girls' Empowerment and Mainstreaming Sustainably (GEMS) (2022–25)

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Endline evaluation of the Girls' Empowerment and Mainstreaming Sustainably (GEMS) Project. British Council.

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Cover page caption:
A Peer Group Leader (PGL) demonstrating different ways of introducing themselves in English to her peers. Source: Scott Wilson Nepal (SWN).

Executive summary

The Girls' Empowerment and Mainstreaming Sustainably (GEMS) intervention (2022–25), implemented by the British Council and Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO), worked to support adolescent girls in Bara, Rautahat and Surkhet districts of Nepal. Building on lessons from the English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE) initiative, GEMS strengthened girls' English, digital and life skills through a holistic, peer-led model, delivered primarily through community learning centres (CLCs). This approach also aligned with the UK Government's global priorities on girls' education, gender-responsive learning and digital empowerment.

The endline evaluation, conducted across five municipalities, also known as local governments (LGs) or palikas, assessed outcomes in English proficiency, digital literacy and girls' self-efficacy – their confidence and ability to plan, organise and take actions to achieve desired goals. It also examined stakeholders' perspectives on programme effectiveness and sustainability. Out of the 500-baseline data, this evaluation used a convergent mixed-methods approach to collect quantitative data from 210 girls and qualitative insights from 25 key stakeholders. Within this approach, structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the required data. Though the evaluation lacked a formal control group and relied on ordinal-level measures, it nonetheless uncovered substantive improvements across different outcomes.

Sustaining GEMS through local-level ownership

CLCs served as the cornerstone of GEMS' local-level implementation. They provided spaces for peer-led clubs, skill-building activities and community engagement. They also facilitated coordination among schools, municipalities and parents, fostering local accountability and ownership.

Municipalities demonstrated their commitment to sustainability. For example, one municipality in Surkhet district allocated NRS 290,000 to continue GEMS activities beyond the intervention cycle. Stakeholders also recommended introducing GEMS as early as Grade 6, to allow skill development at an early age and grade.

Implication: The use of CLCs as local platforms and embedding GEMS within municipal education structures strengthens long-term sustainability. A CLC chairperson in Surkhet reflected: 'We have included GEMS as an additional activity, and the LG's funding shows their commitment to this intervention'.

Advancing foundation skills in English, digital literacy and self-efficacy

The evaluation revealed improved skill gains.

- *English proficiency:* At endline, 63.1 per cent of girls improved their English skills, while 31.5 per cent remained at the same level as baseline (n=130). This improvement is statistically significant ($p<0.001$), indicating it is unlikely to have occurred by chance. While other factors may have contributed, the finding shows that girls' English proficiency skills have improved over three years.
- *Digital literacy:* By endline, 87.5 per cent of girls showed improvement in PowerPoint, 85.4 per cent in Excel and 84.4 per cent in internet browsing (n=104). These changes are significant ($p<0.001$), but other factors might have contributed too.
- *Self-efficacy:* Around 43.7 per cent of adolescent girls are now confident when meeting new people (n=206); 77.3 per cent are aware of early marriage struggles (n=207) and 67.6 per cent are convinced that dowry is not a good practice (n=207). The confidence index of Peer Group Leaders (PGLs) was highest in Bara (3.38) and lowest in Surkhet (2.85).

Implication: These gains equip girls with essential tools for academic success, employability and active participation in social life. As one participant, Anjali Sah, mentioned, 'I used to have a hard time understanding big words earlier, but now I can easily read and translate those words'.

Fostering agency, peer networks and community collaboration

GEMS intervention used peer-led clubs and the PGL model to create safe spaces where girls could develop their leadership skills. Within these spaces, the girls supported one another in both education and personal growth. Organisations like Aasaman Nepal helped CLCs in facilitating and implementing the programme, while also coordinating with schools, parents, local governments and other stakeholders.

Implication: Strengthened collective agency allowed girls to emerge as local leaders and advocate for social change. As one participant, Binita Kushwaha, mentioned, 'I don't fear like earlier. GEMS not only taught us, but it made us strong'.

Conclusion

GEMS has created a foundation for girls' empowerment in Nepal, through improvements in confidence, skills and community engagement. It has generated key trends of local government ownership, peer-led networks and systemic integration. However, limited digital access and the lack of post-intervention monitoring remain the major challenges. These gaps need to be addressed by developing context-sensitive approaches, strengthening monitoring tools and sustaining local investment.

Reflections from the evaluation

Future interventions should include more robust baseline data systems so that the analysis can delve further into the impact. Earlier programme entry, probably at Grade 6, could be more effective in maximising learning and confidence-building, though further research is necessary to confirm this. The follow-up mechanism is essential to track the progress of girls after the intervention and to reinforce commitment to the programme. Finally, the integration of GEMS into the municipal plan is necessary to sustain the initiative beyond the intervention cycle.

In conclusion, GEMS successfully enhanced the skills of adolescent girls. However, its design should evolve to address sustainability and inclusiveness, positioning it as a scalable model for advancing gender equity in Nepal.

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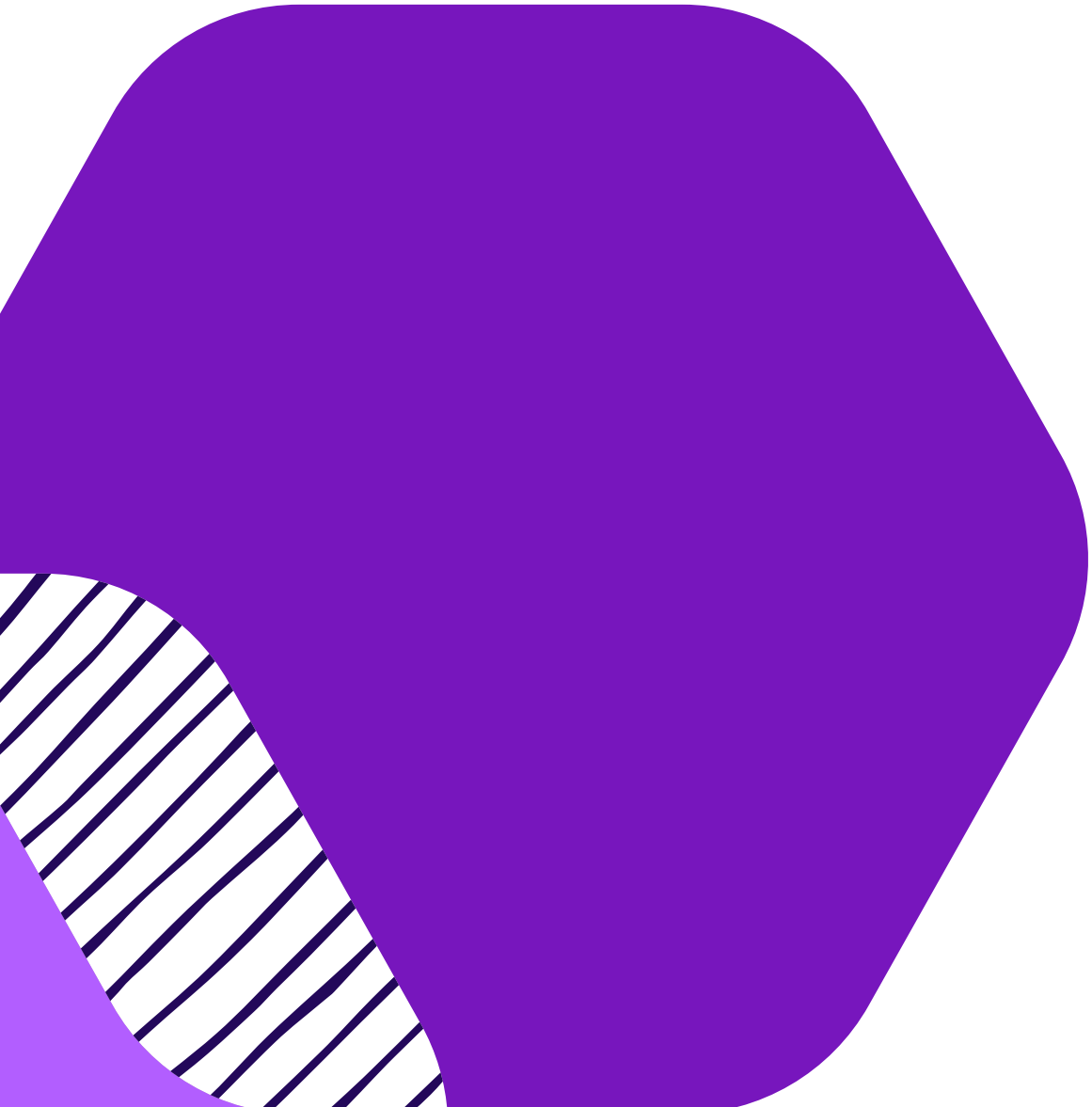

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Part 1
Introduction

1.1. Background of the GEMS intervention

The Girls' Empowerment and Mainstreaming Sustainably (GEMS) intervention builds upon the successful foundation established by the British Council's English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE) project. EDGE demonstrated the transformative potential of combining English language learning with digital literacy to empower marginalised girls, while also highlighting the need for more comprehensive approaches that address systemic barriers to girls' empowerment. The lessons learned from EDGE, particularly regarding the importance of community engagement, peer-to-peer learning and addressing social norms, directly informed the design and implementation of GEMS.

The transition from EDGE to GEMS represents an evolution in programming approach, expanding from primarily education-focused interventions to a more holistic model that addresses policy environments, individual capacity building and collective action simultaneously. This progression reflects growing understanding that sustainable girls' empowerment requires coordinated intervention across multiple levels of the social and institutional ecosystem.

The GEMS project represents a transformative three-year initiative implemented collaboratively by the British Council and Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) in Nepal from 2022 to 2025. This comprehensive project was designed to foster an inclusive society and promote equitable development by strengthening girls' education and health while empowering women and girls across marginalised communities.

GEMS emerged from extensive consultations with communities, government stakeholders and civil society organisations who identified critical gaps in existing programming for marginalised adolescent girls. Traditional approaches often focused on single interventions, failing to address the systemic nature of gender inequality that perpetuates barriers to girls' empowerment in Nepal. The consultative process revealed that while numerous initiatives targeted girls' education or health in isolation, few addressed the interconnected barriers that require coordinated intervention across multiple levels.

The project's strategic foundation rests on three interconnected outcomes that address different levels of the empowerment ecosystem. Outcome 1 focuses on enhanced enabling policy environments and accountability for gender-responsive and inclusive education and health systems, recognising that sustainable change requires supportive institutional frameworks. Outcome 2 targets improved self-efficacy and life skills of marginalised adolescent girls through comprehensive capacity-building programmes that develop both technical competencies and personal confidence. Outcome 3 emphasises enhanced agency, networks and collaboration to enable adolescent girls to claim their rights and participate meaningfully in community development processes.

The scale and inclusivity of GEMS demonstrate its commitment to reaching the most marginalised populations. The project reaches 72,460 people across diverse geographical and cultural contexts, including 36,959 females and 35,501 males, 725 of whom were persons with disabilities. This deliberate inclusion of persons with disabilities reflects GEMS' intersectional approach that recognises how multiple forms of marginalisation compound to create unique barriers for different groups of girls.

GEMS operates through a sophisticated network of community structures that serve as the backbone for sustainable change. The project supports 30 mothers' groups who serve as advocates for girls' rights within family structures and challenge traditional gender norms at the household level. Moreover, 30 Youth-Led Communities provide peer support and leadership development opportunities, while creating safe spaces for intergenerational dialogue about changing social expectations.

The project's institutional partnerships extend to 19 schools that serve as formal education entry points and 24 health facilities that ensure access to essential services, including sexual and reproductive health information and care. This multistakeholder approach ensures that interventions are embedded within existing community systems rather than creating parallel structures that may not be sustainable beyond project completion.

Central to the GEMS approach is use of community learning centres (CLCs) for programme delivery and community engagement. These centres represent an innovative model that bridges formal and non-formal education, while creating safe spaces for girls to develop skills, build confidence and challenge restrictive social norms. CLCs operate as more than educational facilities; they are community hubs where intergenerational dialogue occurs, where policy discussions happen at grassroots levels and where girls can exercise leadership roles that may not be available to them in other contexts.

The theoretical foundation of GEMS draws from feminist development theory, social change models and evidence-based practices in girls' empowerment programming. The project recognises that sustainable change requires attention to individual agency, relational dynamics and structural factors that shape girls' opportunities and choices. This comprehensive understanding informs the project's holistic approach that simultaneously builds individual capacity while working to transform the social and institutional environments in which girls live.

The partnership model between the British Council and VSO leverages the comparative advantages of both organisations, while reflecting a commitment to collaborative development programming. The British Council brings expertise in education, English language learning, digital literacy and policy engagement, while VSO contributes deep experience in community mobilisation, volunteer management and social-change programming. This partnership extends to local implementing partners, who provide essential cultural knowledge, community relationships and contextual understanding that ensure programming is responsive to local needs and priorities.

1.2. Purpose of the evaluation

The endline evaluation aimed to assess changes in adolescent girls' English proficiency, digital skills and self-efficacy through pre- and post-intervention measurement. Qualitative data from stakeholders complemented this by providing context and supporting or contrasting the quantitative findings.

The evaluation also sought to generate evidence of the effectiveness of the GEMS intervention, capturing both immediate outcomes and potential social impacts. It also provides insights for future programming, sustainable practices and

methodological approaches to measuring girls' empowerment, ensuring that findings could inform policy, practice and community-level decision making.

1.3. Objectives of the evaluation

The endline evaluation of the GEMS intervention is guided by the following three overarching research questions, closely connected to three outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** To what extent have the GEMS interventions contributed to the development and implementation of a gender-responsive education plan at the local levels?
- **Outcome 2:** How have the GEMS interventions improved the life skills, self-confidence and digital/English literacy of marginalised adolescent girls?
- **Outcome 3:** To what extent have adolescent girls developed collective agency and leadership capacity through the GEMS interventions, and how are they using peer networks to advocate for their rights and participate in community development?

Through these research questions and outcomes, the evaluation seeks to generate evidence of the policy, individual and collective impacts of the GEMS interventions. Together, these objectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding both the direct outcomes for girls and the broader social and institutional changes facilitated by the GEMS interventions.

1.4. Geographical focus of the evaluation

The evaluation focused on schools identified by the British Council across five local governments (LGs) in three districts spanning two provinces (Figure 1). These schools formed the primary sites for data collection and served as the key geographical focus of the endline evaluation. Table 1 presents details of schools across the provinces, districts and local levels included in the study.

Province	District	Local level	School
Madhesh	Bara	Kalaiya Sub-Metropolitan City	Janata Ma. Vi., Bhawanipur
			Nepal Rastriya Ma. Vi., Manharwa
			Nepal Rastriya Ma. Vi., Matiharwa
			Teen Chandra Ma. Vi.
	Rautahat	Gadhimai Municipality	Shree Ma. Vi., Birnagara
			Shree Ma. Vi., Dharampur
			Shree Ma. Vi., Sangrampur
			Shankar Gudar Ma. Vi.
Karnali	Surkhet	Bheriganga Municipality	Janajyoti Ma. Vi.
			Prabhat Ma. Vi.
			Shikhar Ma. Vi.
		Gurbhakot Municipality	Bheri Ma. Vi., Gurbhakot
			Janasewa Adharbhut Vidyalaya
			Ne Ra Ma. Vi., Gurbhakot
		Lekhbesi Municipality	Jivanjyoti Ma. Vi.

Table 1*: Schools across the two provinces and three districts that were approached for data collection during this endline evaluation.*

This geographical distribution allowed the evaluation to capture diverse contexts and experiences of adolescent girls participating in the GEMS intervention. The selected schools provided a comprehensive view of both educational settings and community-level variations, strengthening the reliability and relevance of the findings.

Figure 1: The geographical focus of the endline evaluation of the GEMS project

1.5. Significance of the evaluation

The endline evaluation is significant for three reasons. First, it provides evidence that peer-led interventions can effectively enhance girls' skills, leadership and self-efficacy. Second, it shows that CLCs are capable of implementing the GEMS-like programmes and are actively working to sustain such initiatives at the local level. Third, by aligning with the UK Government's strategic priorities on girls' empowerment and digital inclusion, the evaluation offers practical lessons for designing scalable and impactful interventions in Nepal.

1.6. Timeline of the evaluation

The endline evaluation was conducted from **16 May to 29 August 2025**, encompassing preparatory orientation, systematic data collection and iterative report drafting. Orientation and training for field researchers took place on **10 and 11 June 2025**, followed by the British Council's approval of the inception report on **11 June 2025**. Primary data collection occurred between **14 and 30 June 2025**, setting the foundation for analysis and reporting. The first draft of the endline evaluation report, together with a short documentary, six case stories and an infographic, was submitted on **26 July 2025**. The British Council's feedback arrived on **20 August 2025**, prompting revisions. The second (final) draft report – with all accompanying materials – was completed and submitted on **29 August 2025**.

> **the evaluation offers practical lessons for designing scalable and impactful interventions in Nepal.**

Part 2

Design and methodology

2.1. Mixed-methods evaluation design

The endline evaluation employed a convergent mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture the scale and depth of the GEMS intervention. Pre- and post-intervention assessments measured changes in English proficiency, digital skills and self-efficacy among participating girls, while interviews, case stories and observations provided contextual insights into their lived experiences.

This methodological choice allowed for data triangulation, balancing statistical rigour with rich narrative detail. The evaluation also produced a short documentary showcasing outcomes and stakeholder perspectives in an engaging visual format.

2.2. Data-collection tools

A combination of quantitative and qualitative tools was necessary to capture both measurable outcomes and the lived experience of participants. The evaluation, therefore, used structured questionnaires to assess adolescent girls' competencies in English proficiency, digital skills and self-efficacy. The structured questionnaires were provided by the British Council, which included an English language proficiency tool, a digital skills assessment tool and a self-efficacy questionnaire. Additionally, the evaluation used open-ended interview questionnaires, observations, informal discussions, desk review and video documentaries to gather qualitative insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions from various stakeholders.

English language proficiency assessment tool

The English language proficiency assessment tool measured listening, reading and speaking skills, aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The tool consisted of five sets of questions, with each participant responding to one set. Responses were digitally recorded and sent to the British Council for decoding. Once the decoded results were received, the evaluation team conducted the data analysis. Details of the questions are provided in Section 3.

Digital skills assessment tool

This structured assessment tool evaluated practical digital literacy across four areas: Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft PowerPoint and internet browsing. Tasks included creating and saving documents, entering data in spreadsheets, designing and delivering presentations and retrieving information online. The tool assessed both technical proficiency and the ability to apply digital skills in practice.

Self-efficacy questionnaire

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own ability to organise and execute actions required to achieve desired outcomes. It influences motivation, persistence and resilience in the face of challenges. To assess self-efficacy, the evaluation employed a paper-based questionnaire covering social skills, awareness of social issues, employability skills and leadership abilities.

Responses were collected using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The team ensured consistent instructions, and standardised data-entry procedures were used to maintain accuracy. This tool provided valuable insight into participants' confidence in their personal capabilities, which is critical for both academic and personal growth.

Key informant interviews

The evaluation used semi-structured interviews to collect emerging insights regarding GEMS interventions. The participants included local government officials, parents, school representatives, CLC facilitators, the local implementing agency, adolescent girls and an international non-government organisation. The interviews also explored policy implementation, peer-led group effectiveness, community perceptions and network strengthening. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure diverse perspectives and comprehensive representation.

Case stories

Adolescent girls from Bara and Rautahat were purposively selected to document transformative experiences. Participants included GEMS club members and PGLs, with in-depth interviews capturing changes in English proficiency, confidence, employability, self-efficacy and social skills.

Document review and observations

The evaluation team reviewed the concept note, theory of change (ToC), logical framework, training materials, EDGE regional evaluation reports, monitoring data and policy briefs to triangulate findings. During the field visit, the team members observed CLCs to assess learning environments.

Video documentary

The team used an external company to prepare a short video documentary highlighting the key outcomes and impacts of the GEMS interventions. This documentary complemented the evaluation findings by showcasing how the interventions have influenced the lives of adolescent girls and other key stakeholders.

2.3. Population and sample size

For quantitative data, the evaluation team was provided with a sampling frame of 460 adolescent girls, out of which a sample of 210 respondents was drawn. A stratified random sampling approach was used to allocate the required sample size across local governments. The formula was further extended to the school level to ensure representation from each school (see Annex 3 for details). The sample was proportionate to the number of participating girls, thereby maintaining methodological rigour and transparency. In cases where selected respondents were not reachable, replacements were identified through a snowball sampling approach. Given field-level constraints, it was not feasible for enumerators to repeat randomisation, making snowball sampling a practical alternative for securing replacements. For self-efficacy measures, baseline data from 500 adolescent girls was used to assess changes in awareness levels over time.

For qualitative data, the sampling frame consisted of direct and indirect beneficiaries of the GEMS intervention. The evaluation team requested the British Council to identify potential informants directly involved in the intervention. Table 2 lists the

purposefully selected stakeholders interviewed to provide additional insights.

Table 2: Selected informants for qualitative insights

Stakeholders	Number of informants
Parents/Guardians	3
CLC facilitators and members	6
LG representatives, including those from the education sector	3
Aasaman Nepal	2
Teachers and head teachers	2
GEMS participants	6
British Council	2
VSO International	1
Total	25

Six GEMS participants from Bara and Rautahat districts were selected for case studies. The selection was made from an existing list of participants, ensuring representation of both PGLs and general club members. This approach was intended to capture a balance between leadership experiences and broader member participation. Participants were purposefully chosen to reflect diverse stories.

2.4. Data analysis

A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to enter the endline data. Each adolescent girl was identified through a unique number, followed by contextual information such as district, local government and name of the CLC, age, grade and scoring results. The scoring format was consistent with that of the baseline survey, enabling comparison between the two survey periods. This dataset was then used to compute score differences and conduct inferential analysis in SPSS. To ensure confidentiality, the names of the adolescent girl were anonymised with asterisks.

The analysis followed a structured approach to assess baseline and endline scores. Only participants with matched baseline and endline scores were included to track progress over time, and that included:

- English proficiency test: 130 adolescent girls
- digital skills: 96 adolescent girls
- self-efficacy: 104 adolescent girls.

Certain self-efficacy responses that could be analysed independently used endline data from 209 adolescent girls, compared with baseline data from 500 adolescent girls. This independent analysis was conducted to maximise the use of available data while maintaining methodological rigour, allowing the evaluation to examine specific aspects of self-efficacy even when matched baseline and endline

scores were not available for all participants. The number of adolescent girls included in each analysis is indicated in the corresponding table headings or figure captions in Section 3.

Responses to the English proficiency test were captured in a recorder and handed to the British Council trainers for decoding. Once the results were provided, the evaluation team analysed the data.

For both English proficiency and digital skills, total scores were calculated by summing ordinal values across different sections (part 1, part 2, part 3a, part 3b and part 4). While each section was ordinal, the summed total was treated as an interval variable, allowing for statistical comparisons. Each section was also analysed separately to show the significant changes between baseline and endline scores.

The Shapiro-Wilk test was utilised to check the normality of the total score distribution, and the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test was used to compare paired baseline and endline scores. A significance level of 0.05 was used, and the associated p-value was interpreted to show a significant change in performance.

In addition to quantitative analysis, the evaluation team developed case stories to capture participant insights. An open-ended questionnaire was used to explore girls' experience of the GEMS project. All interviews were conducted in Nepali, with informed consent obtained beforehand. Recordings were transcribed, translated into English and synthesised into narrative formats to illustrate the most significant changes reported by the girls.

2.5. Methodological limitations and key considerations

The evaluation generated important insights into the outcomes of the GEMS intervention. However, certain methodological limitations should be acknowledged. These relate to study design and the nature of the assessment tools used.

Absence of a control group

Improvements in English proficiency, digital skills and self-efficacy cannot be conclusively attributed solely to the GEMS intervention, as external influences like societal changes, government interventions, school initiatives and informal learning influence outcomes all the time. To address this, the team guided self-efficacy questionnaires, expert assessment of English proficiency and direct observation of digital skills to track progress.

Digital skills assessment

The evaluation team measured competencies using ordinal rankings (0=unable, 1=some help, 2=independent). While the distance between categories is not equal, the scores reflect meaningful, sequential improvements in task performance. Because the evaluation team directly assessed the girls' digital skills, non-parametric tests were applied to assess the significance of change over time.

Self-efficacy assessment

The self-efficacy questionnaire used Likert scale data, which is ordinal in nature. The differences between categories (for example, 'Agree' vs 'Strongly agree') are not necessarily equal. As the self-efficacy data relied on girls' own reporting, responses may be influenced by social desirability, recall challenges or girls' perceptions of what evaluators expected to hear. This introduces the possibility of bias. Realising this, the evaluation team compared the baseline and endline responses descriptively, rather than using statistical tests, allowing for identification of trends while respecting the ordinal nature of the data.

2.6. Ethical considerations

The endline evaluation was carried out in strict adherence to recognised ethical principles – respect for persons, beneficence, non-maleficence and confidentiality – as articulated in foundational documents such as the Belmont Report and international guidelines for research involving minors. It also aligned with the British Council's Global Safeguarding Policy, ensuring rigorous child protection throughout the evaluation implementation.

Key ethical safeguarding included:

- **mandatory safeguarding compliance by all researchers:** All evaluation team members signed the British Council's safeguarding agreement, affirming their commitment to safeguarding procedures and child protection frameworks consistent with organisational policy.
- **robust informed consent and assent procedures:** Each adolescent survey participant was provided with an informed assent form. For minors under 18, parental or guardian consent was also secured, along with the girl's own assent. Clear, age-appropriate explanations were offered regarding the purpose, procedures, risks and voluntary nature of the participation – including the right to withdraw at any point without justification and consequence. These practices respect autonomy while acknowledging the increased vulnerability of adolescent girl participants, in line with global guidance regarding minors' involvement in research.
- **verbal informed consent for qualitative interactions:** Qualitative interviews and case study participants provided verbal consent before participation. They were also informed about audio, photo or video capture and explicitly consented to these, with reassurances that participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time.
- **media consent for visualisation:** Separate consent or assent was obtained from participants and guardians specifically for video or photographic documentation, ensuring full transparency and respect for personal autonomy.
- **confidentiality and pseudonym use:** To preserve anonymity and privacy, all personal identifiers were removed, and pseudonyms were used in interviews, case studies and report narratives, where possible. This approach upholds confidentiality and prevents unintended identification of individuals.

Part 3

Findings and analysis

The GEMS intervention was implemented across two provinces, three districts, five local governments and 15 schools, reaching a total of 460 adolescent girls (of which around 100 adolescent girls have left their village, leading to a total sampling universe of 360 adolescent girls). The endline evaluation focused on all 15 schools, with a random sample of 210 adolescent girls from the selected schools. This section provides the evaluation findings, grouped under three outcomes.

The first outcome is purely qualitative, describing the ways through which GEMS ensured the project's sustainability. The second outcome is linked with quantitative data on English proficiency, digital skills and measurement of self-efficacy through baseline and endline scores. This outcome is supported by qualitative insights that either validate or contrast the quantitative results. The third outcome is associated with adolescent girls' enhanced agency, networking ability and collaborations. The evaluation team used both quantitative and qualitative data to highlight how the GEMS project helped in forming the PGL network, empowering adolescent girls in self-advocacy and collective action.

Summary of findings

- **Systemic integration:** CLCs and implementing agencies were found to be working to integrate GEMS into local education systems, enabling local governments to take ownership of the programme.
- **Local ownership:** Efforts to sustain the GEMS intervention are evident, although concerns remain about long-term independence without external support.
- **Stakeholder collaboration:** Schools and CLCs provided spaces, schools selected PGLs and club members, and local authorities and parents supported smooth implementation, fostering accountability and community involvement.
- **English proficiency gains:** Statistically significant improvements ($p<0.001$) were observed across all five English proficiency components, with low confidence reported by 65.6 per cent of girls at baseline, dropping to 7.5 per cent at endline.
- **Digital skills growth:** Significant progress was recorded in digital skills related to Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and internet browsing ($p<0.001$). At endline, 92.7 per cent of girls could browse the internet independently, though many still lacked personal access to a laptop or a desktop at home.
- **Self-efficacy advancements**: Around 43.7 per cent of girls reported feeling confident in meeting new people, 77.3 per cent supported marriage after the age of 18 and 67.6 per cent opposed dowry practices, reflecting positive shifts in attitudes and perceptions.
- **Increased agency:** Adolescent girls are overcoming fear of public speaking, with PGLs demonstrating leadership through facilitation and conflict resolution, marking their growth as community change makers.
- **Strengthened networks**: GEMS clubs and the PGL model have created safe spaces for peer

support, with stakeholder collaboration fostering an enabling ecosystem.

- **Community impact**: Girls gained exposure through training and actively addressed social issues, including child marriage and discrimination.

The detailed analysis in sections 3.1–3.3 provides a comprehensive understanding of these findings, organised around the three outcomes and presented through key indicators.

3.1. Outcome 1: Enhanced enabling policy environment and accountability

The GEMS partnered with CLCs to create a more supportive and accountable environment for girls' education at the local level. This section highlights how CLCs are actively working to integrate GEMS initiatives into local education plans, strengthening the sustainability of the intervention. It also provides perspectives from local government authorities, school head teachers, CLC chairpersons and facilitators on the implementation and impact of GEMS. Finally, this section discusses the risks and challenges in building local partnerships, demonstrating how GEMS has contributed to making education more inclusive and responsive to the needs of adolescent girls.

3.1.1. From intervention to practice: Embedding GEMS into local systems

At its core, the major aim of the GEMS intervention is to sustain its activity in the structure of local-level plans and programmes. From the initial phase, the project used CLCs in close collaboration with the local governments, schools and communities to ensure local ownership and long-term continuity of the project. With this view in mind, the evaluation team interviewed different stakeholders to observe changes in local priorities and sustained institutional practices at the household level.

During interviews in Kalaiya Sub-Metropolitan City and Gadhimai Municipality, local authorities expressed that the GEMS interventions certainly align with the municipal education goals, which promote the right to quality and inclusive basic education. They also felt that the GEMS project has achieved remarkable impact in empowering adolescent girls across Bara, Rautahat and Surkhet districts as a) the project delivered marked improvements in English proficiency, digital competence and self-efficacy, strengthening girls' life and leadership skills and b) it fostered agency, networks and civic engagement, enabling girls to confidently claim their rights and participate in community decisions. As one local-level authority mentioned:

> "हामीले आसमान नेपाललाई प्रोपोजल ल्याउनुस, हामी त्यो मेयरसाबको अघि पेश गर्नेछौ भनेर भनेका छौ"

which translates to 'We have requested Aasaman Nepal to submit the proposal, so that we share it with the mayor'. Adding one step ahead towards sustainability, a CLC chairperson from Surkhet district mentioned:

> "यो वर्ष हामीले GEMS लाई निरन्तरता दिनुपर्छ भनेर CLC को अतिरिक्त कार्यक्रमको रुपमा यसलाई राखेका थियौ, र हामीले जानकारी पाए अनुसार २९०००० यसको लागि पालिकाले छुट्याउनु भएको छ"

which translates to 'This year we have put GEMS as an additional activity in our programme list, and we have learned that the local level has allocated NRS 290,000 for this programme'. The chairperson highlighted that those GEMS outputs are now consistently shared in local government meetings and have even been formally presented in the presence of the mayor and deputy mayor, underscoring their recognition at the highest municipal level. As the new fiscal year begins, it remains to be seen whether the local government will independently initiate and continue this project, marking a shift in local ownership.

The evaluation team observed several positive changes within schools participating in the GEMS intervention. For example, schools actively supported the selection and recruitment of PGLs and club members for the GEMS intervention. They also provided spaces to operate the GEMS project after school hours. During interviews, the CLC chairpersons and facilitators mentioned that school head teachers, parents and local-level authorities visit CLCs regularly, contributing to smooth project implementation. The school head teachers from

Bara and Rautahat districts expressed pride in seeing their students represent the school in external training sessions and community activities. All voices point towards the successful implementation of the GEMS project in integrating non-formal life skills alongside formal education to support holistic student development.

3.1.2. Diverse stakeholder voices: Appreciation and concerns

The evaluation team discussed with six key stakeholders – the local governments (LGs), schools, CLCs, the key implementing partner, the local implementing partner and parents – to understand their perspectives on the GEMS project.

All stakeholders acknowledged and appreciated the collaborative implementation model of GEMS, which is delivered through CLCs in close coordination with the local implementing partner, Aasaman Nepal. They praised Aasaman Nepal for its effective coordination across schools, municipal government and community actors, ensuring seamless collaboration and smooth execution of activities. However, stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of institutionalising and sustaining GEMS within municipal development plans to ensure long-term continuation.

In districts like Bara and Rautahat, the stakeholders mentioned the need for community and parental support to ensure girls' participation in the project, especially in more conservative settings, which the evaluation team felt was nicely coordinated.

There were some notable differences in perspectives observed during the time of evaluation. In Surkhet, the School Management Committee (SMC) chairperson questioned the choice of Grade 8 as an entry point for girls, as he felt that Grade 6 would be the appropriate choice. He further mentioned:

> "सरकारको नीति अनुसार तल्लो कक्षामा आफ्नै भाषामा पढाई हुनुपर्छ, जुन कक्षा १ देखि ५ सम्म ठिक छ, कक्षा ६ मा भएको भए उसले चाडै अंग्रेजी सिक्थ्यो, तर ८ कक्षामा हुदा उसलाई समस्या भयो"

This translates to 'According to government policy, schools should use mother-tongue education at early grades, which is fine for Grades 1–5; and had this programme been launched at Grade 6, students would have learned English faster, but because it starts in Grade 8, it has become difficult'. He further mentioned that once girls complete the project, there is no follow-up, which means they are not in a position to see the real improvement of adolescent girls in terms of English proficiency, digital skills and social empowerment.

In Bara and Rautahat districts, school head teachers expressed concerns about the limited selection of adolescent girls for GEMS programming. When the evaluation team enquired with the acting head teacher at one school in Surkhet district about the selection criteria, the response indicated that no clear process or guidelines were in place. Additionally, head teachers from Bara and Rautahat districts raised issues regarding the uneven stipend distribution – PGLs received different (presumably higher) stipends than other club members. This disparity led to confusion and feelings of exclusion among the broader group.

Regular attendance of adolescent girls in GEMS interventions, according to some girls, was difficult because of the Grade 10 national examination. In Surkhet, the evaluation team requested the CLC facilitator to show the attendance records of the adolescent girls, but she could not do it as it was on Saturday. In Bara and Rautahat districts, parents from Dom, Chamar and Muslim communities were found to be hesitant to send their girls into GEMS interventions, as they felt that their daughters should be engaged in household responsibilities over the weekend.

Various stakeholders (mostly schools) have questioned the roles of CLCs in all three districts because, as per their view, CLCs are mandated to

support non-formal activities. In the context of GEMS, the CLCs are directly engaged with school-going girls for the first time, expanding beyond their traditional roles. The acting head teacher of one of the schools mentioned:

> "यो काम त बिद्यालयले पो गर्ने हो त, CLC को अधिकार क्षेत्र नै होइन"

It translates to 'This activity has to be done by the school, as this does not fall under CLCs' mandates'. The evaluation team looked at the Education Act, 2019, to verify this mandate, which clearly stated that CLCs are authorised to organise learning-related programmes. In such cases, the team feels that the CLC mandate has to be discussed properly at all levels of government, so that it does not undermine any learning-related efforts.

In discussion with Aasaman Nepal, a key sustainability concern emerged: despite some local governments demonstrating genuine commitment to GEMS – such as allocating municipal funding – they remain uncertain about their ability to continue the project without financial and technical support from outside organisations. This is a genuine concern, as the current education system lacks the effective monitoring and guidance that were previously provided by resource persons under the earlier centralised governance system.

In Surkhet district, the girls' selection started immediately after the Tihar holiday, a major five-day Nepali festival of lights celebrated in October to November, which led to a few dropouts. To address this, Aasaman Nepal, in coordination with the British Council, extended these opportunities to other girls. Consequently, only 96 out of the planned 210 girls had complete baseline data – a clear indication of the challenges in maintaining consistent participation and documentation.

In a conversation with VSO International, the team gained insights into the project's conceptualisation, strategic integration of menstrual health and gender, and the sustainability of outcomes. The project was conceptualised and created based on the respective strengths of both the British Council and VSO International. The British Council brought in technical expertise on English learning and digital education, while VSO contributed to menstrual health and social norms transformation. VSO, though, was not directly involved with Aasaman Nepal in the field along with Jana Jagaran Youth Club and Nepal Farmers Group Federation, but it provided technical know-how such as tools, frameworks and content based on its extensive experiences with other similar kinds of projects. In order to orient the local partners and align them with the project, VSO conducted introductory workshops. Throughout the project, regular review and reflection meetings were conducted between the British Council, VSO and local implementing partners, which enabled a safe and open space to address operational challenges and reflect on progress.

It was also recognised by VSO that, despite the success of the project, there were a few limitations, such as the menstrual health management (MHM) intervention in GEMS was limited to only a basic awareness component to school nurses and gender focal teachers. They stressed

impactful MHM programming with targeted, periodic interventions and social norm change strategies. The MHM responsive infrastructure and services were recognised as a future programme priority. Yet another persistent challenge was the lack of proper documentation and incorporation of baseline and endline evaluations to allow comparative analysis of the impact and evidence-based evaluation.

3.1.3. Leadership, learning and life skills: Systemic gains from GEMS

The peer-led learning model fostered inclusive, safe learning environments and built leadership from within the cohort. Through this approach, adolescent girls supported each other – learning and practising English and digital skills together in a non-judgemental setting – allowing them to overcome fears and build confidence. This model proved highly effective in boosting club members' English language proficiency, digital literacy and social skills. Moreover, girls selected as PGLs gained valuable facilitation and leadership experience, transforming them into trusted human resources within their communities. Peer-led interventions have been demonstrated to boost self-esteem, retention of knowledge and empowerment, making peers more credible and relatable role models than traditional adult-led instruction. GEMS' peer-led model not only enhanced skills among club members but also cultivated young leaders capable of sustaining community-based learning and empowerment.

Each CLC is provided with one or two laptops as part of the GEMS project. In all three districts, where the majority of the adolescent girls did not have a laptop or a computer, the GEMS project used digital skills as a tool for encouraging families to enrol their girls in this project. By addressing digital exclusion, GEMS opened new educational and professional pathways for adolescent girls who would otherwise be left behind. The evaluation team felt that GEMS has significantly enhanced girls' exposure and networks. One PGL from Surkhet district mentioned:

> "मैले वर्षको २/३ पटक GEMS संग सम्बन्धित तालिम लिने मौका पाए"

It translates to 'I got a chance to receive training 2–3 times a year', which also states that GEMS has been instrumental in providing the adolescent girls with outside exposures. These interactions and training sessions have fostered a sense of community, strengthened peer learning and expanded the girls' social and professional horizons. The PGL credited GEMS for empowering her and the whole group, which ultimately ended a potential child-marriage prospect in their village.

Most importantly, the evaluation team felt that GEMS integrated skills education into the broader learning process, as 92.7 per cent of girls were able to use digital tools such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint and the internet, 43.7 per cent reported feeling confident when meeting new people, and there were statistically significant improvements in all five components of English proficiency. This allowed adolescent girls to be

Picture 1: Adolescent girls engaging in classroom activity, even as they navigate personal and societal challenges

more aware of gender and caste discrimination, menstrual practices (such as social isolation where girls are restricted from touching family members, entering the kitchen and temples or participating in social and religious activities, and unhygienic practices due to lack of sanitary products and toilets) and child marriages. During discussions, the adolescent girls mentioned their cases against dowry practices and were vocal about minimising child marriages and caste-based discrimination.

3.2. Outcome 2: Improved self-efficacy and life skills of marginalised adolescent girls

This outcome is grouped into three sections for clarity and focus. The first section provides a detailed analysis of the English Proficiency Assessment results. The second section details the findings related to digital competency, covering key areas such as the usage of Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and internet browsing. Finally, the third section explores self-efficacy, offering insights into adolescent girls' confidence, social skills and belief in their abilities. Qualitative findings are added where possible and necessary, to complement, substantiate or differentiate between the quantitative results.

3.2.1. Understanding improvements in English communication

The English Proficiency Assessment tool was structured into five sets that progressively measured various dimensions of spoken English, including description, explanation, comparison and opinion

expression. The evaluation team used this tool to check the English proficiency skills of the adolescent girls; however, each adolescent girl was required to complete one set, ensuring a fair distribution of topics and difficulty levels.

Out of the five sets, the first set focused more on observation, vocabulary, sentence formation and spontaneous description. The second set related to visual interpretation, clarity in speaking, basic descriptive vocabulary, procedural language and talking about aspirations. The third set used spatial language, the use of prepositions, comparative structures and value-based discussions. The fourth set was linked with orientation vocabulary, media-related vocabulary and comparative reasoning. Finally, the last set was associated with personal opinion, recounting past events and expressing preferences.

3.2.1.1. From hesitation to confidence: Significant gains in English proficiency

The English Proficiency test showed clear and consistent improvement in girls' speaking abilities. A comparison of baseline and endline scores using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test confirmed that the improvements were statistically significant. In every set, more girls improved than stayed the same or declined. For example, in set 4, 63.1 per cent of girls showed improvement, 5.4 per cent of girls' scores declined, and 31.5 per cent of girls' scores remained the same as at baseline. Table 3 presents information on the scores on each set of the English Proficiency Assessment.

Compo-nent	Positive ranks	Ties	Negative ranks	Z-value	p-value (2-tailed)
Set 1	60.8	20.8	18.5	-6.643	.000
Set 2	53.8	30.8	15.4	-5.211	.000
Set 3	53.8	28.5	17.7	-4.807	.000
Set 4	63.1	31.5	5.4	-7.003	.000
Set 5	51.5	36.9	11.5	-6.190	.000

Table 3: *English proficiency improvement summary in percentage (n=130)*

The p-values for each set were .000, indicating that the changes were not due to chance. The changes were statistically highly significant, providing strong evidence that the GEMS interventions improved the English proficiency skills of the adolescent girls.

Quantitative data, along with the case study, shows that improvement in English proficiency is more than just language gains. It signifies the growing confidence of adolescent girls, their ability to express themselves in new spaces and their readiness to engage with the world beyond their immediate community. During the evaluation, girls were asked about their confidence in speaking English in school and outside of school. Figure 2 presents their views in percentages across baseline and endline.

Case 1: From silence to speech

Roshani is 15 and is from Rautahat district. She has grown into a confident young girl over three years in the GEMS club. Once hesitant, she now speaks English easily and even introduced herself publicly, stating: 'I like talking to my friends in English. The GEMS club is fun. I can now introduce myself in English and can also share my views with ease'.

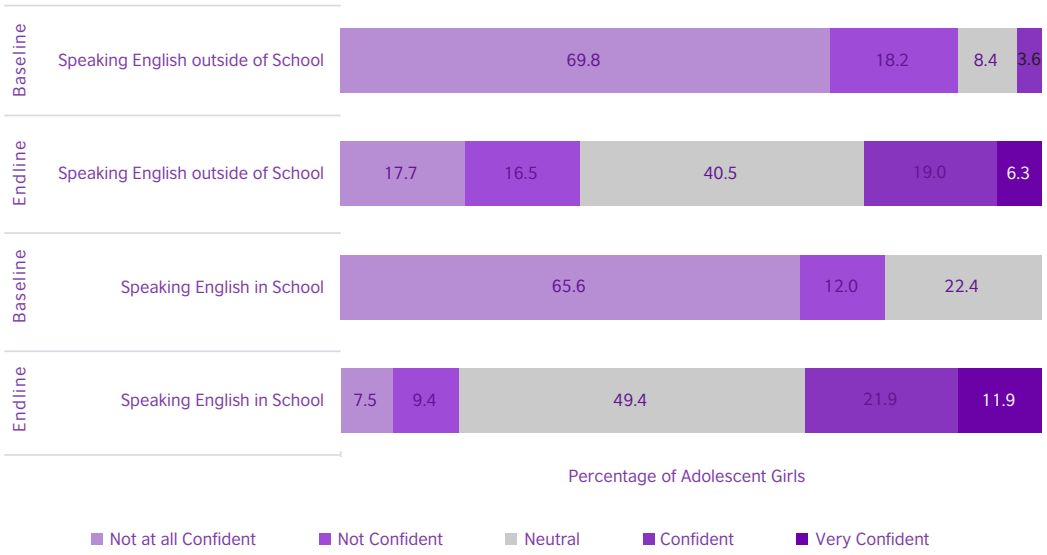


Figure 2: English speaking in and outside school
Baseline: N=500; Endline: n=162, excluding PGL members

The self-efficacy questionnaire requested club members to respond their confidence on speaking English in and outside schools. Based on the response, the evaluation shows an improvement in adolescent girls' confidence in speaking English. At baseline, 65.6 per cent of girls reported low confidence in speaking English at school. By the endline that number dropped to 7.5 per cent, reflecting three years of improvement. However, at endline, 49.4 per cent of girls remained unsure about their English improvement, choosing the neutral option as their response. From an evaluation perspective, the improvement in English speaking skills shows strong gains in confidence, though many girls remain cautious in acknowledging their progress, pointing to room for further growth and reinforcement. Meanwhile, girls were also asked 'Do you think learning English is easy or difficult?' Figure 3 presents their responses, in percentages.

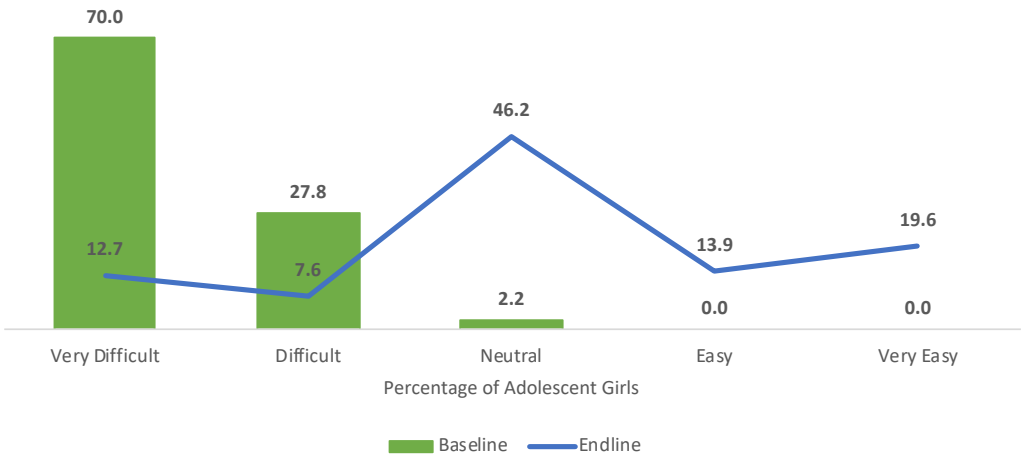


Figure 3: Adolescent girls' perception of English language difficulty
Baseline: n=500; Endline: n=158, excluding PGL members

Within three years of the GEMS project, the proportion of adolescent girls referring to English as a very difficult subject went down from 70.0 per cent at baseline to 12.7 per cent at endline. However, 46.2 per cent remained neutral, perhaps indicating that the girls may still be uncertain or hesitant in expressing their perceptions. Similarly, the girls were asked 'Do you think learning English is fun or boring?'; 46.8 per cent of girls initially mentioned it as boring, a figure that dropped to 1.3 per cent by endline. Supporting this response, Anjali Sah noted during her interview:

"मलाई पहिले अंग्रेजीको ठुलो ठुलो शब्दहरु पढ्न आउदैन थियो, तर म अब ति शब्दहरु सजिलो संग उल्था गर्न र पढ्न सक्छु"

It translates to 'I used to have a hard time understanding big words earlier, but now I can easily read and translate those words'. This shift points to a growing sense of enjoyment and mastery among adolescent girls, thus transforming English from a barrier into a tool of empowerment and self-expression.

3.2.2. Measuring growth in digital skills

The assessment of digital skills is organised into four areas. The first area evaluates Microsoft Word skills, measured from 0 to 2. The second area assesses spreadsheet skills in Microsoft Excel, measured on a scale from 0 to 3. The third area focuses on presentation skills in Microsoft PowerPoint, divided into two parts, with the first part measured on a scale of 0 to 3 and the second part measured on a scale from 0 to 2. Finally, the fourth area examines internet navigation and online information skills, scored from 0 to 2. Together, these assessments provide a measure of foundational digital competencies, with baseline and endline data revealing the significant change in digital skills over the course of the project.

3.2.2.1. Digital transformation: Enhancing skills for innovation

A non-parametric approach was required because the digital skills data did not follow a normal distribution. The evaluation team compared digital skill levels at baseline and endline to measure change over three years. However, the endline data did not follow a normal (bell-curve) distribution, making the standard paired t-test unsuitable for measuring significance.

Instead, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test was used – a non-parametric alternative that is appropriate for comparing paired observations when data is not normally distributed. This test ranks the paired differences (endline minus baseline), then assesses whether positive changes are statistically larger than negative ones, even with ordinal or skewed data.

By applying this method, the evaluation team could reliably assess whether the improvements observed in digital skill scores were statistically meaningful – even without assuming data normality – and thus draw robust conclusions about the significance of change. Table 4 presents the summary of digital skills improvement in adolescent girls, shown in percentages.

Table 4: Digital skills improvement summary in percentages (n=96)

Component	Positive improvements	Similar to baseline	Declined from baseline	Z-value	p-value (2-tailed)
Word	69.8	27.1	3.1	-6.644	0.000
Excel	85.4	14.6	0.0	-8.199	0.000
PowerPoint-I	87.5	12.5	0.0	-8.079	0.000
PowerPoint-II	37.5	62.5	0.0	-5.413	0.000
Internet	84.4	13.5	2.1	-7.892	0.000

There is a statistically significant improvement in all aspects of digital life skills from baseline to endline ($p < 0.001$). Microsoft PowerPoint I and Microsoft Excel had the strongest improvement (87.5 and 85.4 per cent, respectively), with no negative ranks, while PowerPoint-II had the highest number of ties (62.5 per cent), indicating that while improvement occurred, it was smaller or more consistent across the group. Percentage-wise, 84.4 per cent of adolescent girls showed positive improvements in internet navigation, 13.5 per cent showed no change, and the remaining 2.1 per cent were worse than the baseline.

3.2.2.2. From theory to practice: Gaps in digital device access for adolescent girls

Once the digital assessment was completed, the evaluation team held discussions with adolescent girls from Ne. Ra. Ma. V., Surkhet, to understand their experience with digital skills. Many, if not almost all, of the girls stated that they do not have a laptop/desktop at home. Whatever they have learned, they did it by joining regular schools and GEMS classes. In GEMS classes, their hands-on experience was limited, as 14 girls need to share two laptops, giving each girl a maximum of 10–12 minutes of use per class.

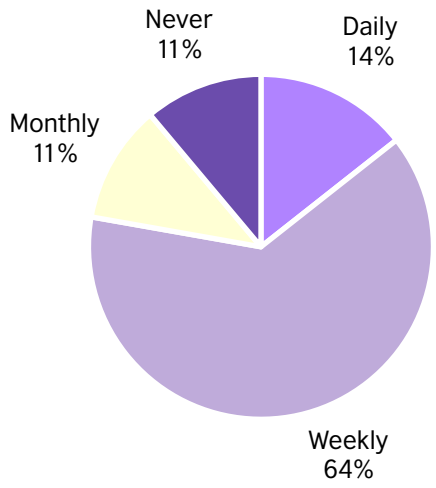


Figure 4: Use of computers (Endline: n=139)

As part of the evaluation, girls were asked through a self-efficacy questionnaire 'How often do you use a computer/laptop?' The responses varied across districts, with 13.3 per cent of girls in Bara, 6.0 per cent in Rautahat and 22.4 per cent in Surkhet reporting using computers daily, with the overall average standing at 14 per cent. This pattern highlights a significant challenge: digital skills develop

Case 2: Internet searching as a foundational digital skill

The evaluation team found out that 92.7 per cent of girls can search the internet when they need help. This finding might look simple on the surface, but it shows a transformative digital competency that allows adolescent girls to independently access and search online information. In the current digital world, this skill lays the foundation for lifelong learning, problem solving and self-reliance.

"मैले अनलाइनमा हेर्दै टिकटक सिके। हामीले Word/Excel कहाँ चलाउने हो र, अनि यो जानेर हामीलाई हुने नै के हो?"

The quote from a club member, from Surkhet district, mentions that she learned TikTok entirely on her own, further stating 'Where would we use Word/Excel, and how does this skill benefit us?' These questions provide the much-needed balance between programmatic aims and the interests of the adolescent girls.

Picture 2: A group of friends sit together exploring Microsoft PowerPoint, discussing ideas, testing each other's knowledge and exemplifying the power of peer-led learning in action.

interventions that include demand-driven, practical and contextually relevant digital competencies in the future.

Both case studies reveal that digital skills enhance confidence by enabling adolescent girls to access information and solve problems independently. At the same time, the use of social media and internet search engines highlights the value of expanding digital skill programmes to include contemporary online tools, complementing traditional competencies in Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

3.2.3. Measuring progress in self-efficacy: A four-dimensional framework

The first dimension is associated with academic and digital competencies, which have been further divided into two parts, where questions on school attendance, grade levels and reasons for leaving school fall under academic self-efficacy. The second part is digital self-efficacy, which measures responses on frequency and confidence related to the use of computers, smartphones and software like Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

Case 3: More than numbers

Anjali is a 14-year-old adolescent girl from the Rautahat district. She describes GEMS as a turning point in her pursuit of digital skills. She now uses a laptop confidently, creates documents and learns through the internet. She says:

> "मलाई Word वा PowerPoint फायल बनाउन आउदछ । नआएको कुरो म युट्युब र सोसल मिडिया हेरेर सिक्ने गर्छु"

This translates to 'I know how to make and save Word and PowerPoint files. I also use YouTube and social media platforms to learn what I need help with'. This boost in digital literacy has raised her self-esteem and fueled ambitions in hotel management or fashion design, with Anjali happily emphasising the big change GEMS brought in her.

The second dimension of self-efficacy addresses social, emotional and communicative self-efficacy. Questions related to confidence in speaking English, interacting with unfamiliar people, expressing opinions, the ability to complete tasks on time, and discussing difficult topics with others fall under this category. This self-efficacy allows adolescent girls to believe in their ability to handle everyday challenges and interpersonal dynamics.

The third dimension of self-efficacy centres on agency, values and future planning. It includes questions on early marriage, gender roles and responsibilities, dowry practices and opinions on child labour. This self-efficacy enables adolescent girls to challenge or navigate social expectations and plan for long-term goals.

Finally, the integrated self-efficacy brings together key elements from the three dimensions to reflect a more holistic understanding of the capabilities of the adolescent girls. By focusing on integrated self-efficacy, this evaluation team has explained how adolescent girls manage their learning and emotions, and at the same time have adapted to uncertainty, and plan for the future with empathy and self-awareness.

Positive improvement – 76.0 per cent
Decline from baseline – 21.2 per cent
Same level as baseline – 2.8 per cent

Based on the comparable data points between baseline and endline scores, the evaluation team recorded 76.0 per cent of adolescent girls with improvement from the baseline, 21.2 per cent of girls showed a decline from baseline, and 2.8 per cent had the same result as at baseline.

3.2.3.1. Academic gains with digital setback: The case for targeted interventions

The evaluation team asked the girls whether they had ever dropped out of any grade. None of the girls reported having dropped out of school since they joined the GEMS classes. Even when the distance between school and home is two hours, Kabita Pun, a PGL from Surkhet district, mentioned:

> "मेरो लागि बिद्यालय एकदम महत्वपूर्ण छ, किनभने यसले हामीलाई धेरै कुरो सिकाएको छ"

which translates to 'School is very important, as it has provided me with lots of information'. Pun, along with almost all adolescent girls, stated that they will continue their education till late teens or early twenties. Girls waiting for Grade 10 national examination results are found to be at a crossroads regarding their choice of further schooling opportunities, as their interests might not align with the family's expectations.

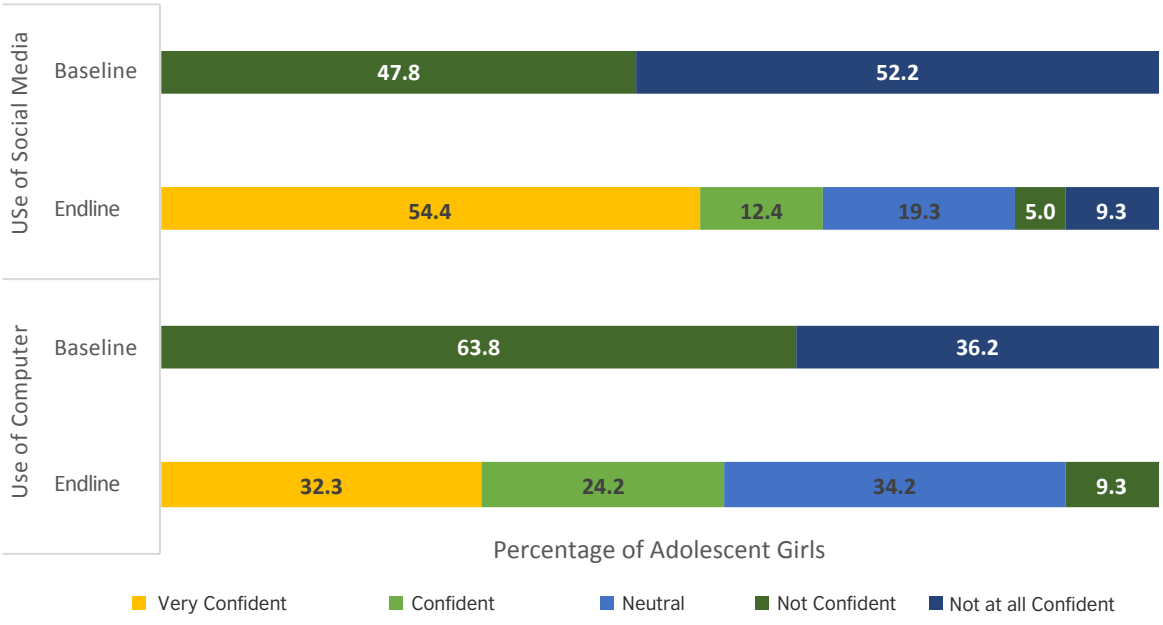


Figure 5: Use of computers vs social media *Baseline: N=500; Endline: n=161, excl. PGL members*

During evaluation, the girls were asked whether they felt confident using a laptop, tablet, smartphone and social media; 32.3 per cent said that they now felt very confident, and an additional 24.2 per cent felt confident. At baseline, none of the girls reported feeling confident or very confident in their computer and social media skills. Similarly, for social media use, 54.0 per cent of girls mentioned being very confident, and 12.4 per cent as confident. A comparison of individual scores between baseline and endline (n=104) shows that 93.3 per cent of girls improved their skills, 2.9 per cent experienced a decline and 3.8 per cent maintained the same level as at baseline.

3.2.3.2. Navigating conversations: From first impressions to difficult dialogues

The evaluation included questions such as 'How confident do you feel when meeting new people?', to measure the confidence, anxiety and openness of girls when interacting with new people. At endline, 43.7 per cent of girls strongly agreed that they feel confident when meeting new people, which was 0 at baseline. Around 37.4 per cent remained neutral, suggesting that they were either uncertain or needed situation-based confidence.

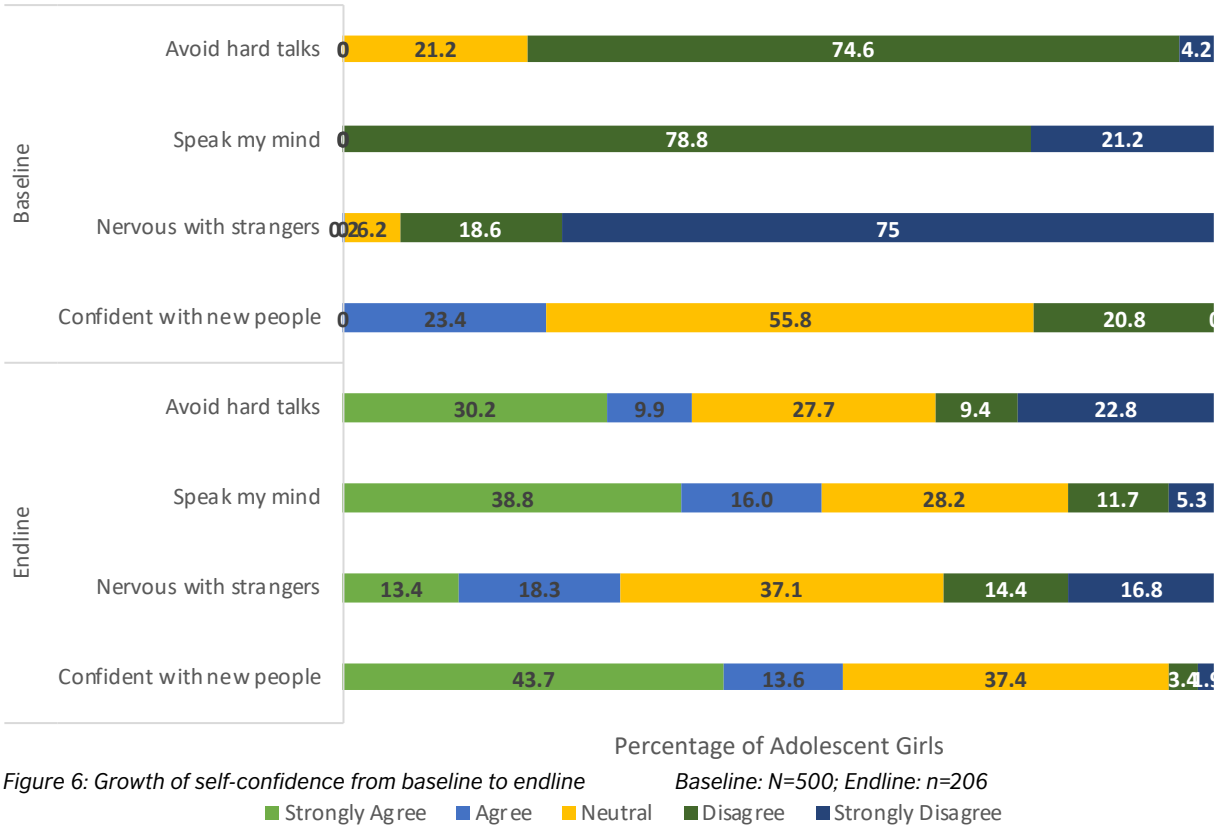


Figure 6: Growth of self-confidence from baseline to endline *Baseline: N=500; Endline: n=206*

The evaluation asked girls 'How nervous do you feel when talking to strangers?' Responses regarding discomfort in communication were mixed. Only 13.4 per cent of girls strongly agreed that they do not feel nervous while talking to strangers. Meanwhile, 68.3 per cent of girls shared that they are either neutral or they feel nervous around strangers, suggesting that anxiety in social settings is not universal.

When asked 'How confident are you in expressing your feelings, emotions and knowledge?', 38.8 per cent of girls strongly agreed that they can now express their feelings, emotions and knowledge. Similarly, 16.0 per cent are not far away from strongly agreeing to express themselves, as they agreed that they are more expressive than in the early days. However, 28.2 per cent remained neutral, indicating that not all adolescent girls feel equally empowered or are undecided.

Avoidance of hard conversations was another topic of discussion during the evaluation. When asked 'How comfortable are you discussing emotionally difficult topics?', 30.2 per cent of girls indicated that they strongly avoid them, while 22.8 per cent stated that they are willing to engage in difficult discussions. During the discussion with the adolescent girls, they shared how they convinced one family to stop the early marriage of one of their friends:

> "हामीले धेरै सम्झायौ, पछि यो यो समस्या हुन्छ भनेर जानकारी दियौ, हाम्रो कानूनमा के भनेको छ त्यो पनि जानकारी दियौ, अनि मात्र वहाहरुले बिहे रोक्नु भयो"

This statement translates to 'We convinced them by stating the issues that they will face in the future, and we also told them about child-marriage laws, and then they stopped the marriage procedure'. The comparison of individual responses between baseline and endline aligns with these qualitative insights, showing that 77.8 per cent of girls showed improved understanding, 11.1 per cent showed a decline and another 11.1 per cent remained unchanged from baseline.

3.2.3.3. From norms to goals: Self-efficacy for life decisions

The evaluation team explored how adolescent girls perceive and respond to deeply rooted social expectations, such as the age of marriage, dowry practices and the value of education, even in financial hardship. The major aim of this questionnaire is to understand the ways through which adolescent girls are navigating and challenging traditional norms in personal and collective aspirations.

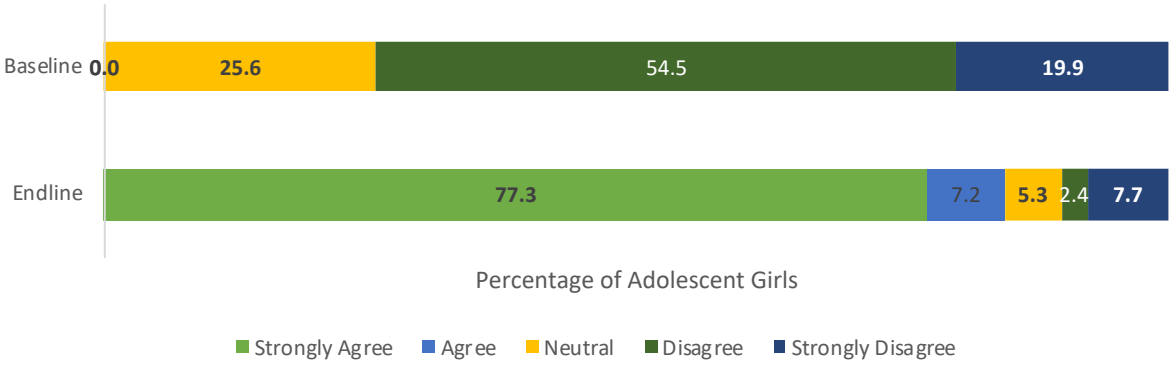


Figure 7: Perception of adolescent girls regarding age of marriage *Baseline: N=587; Endline: n=207*

When asked 'Should women get married after 18 years of age?', 77.3 per cent of girls agreed (agree and strongly agree), 10.1 per cent disagreed (disagree and strongly disagree) and 5.3 per cent remained neutral. At the baseline, none of the girls agreed that marriage should take place at age 18 or above. During an interview in the Rautahat district, Priyanshu mentioned:

> "मलाई सरकारी जागिर खानु छ र खरिदार बन्नु छ, त्यसको लागि म आफ्नो बिहे पछि सारेर भए पनि पढ्ने छु"

This statement translates to 'I wish to become a Kharidar, a government employee, and I will delay my marriage to continue my studies'. These changes represent a positive shift in mindset, where long-term well-being, education and autonomy prevail over early marriage.

During the evaluation process, girls were asked to present their opinion on the practice of dowry. At baseline, 44.8 per cent of adolescent girls remained neutral regarding this practice, while 48.4 per cent disagreed with this tradition. At endline, 67.6 per cent of adolescent girls strongly disagreed with the practice, and 11.1 per cent remained neutral. The

improvement in endline results suggests growing awareness among adolescent girls and a greater willingness to question practices that may affect their future opportunities. At the same time, 10.1 per cent strongly agreed with dowry at endline, raising important questions about differing perceptions that warrant further investigation.

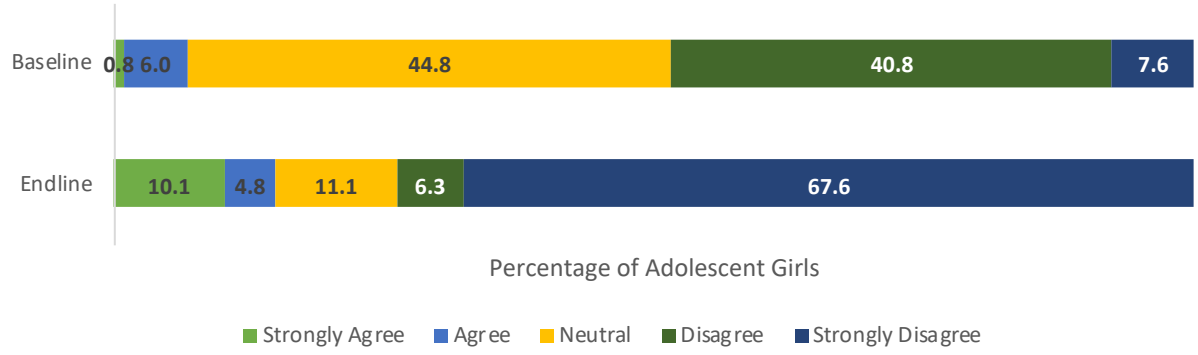


Figure 8: Perception of adolescent girls regarding the dowry system
Baseline: N=500; Endline: n=207

Should a child under 18 be allowed to work? This was the trickiest question, as some adolescent girls during the discussion argued that, when in a family crisis, everyone has to earn, regardless of age. Yet, 54.6 per cent strongly disagreed that children under 18 should work, regardless of the circumstances, reaffirming the importance placed on education. Additionally, 11.7 per cent strongly agreed and 7.8 per cent agreed with the idea that, depending upon the situation, the adolescent girls should make the choices. Some girls were undecided regarding this topic, as 19.0 per cent remained neutral in their response.

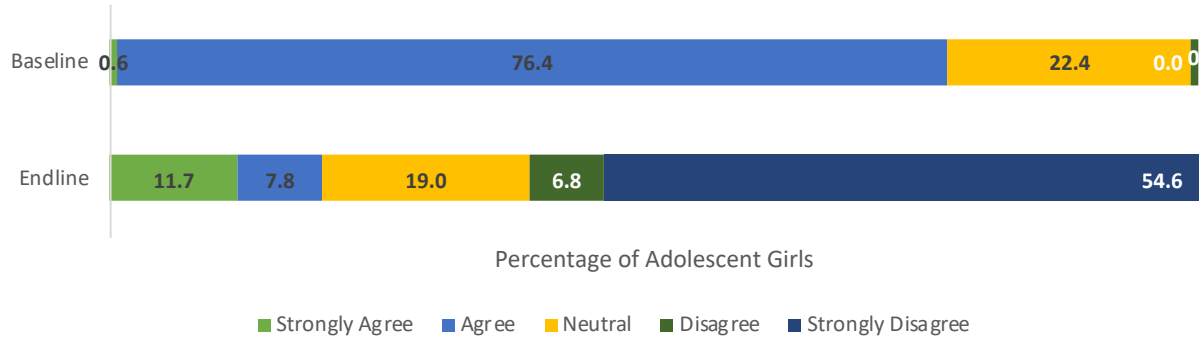


Figure 9: Perception of adolescent girls regarding employment vs study
Baseline: N=500; Endline: n=205

At the baseline, 76.4 per cent of adolescent girls agreed that girls should earn during a time of crisis, thus reflecting the ongoing tension between economic hardship and the right to education. Together, these findings suggest that girls are becoming more aware of their situation and are beginning to value education, independence and future goals.

3.2.3.4. Integrated self-efficacy: Relationships, learning and future readiness

During the evaluation, the girls were asked a series of questions covering academic, socio-economic and future-oriented dimensions. These included questions like 'How hard is it for you to plan your future?', 'Are you happy with where you are?', 'Are you worried about future jobs?', 'Do you enjoy your studies?', 'Do you finish your tasks on time?', 'Is group work challenging for you?' and 'Do you have a good relationship at school?'

A large majority of adolescent girls reported having a positive relationship at school. In terms of proportions, 72.6 per cent strongly agreed and 10.9 per cent agreed, reflecting that schools have increasingly become supportive spaces for fostering peer and teacher interactions.

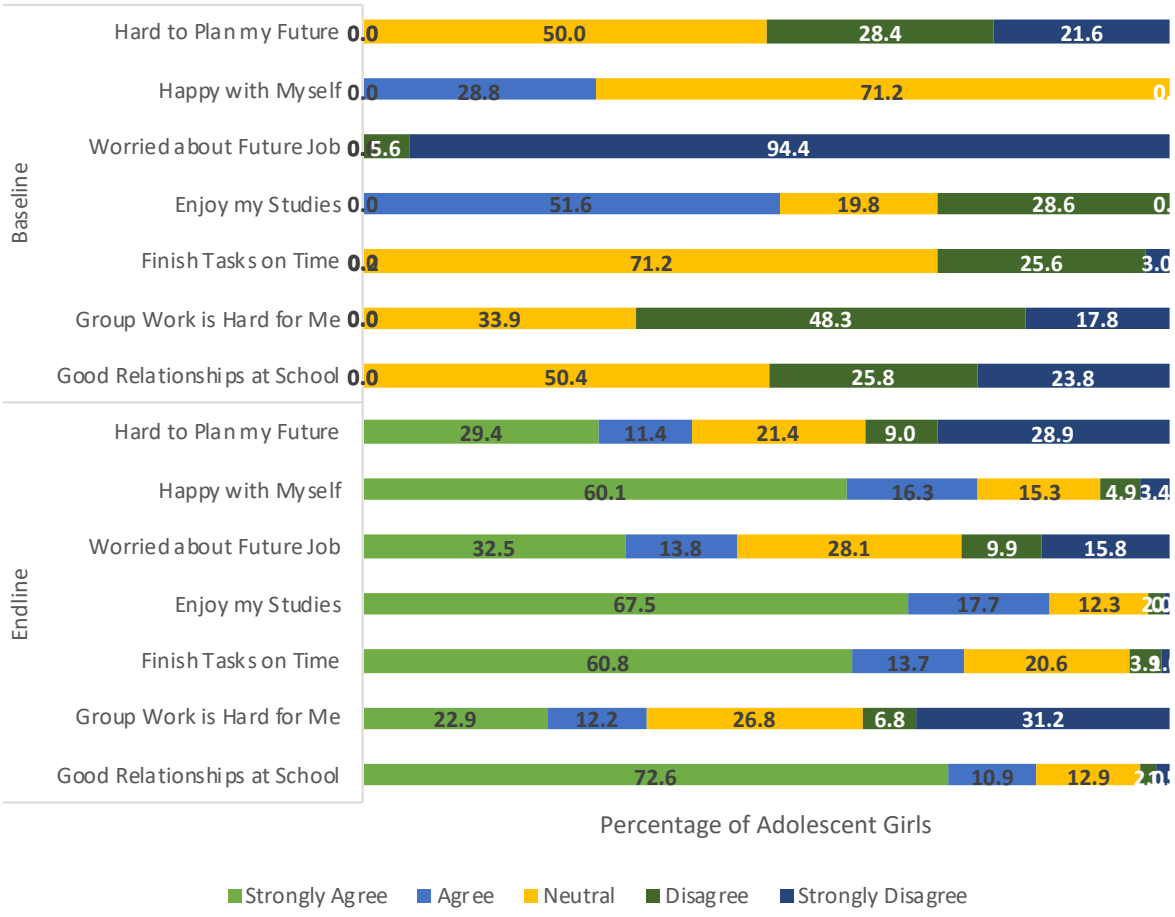


Figure 10: Perception of adolescent girls regarding different areas
Baseline: N=500; Endline: n=201

Enjoyment of studies also showed encouraging responses, with 67.5 per cent strongly agreeing with the statement. Similarly, 60.1 per cent strongly agreed that they are happy with where they are, suggesting strong levels of self-esteem. Future planning, however, seemed to be

Picture 3: A group of students dive into their learning session, learning new knowledge as they explore interesting topics together.

more challenging: 40.8 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with being able to plan, while 21.4 per cent remained neutral and 28.9 per cent strongly disagreed, suggesting uncertainty and difficulty in envisioning long-term goals.

3.3. Outcome 3: Enhanced agency, networks and collaborations

This section highlights the transformative impact of the GEMS intervention on adolescent girls. It illustrates the ways through which the GEMS intervention strengthened social networks and enhanced individual and collective agency.

3.3.1. Strengthened networks

The GEMS intervention contributed to enhancing agency among adolescent girls by improving their English proficiency, digital skills and knowledge on critical life topics. As a result, many girls reported greater confidence in expressing their knowledge, feelings and emotions. The intervention also supported the development of peer networks through GEMS clubs and the PGL model, providing safe spaces for girls to collaborate and build leadership skills. Collaboration among key stakeholders, including CLCs, schools, local governments, parents and external agencies, helped ensure the programme's smooth implementation over three years. According to one Aasaman Nepal staff member, the major challenge behind this network and collaboration is:

> "दलित र चमार समुदायका अभिभावकहरुले यो कार्यक्रममा आफ्ना छोरीहरुलाई पठाउन त्यति चाहनु हुन्न"

This translates to 'Parents from Dalit and Chamar communities do not like to send their girls into this project', further stressing the importance of expanding GEMS in bringing out-of-school girls into this programme.

3.3.2. Indicators of increased agency (self-advocacy, collection action)

One of the clearest pieces of evidence of increased agency among GEMS participants, as observed by the evaluation team, is the rise in self-confidence. The adolescent girls are overcoming their fear of public speaking; confidently engaging with unfamiliar faces suggests a significant transformation in the

adolescent girls' sense of self-worth. Binita Kushwaha, a GEMS club member from Bara district, mentioned:

> "पहिले जस्तो म डराउने गर्दिन। GEMS ले मलाई पढाएको मात्र होइन, यसले मलाई बलियो पनि बनायो"

This translates to 'I don't fear like earlier. GEMS not only taught us but it made us strong'. This transition suggests a positive shift in confidence and agency, indicating that adolescent girls are beginning to see themselves as capable of contributing to change within and beyond their communities.

In addition, the evaluation team observed that GEMS has established itself as a strong peer network group, where girls feel empowered to support and uplift one another. The concept of PGLs actively facilitating sessions, teaching others and resolving group conflicts demonstrates their leadership and facilitation skills in real-time settings. The evaluation team felt that such leadership is likely to lead to increased recognition of the adolescent girls as informed and capable change-makers.

Table 5: Key contributions and observed changes

Key contributions	Stakeholders	Observed changes
Granted permission Offered crucial moral support Made household adjustments that enabled girls to participate fully	Parents	Parental support Parents speaking positively about the project
Formally recognised the project Involved in ensuring the sustainability of the project	Local governments	Reflect commitment to institutionalise GEMS practice
PGLs facilitated sessions Provided invaluable mentorship Ensured inclusive environments and extended the project's reach through community outreach	PGLs and club members	Elevated agency, communication skills Passive learners to active change-makers
Provided spaces for club activities Recognised and motivated girls for the project	Schools	Institutional support Sustained project engagement

3.4. Tracking indicator: Relationship between skills and self-efficacy

This endline evaluation used the outcome 'Women and girls have improved language, life skills, confidence and agency to access opportunities in their communities' to measure selective indicators, shown in 3.4.1.–3.4.3.

3.4.1. Percentage of participating adolescent girls who improve their language (especially English) and/or life skills

To determine the overall improvement in English proficiency and life skills, the evaluation team combined the positive ranks from two skill areas, then divided by the number of adolescent girls.

$$= \frac{91 + 79}{130 + 104}$$

$$= \frac{170}{234}$$

$$= 72.65\%$$

While this percentage reflects growth, it is essential to examine the relationship between English scores and the self-efficacy responses. The correlation analysis showed that in all three districts, there is no strong or reliable evidence of a relationship between girls' English learning and their self-efficacy. In terms of numbers, the p-value for Bara is 0.693, which is very weak and not significant. The p-values for Rautahat and Surkhet are 0.584 and 0.360 respectively, which are also weak, signifying that those improvements in English do not appear to be linked to changes in confidence levels.

3.4.2. Percentage of participating adolescent girls with increased confidence and agency to pursue further opportunities and rights

The pursuit of further opportunities is closely tied to self-efficacy and digital skills. Digital literacy is essential, as it provides skills related to a) job application, b) connection with support networks or learning platforms, and c) girls staying informed about their rights and services. The improved self-efficacy means the girls would be able to a) speak up for themselves, b) take initiative, and c) navigate institutions or systems to claim their rights. While English also enhances future opportunities, it is not always essential, especially in local contexts where rights, services and opportunities are accessible in the local language. Based on this assumption, this indicator is calculated by dividing the combined positive ranks in digital skills and self-efficacy by the total number of adolescent girls.

$$= \frac{70}{96}$$

$$= 72.91\%$$

The correlation analysis between digital skills and self-efficacy also shows a promising sign. In Bara, there is a moderate positive relationship between these two skill sets (correlation=0.497), which shows that girls with improved digital skills felt more confident in their ability to learn and take on challenges. The other two districts, Rautahat and Surkhet, have struggled to show these changes, as Rautahat has a correlation value of -0.119 and Surkhet has a correlation value of 0.180, demonstrating a weak relationship between digital skills and self-efficacy. Surkhet is relatively better than Rautahat, illustrating a small tendency that digital skills and self-efficacy go together.

3.4.3. Percentage of participating adolescent girls who benefit from access to and participation in wider networks

The PGLs, who are the mentors of the GEMS project, are at the forefront of the GEMS intervention. They receive regular training and mentorship from Aasaman Nepal and other partner organisations, enabling them to connect with and benefit from wider networks. The overall confidence index uses various questions related to PGLs' ability to plan and organise activities, lead others, support peers and encourage inclusive participation. The response is converted into a score on a 0–4 scale, where positive statements (for example, 'I motivate others to achieve their goals') are scored directly, while negative statements (for example, 'I don't know what

to do when plans and situations change') are scored in reverse order to maintain consistency in interpretation.

Total PGLs with valid response: 41
PGLs with confidence index >=30: 37
Estimated per cent benefited: 90.2 per cent

Approximately 90.2 per cent of the PGLs have demonstrated a high level of confidence in both facilitation and leadership, suggesting they have significantly benefited from the network. Table 6 provides the breakdown of the overall confidence index by districts and by categories.

Table 6: Overall confidence index of PGLs

District	Facilitation confidence	Leadership and support	Inclusive thinking	Overall confidence index
Bara	2.97	3.83	3.35	3.38
Rautahat	2.94	3.30	3.27	3.17
Surkhet	2.70	3.25	2.61	2.85

The result reveals that Bara district has the highest overall confidence index of 3.38, while Surkhet district has the lowest confidence index of 2.85, suggesting that PGLs from Bara district are more likely to succeed compared to Surkhet.

Part 4

Emerging trends and patterns

The GEMS intervention brought positive changes for adolescent girls and their communities through careful planning and adaptive approaches. As the intervention concluded, several key patterns became clear.

- **Local ownership and integration:** Local governments (LGs) are beginning to take ownership by including GEMS in their education plans. One community learning centre (CLC) has already listed GEMS as an alternate activity. Collaboration with schools, LGs and communities has also strengthened accountability.
- **Improved digital literacy:** Nearly all girls reported being able to use the internet independently by the endline, showing the success of peer-led, hands-on digital learning.
- **Better English communication:** At baseline, most girls lacked confidence in speaking English at school. By the endline, confidence had improved significantly, with more girls actively speaking in classrooms and clubs.
- **Stronger self-efficacy and empowerment:** By the endline, 43.7 per cent of girls felt confident meeting new people, while 77.3 per cent supported marriage only after 18 years. Girls also reported speaking out against harmful social norms, taking part in household decision making and showing more peer leadership.
- **Peer-led leadership:** The GEMS clubs and Peer Group Leader (PGL) model created safe spaces for girls to learn, read and support one another.
- **Collaboration with stakeholders:** Parents, schools and LGs worked together to create a more supportive environment. In the Bara district, for example, the confidence index reached 3.38, the highest among intervention areas.
- **Link between skills and empowerment**: Gains in English did not strongly predict self-confidence, but digital literacy was closely linked to empowerment outcomes, especially in the Bara district.
- **Community challenges:** Some communities (Dom, Chamar and Muslim) raised concerns that girls were expected to support their families on Saturdays, limiting their participation.

Overall, these patterns show that the GEMS intervention has been effective in supporting adolescent girls to build skills, confidence and leadership.

Part 5

Barriers and challenges

The GEMS intervention, while impactful in many areas, has also encountered notable barriers and challenges. These challenges collectively underscore the need for better alignment with institutions, stronger community support and more context-sensitive programming.

- **Sustainability:** Although some local governments (LGs) have shown sustainable commitment, there are doubts about whether GEMS can continue without financial and technical support from outside organisations.
- **CLC mandates:** The community learning centres (CLCs) are also mandated to support learning environments, including students from formal schools; stakeholders often argued that CLCs are only mandated to focus on non-formal activities, thus creating confusion regarding the roles.
- **Community resistance:** Schools often choose GEMS participants based on their own decision. In such a case, poor families might resist sending girls in favour of household support.
- **Limited digital access:** Girls have to share one laptop in groups, restricting practice with tools like Word, Excel and PowerPoint.
- **No follow-up support:** There are no mechanisms to track girls' progress in English, digital skills or empowerment after training.
- **Mismatch with local needs:** Some girls feel skills like Word and Excel need to be supplemented with social media and other practical tools.
- **Unequal resources:** In Bara and Rautahat, unequal stipends for Peer Group Leaders (PGLs) and other members created confusion and feelings of exclusion.
- **Grade selection issues:** Some stakeholders believe starting GEMS in Grade 8 is too late and recommend beginning from Grade 6.
- **Weak information system:** Lack of proper records on participants made it difficult to track progress. Household-level data that could have enriched the evaluation was also missing.
- **Bias in self-reported data:** Self-efficacy was self-reported, which could be influenced by social desirability or what participants thought evaluators wanted to hear. This can affect the accuracy of reported confidence levels.

Addressing these barriers is essential to improving the sustainability, relevance and equity of GEMS, and to ensuring it delivers lasting impact for adolescent girls.

Part 6

Conclusions and recommendations

The following section presents the conclusions and recommendations of this endline evaluation.

2.7. Conclusions

The evaluation of the GEMS interventions demonstrates meaningful progress across all key outcome areas, with evidence of both skill development and increased awareness. The following conclusions emerge from the endline analyses.

- **Institutional integration and local ownership**: GEMS has made promising progress in being integrated into local education plans and programmes. However, its long-term sustainability remains uncertain without continued financial and technical support.
- **Multistakeholder collaboration**: Collaboration between schools, local governments (LGs), parents and communities has created an enabling environment for GEMS. This collaboration has strengthened accountability and improved ownership of the programme.
- **Significant skill improvement:**
    - **English proficiency**: The percentage of girls showing low confidence in speaking English at school dropped dramatically – from 65.6 per cent at baseline to just 7.5 per cent at endline.
    - **digital skills:** Approximately 92.7 per cent of the girls can now browse the internet independently, reflecting strong digital competency.
    - **self-efficacy and agency:** Level of awareness has increased, with 67.6 per cent of girls willing to publicly oppose harmful practices like dowry.
- While gains in English proficiency were evident, they did not strongly predict self-efficacy outcomes. By contrast, digital literacy showed a more consistent link to awareness, particularly in the Bara district. This reflects wider evidence that digital competence enhances self-confidence, self-regulation and social agency.
- **Peer Group Leader (PGL) model as a leadership platform:** The PGL model proved effective in cultivating a peer support system and leadership opportunities. About 90.2 per cent of PGLs demonstrated high overall confidence, with Bara district showing the highest district-level confidence index (3.38).

Overall, the GEMS intervention has laid a strong foundation for advancing girls' skills, confidence and agency. Yet, challenges remain. Unequal digital access suggests the need for tailored follow-up interventions in all districts, with special attention to Rautahat and Surkhet.

2.8. Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings, the following recommendations are offered to enhance the design, delivery and sustainability of GEMS across its three outcome areas.

Outcome 1: Policy engagement and system strengthening

- Strengthen community engagement by developing targeted outreach campaigns, including dialogues and awareness sessions, to address parental concerns regarding the GEMS intervention.
- Facilitate discussion among LGs, schools and community learning centres (CLCs) to clarify the CLC mandates and establish formal agreements to align GEMS with local education frameworks.
- Integrate practical outcomes of GEMS into local education plans. Develop and disseminate a toolkit (that includes an activity plan, monitoring indicators and mobilisation strategies) that guides all stakeholders regarding GEMS methodologies.
- Support LGs with capacity-building workshops to independently manage GEMS, including the preparation of budgets, to reduce reliance on external agencies.
- Establish clear and standardised criteria for selecting GEMS participants, communicated to schools and communities.

Outcome 2: Improved English proficiency, digital life skills and self-efficacy

- Introduce a structured follow-up system to track and sustain improvements in English proficiency, digital skills and self-efficacy post programme.
- Revise the digital skills component to include contextually relevant tools (for example, social media) alongside Microsoft Office, aligning with the needs of the adolescent girls.
- Schedule GEMS activities to avoid conflict with Grade 10 national examinations and post-Tihar vacations.

Outcome 3: Enhanced agency, networks and collaborations

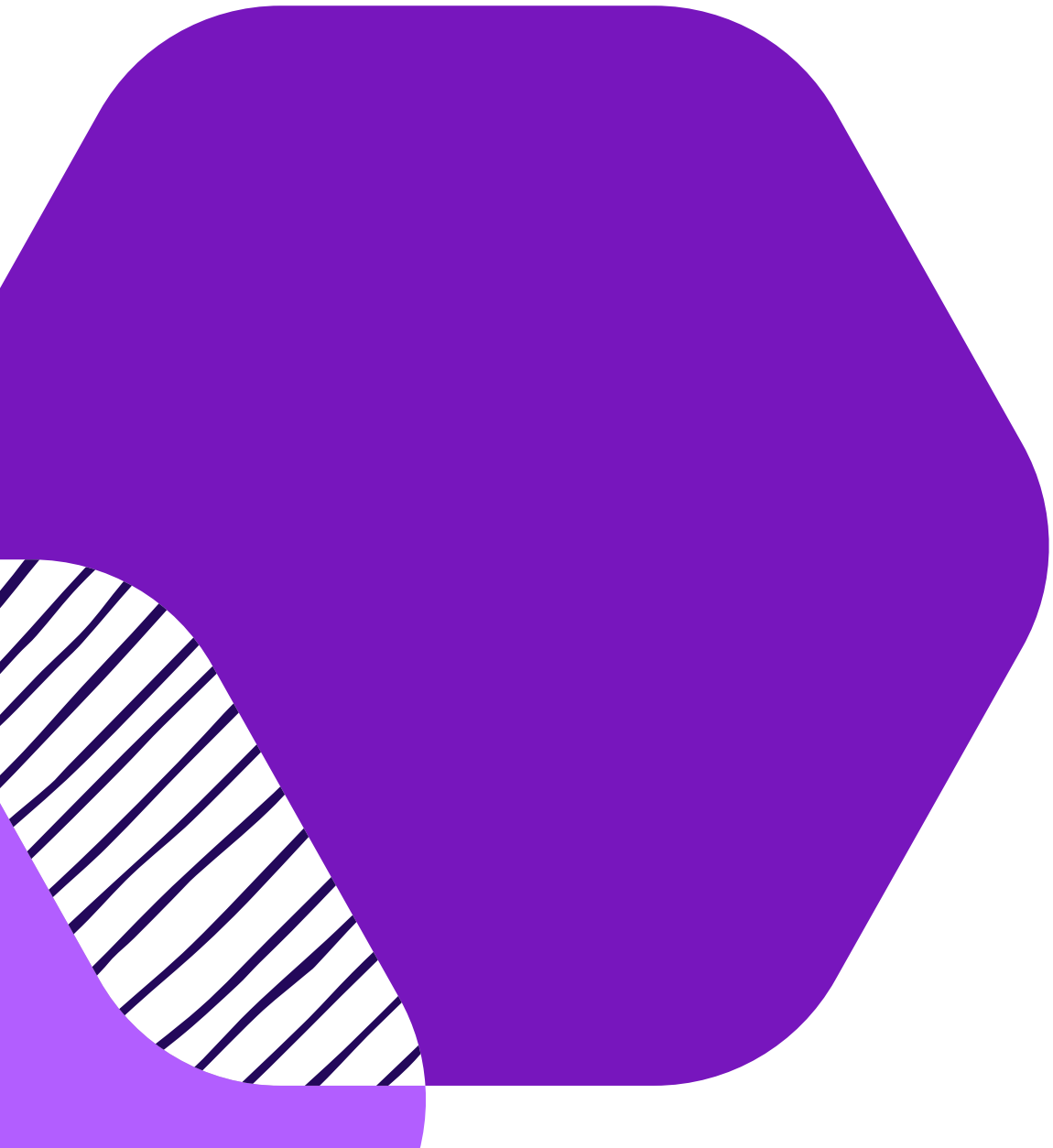
- Implement tailored interventions, such as home visits and incentives (for example, educational materials) to motivate parents and adolescent girls to regularly participate in the GEMS project.

- Standardise stipends or incentives across PGLs and club members to eliminate feelings of exclusion, and communicate the rationale to maintain transparency and fairness.
- Shift the GEMS entry point to Grade 6, to facilitate earlier English teaching and maximise skill development before critical academic transitions.
- Create structured forums within GEMS clubs for girls to discuss sensitive topics like child marriage and dowry.

Cross-cutting: Strengthening data collection tools and processes

- Standardise the self-efficacy questionnaire to ensure data consistency and comparability.
- Provide orientation and periodic refresher training to facilitators and PGLs on accurate data collection and reporting practices.
- Introduce feedback loops by sharing analysed data with LGs, schools and clubs to encourage adaptive learning and strengthen local ownership.
- Periodically review and revise data tools to capture emerging programme needs (for example, digital literacy usage).

The evaluation team believes that implementation of these recommendations will not only enhance the relevance, equity and impact of the GEMS intervention but will also ensure its sustainability through stronger local ownership, clearer institutional alignment and deeper community engagement.



Annex

Annex 1: Qualitative instruments

Attached separately.

Annex 2: Quantitative instruments

Attached separately.

Annex 3: Sampling

Based on the sampling frame of 360 students, the evaluation team used the following formula to get approximately 210 students as a sample for the evaluation.

$$n = \frac{\frac{z^2.p.(1-p)}{E^2}}{1 + \frac{Z^2.p.(1-p)}{E^2.N}}$$

z=1.96, signifying a 95% confidence level, p=0.5 (maximum variability), E= 0.05, signifying margin of error, and N=360

A stratified random sampling approach was employed further to get the required sample size for each local government (LG):

$$n_h = \frac{N_h}{N} * n,$$

N_h = the population of the LG.

The formula was then extended to the school level, giving the appropriate sample size using the formula:

$$n_{h,s} = \frac{N_{h,s}}{N_h} * n_h,$$

$N_{h,s}$ = the population of the school