

Teachers' Engrossment in Professional Development in Surkhet Valley

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Abstract

Since 2010, National Center for Educational Development (NCED) has extended teachers' professional development program for in-service teachers to Resource Centre (RC) level while the service of the then 10 month teacher training was limited to Education Training Center (ETC) (NCED, 2011). All the secondary level teachers have got at least one opportunity to attend Teachers' Professional Development (TPD) training in these last three years in Surkhet district. In institutional schools, teachers are deprived of such opportunities; however, they are seen equally potent and equally professional. On the other hand, if we compare teachers' individual professionalism, we find much variation although there is same kind of opportunities given to them. With an assumption that the teachers are the main resources to be used in the school system, this article summarizes the survey carried out amidst teachers, to explain TPD and to reflect the situation of teachers' engrossment in professional development initiatives (PDI) in Surkhet valley. This study has attempted to assess the situation of teachers' engrossment in Teachers' Professional Development Initiatives in Surkhet valley.

Key words: Teachers' professional development, initiatives, reflection, engrossment, motivation

Background

Education is regarded as a basic human right world-wide today. Dewey has claimed that education stands for the development that required capacities in individual which enable him/her to control his/her environment and fulfill his/her possibilities (Dewey, as cited in Sharma, 1976, p. 20). Another scholar has committed that the governments in the developing countries have been facing many challenges of educating their people. Like other countries Nepal has also been

continuously facing numerous difficulties in educational sector due to inefficiency and lack of commitment on the part of the educational administration (Thapa, 2003).

According to UNESCO (2005), education is considered as a cornerstone in the achievement of the human rights framework; it is intimately linked with the fulfillment of other key rights such as the right to livelihood and work, the right to self-determination, and the right to freedom of thought and expression.

As the education is one of the most powerful instrument for fighting against poverty and inequality and lays a foundation for sustained economic growth (World Bank, 2009), this is very urgent for every country to keep it in the first priority. For this, in addition to physical facilities to be provided to students, teachers should always remain eligible to carry on the teaching learning activities. It is because qualified and dedicated teaching staff serves as a milestone for quality education and successful education system. The role of a teacher is important to show the students' academic performance. Good education is possible only when teachers are well trained and skillful in their profession.

Educational changes, are associated with the rhetoric of the global society, require staff development activities. In order to make effective classroom, additional technical and pedagogical supports are necessary. To address this necessity, Professional Development programs should include all 'staffs' i.e. School principals, teachers, and technical and administrative personnel who are to contribute for the implementation of the intended changes (NCED, 2011, p. 7).

As today's world is quite different than yesterday's; today's challenges are quite different than yesterday. Teachers, who are the prime factor of schools, should be updated to address the change. Moreover, in many countries, the role and functioning of schools are also changing and so is the case of teachers. Today, teachers are asked to teach in increasingly multicultural classrooms; to place greater emphasis on integrating students with special learning needs in their classrooms; to make more effective use of information and communication technologies

for teaching; to engage more in planning within evaluative and accountability frameworks; and to do more to involve parents in schools (Schleicher, 2012). For this teachers need to be updated with every new innovations and technological development regarding educational policies, method and strategies. This can be addressed only when teachers get involved in professional development.

In this respect, being involved in professional development initiatives is to be engrossed with all such facilitated learning opportunities, ranging from college degrees to formal coursework like training on certain topics, seminars, conferences, informal learning opportunities situated in practice, reading journals, doing research and so on. These activities develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher. Hence, professional development refers to both skills and knowledge which are achieved for both personal development and career advancement.

In the writer's view, based on the experience of 18 years teaching, a teacher who joins his job for the first time can be professionally raw, inexperienced, immature and ignorant about latest development in educational field. His knowledge acquired in university life may not be helpful throughout his teaching career. Therefore, education systems seek to provide teachers with opportunities for in-service professional development in order to maintain a high standard of teaching and to retain a high-quality teacher workforce.

It's not just curriculum or resources that determine student success in the classroom—the role of the teacher is the most critical component. As quality of teachers equally play

vital role in giving quality education in the school, teachers should be well trained and updated with new educational policies and strategies. Therefore, quality of institution highly depends on quality of people serving there. (Professional Development, n.d., para. 1)

Professional Development (PD)

In simple understanding, Professional Development (PD) is quite simply a means of supporting people in the workplace to understand more about the environment in which they work, the job they do and how to do it better. It is an ongoing process throughout our working lives. We live in a rapidly changing world where legislative, social and economic developments directly affect the environment in which we live and work, and where technological advances provide radically different ways of working (What is Professional Development, n.d., para. 1).

PD opportunities provide a means by which we can keep abreast of these changes, broaden our skills and be more effective in our work. PD can be part of an individual's personal ambition to be a better practitioner, enhance his/her career prospects or to simply feel more confident about their work and make it more personally fulfilling. Moreover, it can be a step on the ladder to higher qualifications or enhanced job prospects or be required by professional bodies to maintain professional status. Similarly, it can be part of meeting targets set by workforce performance management schemes or an opportunity for individuals to change their career paths. (What is Professional Development, n.d., para. 2)

Professional development, a continuous process, is crucial for enhancing capacity of human

resources working with different roles in any sort of organization. To ensure an employee's sound professionalism, she/he needs to be exposed to various types of professional development programs such as training, workshop, field trip, academic study, networking, and self-study (NCED, 2011).

According to the thesaurus of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database, professional development refers to "activities to enhance professional career growth" (TPD Self-Study Material, 2011, p. 5). These activities may include individual development, continuing education, and in-service education, as well as curriculum writing, peer collaboration, study groups, and peer coaching or mentoring and so on. These programs may be formal, or informal, group or individualized. Individuals may pursue professional development independently, or programs may be offered by human resource department. Professional development on the job may develop or enhance process skills, sometimes referred to as leadership skills, as well as task skills. Its opportunities can range from a single workshop to a semester-long academic course, to services offered by a medley of different professional development providers and varying widely with respect to the philosophy-content, and format of the learning experience (NCED, 2011).

Professional development is a broad term, encompassing a range of people, interests and approaches. Those who engage in professional development share a common purpose of enhancing their ability to do their work. At the heart of professional development is the individual's interest in life long learning and increasing their own skills and knowledge

(Center for Performance Excellence, n.d., para. 2).

Professional development goes beyond the term 'training' with its implication of learning skills, and encompasses a definition that includes formal and informal means of helping teachers not only learn new skills but also develop new insight into pedagogy and their own practice, and explore new or advanced understandings of content and resources. [This] definition of professional development includes support for teachers as they encounter the challenges that come with putting into practice their evolving understandings about the use of technology to support inquiry-based learning...current technologies offer resources to meet these challenges and provide teachers with a cluster of support that help them continue to grow in their professional skills, understandings, and interest (NCED, 2011, p. 5).

Teachers' professional development (TPD)

TPD (also known as "in-service" or "teacher education") is the instruction provided to teachers to promote their development in a certain area (NCED, 2011). It is the tool by which policymakers' visions for change are disseminated and conveyed to teachers. Though the recipient of TPD is the teacher, the ultimate beneficiary is the students. Thus, teacher professional development is often the most critical component. According to Gaible and Burns (2005, p. 25) TPD can be divided into three broad categories:

- i. **Standardized TPD:** it is the most centralized approach, best used to disseminate information and skills among large teacher populations.
- ii. **Site-based TPD:** it is intensive learning by groups of teachers in a school or region, promoting profound and long-term changes in instructional methods.
- iii. **Self-directed TPD:** it is independent learning, sometime initiated at the learner's discretion, using available resources that may include computers and the Internet.

Fullan (1991, as cited in NCED, 2011) expands the definition to include "the sum total of formal and informal learning experiences throughout one's career from pre-service teacher education to retirement" (p. 326).

Butler and Leahy (2003) would argue that there is a need to develop teachers' thinking to that of 'critical judgment' (Papert, 1990) to ensure that teachers are not limited by their current understandings and experiences of digital technologies as a somewhat intimidating new dimension to their classroom practices. They add that there is a need for teachers to be provided with opportunities to reflect on their practice as they make use of the technologies so that they can become active generators rather than passive consumers of knowledge. Teachers' believe must be empowered as transformative agents who through professional development should cultivate "knowledge of practice" (ibid, p. 2).

Swart (2008, p. 10) notes the need for teachers "to be adequately and appropriately trained through pre-service and in-service teacher education programs to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Literacy". She considers that access to ongoing and appropriate ICT professional development is a prerequisite for all teachers, if they are to

improve their confidence and competence in using ICT to meet the needs of all their students. Pelgrum and Law (2003) believe that teacher education, and in particular initial teacher education needs to undergo changes to prepare teachers for the challenges of the information age. Bhatta (2008, as cited in NCED, 2011) considers that effective teacher preparation in ICT-based education requires adequate training in three areas:

- Information technology literacy
- Child-centric interactive teaching and
- Integration of ICT-based instruction in child-centric interactive teaching.

Loveless (2000, as cited in Butler & Leahy, 2013) also notes the tendency in current international models of professional development to focus on evidence of teaching competence rather than confidence in change. Such approaches can leave teaching and learning largely unaffected in schools and can greatly hinder the potential of digital technologies to radically alter the manner in which teaching and learning are constructed. They also inhibit the opportunity for critically examining education systems and for questioning, “the very nature of what we understand by learning” (Gol, 2002, p. 141, as cited in Butler & Leahy, *ibid*). Hadad (UNESCO, online) contends that a new paradigm for teacher education must emerge that replaces one-shot training with lifelong professional preparedness and development of teachers along a continuum of a) initial preparation b) structured opportunities for retaining, upgrading and acquisition of new knowledge and skills and c) continuous support.

How is teachers’ professional development (TPD) possible?

Feiman-Nemser (2001) writes “if we want schools to produce more powerful learning on the part of students we have to offer more powerful opportunities to teachers” (p. 1014). The traditional and conventional approaches to professional development do not fit with the changing and development learning requirements of both students and teachers. This needs to be a consideration in our current changing educational environment. To promote more powerful student learning and to aid in the transformation of the roles of teachers, professional development now calls for ongoing study and problem solving among teachers where “teachers (are) constructors of knowledge and transformers of culture”(p. 1038).

As Feiman-Nemser (2001) writes “professional development is everybody’s and nobody’s responsibility” (p. 1049). Hence, teachers need to know about many different things, including students, learning, curriculum, subject matter and pedagogy. Their knowledge cannot be discrete packets but needs to be flexible and changing as teaching and learning changes. Thus their professional development should be reflective of a coherent and connected professional curriculum. Some knowledge can be gained at university, but much teacher knowledge is gained in the context of practice. The need for continual serious and sustained professional development opportunities for teachers is clear. “Just as student learning is the desired outcome of teaching, so teacher learning is the desired outcome of teacher education” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1025). Similarly, Hord (1997) identifies ‘teachers are the first learners’ (p. 5). It is this idea of teachers as

learners which has formed the essence of the project and the professional development initiative.

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) suggest five models that are useful for accomplishing the goals of staff development:

- i. **Individual guided development:** Here the teacher designs his or her learning activities. An assumption of this model is that individuals are motivated by being able to select their own learning goals and means for accomplishing those goals. A belief that underlies this model is that self-directed development empowers teachers to address their own problems and by so doing, creates a sense of professionalism.
- ii. **Observation and assessment:** Instructional practices are improved if a colleague or other person observes teacher's classroom and provides feedback. Having someone else in the classroom to view instruction and provide feedback or reflection also is a powerful way to impact classroom behavior. This person observing acts as another set of "eyes and ears" for the teacher. Observers also learn as they view their colleagues in action.
- iii. **Involvement in a development or improvement process:** Systemic school-improvement processes typically involve assessing current practices and determining a problem whose solution will improve student outcomes. The solution might include developing curricula, designing programs, or changing classroom practice. New skills or knowledge may be required and can

be attained through reading, discussion, observation, training, and experimentation. Consequently, involvement in the improvement process can result in many new skills, attitudes, and behaviors.

- iv. **Training:** A training design includes an expert presenter who selects the objectives, learning activities, and outcomes. Usually the outcomes involve awareness, knowledge, or skill development, but changes in attitude, transfer of training, and "executive control" need to be addressed as well. The improvement of teachers' thinking should be a critical outcome of any training program. The most effective training programs include exploration of theory, demonstrations of practice, supervised trail of new skills with feedback on performance, and coaching within the workplace.
- v. **Inquiry:** Teachers formulate questions about their own practice and pursue answers to those questions. Inquiry involves the identification of a problem, data collection (from the research literature and classroom data), data analysis, and changes in practice followed by the collection of additional data. The inquiry can be done individually or in small groups. This model is built on the belief that the mark of a professional teacher is the ability to take "reflective action."

Teachers' engrossment in professional development initiatives (PDI) in Surkhet valley

In our Nepalese context, there is provision of Teachers' Professional Development (TPD) for

both community and institutional schools. From 2010 Teachers' Professional Development (TPD) program is being conducted by 29 Educational Training Centers, 46 Lead Resources Center, and 1053 Resource Centers all over the country. This program has been developed on the ground of School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) that has provision of providing at least one month professional development training to every teacher within five years. In line with SSRP, NCED has developed TPD Implementation Handbook with the provision of providing the training program to the teachers. As the provision made in TPD Implementation Handbook, one month training is divided into three different 10 day modules and each module is segmented into training workshop (5days), self-study (3 days) and school based instructional counseling (2 days) (NCED, 2011, p.16)

There were 282 teachers of secondary level in community schools of Surkhet district; of them 331 teachers were given TPD training in three years' time by Educational Training Center (ETC) Surkhet (ETC, 2012). In 2009-10, 37 teachers, in 2010-11, 113 teachers, in 2011-12, 123 teachers and in 2012-13, 58 teachers were given TPD training (ETC, 2013). It means some teachers have repeatedly got chance of attending TPD training in three years.

In case of institutional schools, there is no absolute body, like ETC, to give TPD training to their teachers. In the researcher's experience of 18 years in educational field specially in institutional schools, very rarely few teachers have been getting opportunities to attend TPD training conducted by ETC. He has noticed some teachers still serving being untrained and some getting retired without experiencing adequate

professional development programs in whole career, whereas some teachers becoming well trained and updated in their skill, attitude, and approaches related to their profession within short span of time. Though the opportunities are distributed impartially and equally among all the teachers, some are found more trained and some are not found adequate training. How does it happen?

It is obvious that the Ministry of Education has invested much on teachers' professional development (TPD) through 10 month TPD, 30-day school-based and cluster-based TPD and various seasonal training programs. It has planned 60% of the working teachers should have access to at least one 10-day module to complete all three modules or 30-days TPD course annually within the next 5 years' period (NCED, 2011). According to the Educational Training Center (ETC) Surkhet, 331 secondary level teachers have attended TPD training in three years' time (ETC, 2012). However, in 18 years of the writer's career, his experience and observation show the variation amidst teachers regarding their engrossment in professional development initiatives. Some teachers are found gradually enhancing their professionalism and performing better result in some schools; whereas in some schools, teachers are not adequately involved in professional development initiatives. As a result, in some schools, teachers are found more qualified, more trained, more studious and more skilled and more versatile than the time of their recruitment; whereas in some schools, teachers are found serving with the same qualification and skill that they possessed from University education. So the situation of trained teachers is still perplexed. Hence, this research has attempted that whether teachers are really well acquainted about the meaning, importance

and significance of professional development or not. Furthermore, it has also been searched what kind of opportunities teachers are getting for professional enhancement and what they are doing as their self-effort to enhance their professionalism as secondary level teachers of Surkhet Valley.

Reflection of teachers' engrossment in PDI in Surkhet valley

Through survey was carried out using questionnaire and interview, the following key findings were deducted in term of teachers' engrossment in professional development initiatives:

- Maximum teachers representing both institutional and community secondary schools of Surkhet valley have shown that they have been well acquainted about Professional Development. However, only three quarter of the participating teachers have been getting facilities for their professional enhancement from their respective institutions. Similarly, about half of teachers from both community and institutional schools have put their self-effort for their professional enhancement. Comparatively, teachers from community schools are more familiar with TPD.
- Similarly, teachers serving in community schools are found getting more opportunities for their professional growth from their institutions in comparison to the teachers of institutional schools. Teachers teaching in institutional schools are attending professional development programs organized by Non-governmental Organizations and International Non-governmental Organizations although they are not getting equal opportunities at ETCs.
- However, surprisingly teachers serving at institutional schools are found putting slightly more self-effort for their professional growth.
- For professional growth, not only TPDs are being attended, reading professional books, visiting schools, peer observation, having self-reflection, professional discussion and so on are also in practice.
- Stakeholders of education, like SMC, DEO, PTA, School administration etc., are also positive in term of encouraging teachers to attend professional development programs and manage such programs from their level as well.
- In comparison to male teachers, female teachers are found less upgrading their academic qualification after their recruitment.
- Teachers also expressed that, there should be equal opportunities for the teachers from both institutional and community schools for TPD; if that is not possible, the ministry of education should manage an autonomous body to give such professional development training for teachers from institutional schools. Teachers also rose for the demand driven training for professional enhancement. Some teachers also rose about the reserved seats for marginalized, ethnical minority and females for TPDs.

Conclusion

Firstly, to be professionally trained and skilled, teachers themselves should be aware of continuous professional development to face the challenges new generation may have brought by the changes of time. In this respect, teachers from both types of schools are well acquainted about the Teachers' Professional Development and its importance. Opportunities for professional growth are rather to be created than to be waited to be granted. Secondly, awareness of professional development further envisions the opportunities. Hence, more than half of the teachers are getting opportunities for their professional growth from their respective institutions; and more than that, maximum of teachers have attended such programs in their own effort. Institutional schools are increasingly organizing professional development programs on pedagogy of teaching, preparation of teaching materials, making lesson plan, etc. at their respective schools. Education which is the most important factor to shape future of every nation should be considered with high priority; teachers who are ambassador of national curriculum should be updated with every recent teaching methods and educational strategies. Institutional schools which have been educating almost equal portion of students following the same national curriculum should have proximate space for Teachers' Professional Development Programs facilitated by ETCs.

There should be certain provision as mandatory for the institutional schools for internal management of teachers' professional development. Beside expecting and waiting anybody enhancing teachers' professionalism, they should seek themselves various opportunities; they should have habit of self-

reading; surfing on Internet for recent innovation in educational field. Sharing and attending programs for teachers is gradually increasing; however, reading in library, researching on teaching methods, doing case studies, writing research articles and other professionally sharpening activities are not adequately found in practice. The level of teachers' engrossment in Professional Development Initiatives is increasing. Now teachers have realized that the method they are using today can be outdated sooner; they need to be updated with recent trends and methods of pedagogy.

About the author

Mr. Giri, a committed Vice Principal of SOS Hermann Gmeiner School Surkhet, is a life member of NELTA. He has been in the field of education for last 19 years and earned his Master's Degree in Educational Management from Kathmandu University in addition to his first master's degree in English Literature from Tribhuwan University. He has attended many professional training and facilitated many workshops and trainings in both rural and urban areas.

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