

Exploring the Relevance of Teacher Education at Tribhuvan University

Shree Krishna Panthee, PhD

Assistant Professor

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7666-9681>

Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID)

Tribhuvan University, Balkhu, Kathmandu, Nepal

Corresponding e-mail: shree.panthee@cerid.tu.edu.np

Sanjib Raj Khanal

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9354-1830>

Department of Education, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Tribhuvan University

Keshab Sharma Adhikari

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4052-1093>

Department of Education, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Tribhuvan University

Abstract

This study aims to examine the relevance of teacher education (TE) programs conducted by Tribhuvan University (TU), Nepal, using a methodological approach that combines phenomenology and empirical inquiry. It delves into the discrepancies between the TE syllabuses and participants' actual experiences through a series of qualitative methods, including interviews, content analysis, and focus group discussions (FGDs), while maintaining the study's credibility, reliability, and ethical standards. The study reveals that the TES programs at TU are quite far from the requirements for the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) Licensure Exams, which demand candidates to study independently other areas such as general knowledge and legal aspects that go beyond the EO curriculum. Recent policy changes have allowed graduates from any discipline to get a teaching license, thus solving the issue of teacher shortage, but at the same time reducing the quality. The issues of teacher hiring and appraisal that lacked equity also made the situation worse. Theoretical aspects are still more emphasized in teacher education programs offered by universities. However, there has been a lack of sufficient training and experience along with such theoretical matters, and unorganized coordination among stakeholders has further worsened this situation. Along with these, B. Ed courses are also lacking. The curriculum does not offer rigorous practical pedagogy and technology integration. The article explains how the gap between theory and practice can be closed if the duration of the internship is increased, course harmony improved, hands-on teaching methodologies introduced, and professionals allowed to continue their training. This paper also calls for enhanced incentives and curriculum reforms that integrate the latest in technology and innovations. For the proposed

measures to take place, the paper highlights the need for a string of reforms and institutional collaboration between TU and the TSC.

Keywords: compatibility, relevance, teacher education, teacher license, teacher training

Introduction

In general, teacher education (TE) is considered an education program designed to produce teacher educators at universities. However, throughout history, educationists from various backgrounds have attempted to redefine it, its purposes, and applications. "Teacher development is a process, not an event. It means comprehensive growth and support" (Sagar, 2019, p. 81). Defining TE is like chasing a butterfly and has become a complex job because of the continuous explosion of innovations in it. This is why the teacher development act has become a never-ending, crucial job in the education sector. Hence, defining TE and developing teachers is itself a challenging task.

At present, teachers have to work with a great paradox as they have to prepare students for tomorrow's world with yesterday's knowledge, but a teacher with zero digital knowledge cannot teach the present digitally native students. At present, modern technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) have challenged the teachers' presence and the entire TE system. Therefore, teachers need education to be updated throughout the professional period as per the demands of time, students, and society. It emphasizes that a teacher should be more than a skilled performer; they must adapt to the evolving frontiers of knowledge, recognizing that what is learned today may not remain valid tomorrow (Bhatia & Ahuja, 2004). Similarly, Lal (2016) argues TE is concerned with aspects such as who (Teacher Educator), whom (Student teacher), what (Content), and how (Teaching Strategy). These insights remind us of the enduring importance of educators in shaping society and fostering lifelong learning. TE is thus a continuous process. Its pre-service and in-service components are complementary to each other (Sagar, 2019, & Lal, 2016). To sum up, as a continuous process, the TE system has to be updated and relevant to fulfill the needs of both a person and a nation.

Globally, the post-war period had brought changes in many aspects of development, including TE. The 1940s brought about changes in education as teachers began to think about how to make improvements in their own classrooms. The idea for teacher research began with Kurt Lewin in 1946 (Pant, 2015). In 1906-1956, the program of teacher preparation was called teacher training. It prepared teachers as mechanics or technicians. It had narrower goals with its focus being only on skill training (Lal, 2016). We have behaved for many years like parents who should try to feed their kids all they need to eat for a year in just one week. Teacher educators prefer to use the term "teacher education" rather than "teacher training" to challenge these customs. Because of the constant developments in technology, the TE demands updates or constant changes in the profession, whereas training just provides the necessary skills.

The government of Nepal introduced teacher licensing in 1968 to ensure quality education. The seventh amendment of the Education Act-2028 in 2001 made mandatory licensing policy for all community schoolteachers. However, the government has been blamed for recruiting low-quality teachers, though the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) struggles to

supply quality teachers. In recent years, TSC has failed to supply even a sufficient quantity of teachers. The tables below show the pass rate in teacher license exams.

Table 1

TSC's Teacher's License Result of Lower Secondary Level – 2022 (B.S. 2079)

State	Appeared students	Pass number	Pass percentage (%)
Koshi	31,688	6,419	20.26
Madhesh	25,081	2,657	10.59
Bagmati	26,282	6,519	24.80
Gandaki	17,076	3,751	21.97
Lumbini	35,173	7,305	20.77
Karnali	24,613	3,244	13.18
Sudurpachhim	21,656	3,263	15.07
Total	181,569	33,158	18.26

Exam date: August 13, 2022 (2079/04/28 B.S.)

Source: TSC (2022)

In Nepal, FOE (TU) produces about two-thirds of the educational professionals for secondary and higher level education every year. Though the major aim of FOE is to prepare trained teachers, educators, education specialists, education managers, and administrators for the country, the outcome of FOE seems rundown, as shown in the table one, where the pass rate in the recent teacher license examination of the lower secondary level is just 18.26%.

Similarly, the result of TL at secondary level throughout the country is also seems below average, in the exams conducted last year (see table 2).

Table 2

TSC's Teacher's License Result of Secondary Level – 2023 (B.S. 2080)

State	Appeared students	Pass number	Pass percentage (%)
Koshi	7701	3819	49.59
Madhesh	7192	2504	34.82
Bagmati	12293	6557	53.34
Gandaki	3988	2290	57.42
Lumbini	7559	4141	54.74
Karnali	4744	2299	48.46
Sudoorpachhim	5693	2756	48.41
Total	49,170	24,366	49.54

Exam date: September 9, 2023 (2080/05/23 B.S.)

Source: TSC (2023)

The data presented in the table two further reinforces the same notion that existing TE and pre-service training in Nepal are of low quality, or the exams for teachers' licenses conducted by TSC are very tough or irrelevant. The data indicates that there might be some gaps or faults in the relevance of the TE programs of TU.

Problem Statement, Objectives, and Delimitation of the Study

The applicability of pre-service TE programs in Nepal – which typically award degrees and include one and a half months of practice teaching – is examined in the context of their alignment with TSC exams, course content, practice teaching, professional development, use of

innovations, and the high failure rates in recent teacher licensing and selection exams. This constitutes the primary problem statement of the investigation.

In this context, aiming to explore and assess the relevance of the TE course at TU, this study is delimited to Prithvi Narayan Campus, Kalika Multiple Campus, the Education Development and Coordination Unit (EDCU) in Pokhara Metropolis, and the Education Training Center (ETC) in Kaski.

Review of Previous Studies

Teacher education is directly related to teacher's development and indirectly related to the students' learning and the country's progress. However, a study conducted on primary TE in Nepal by Karunakaran and Bhatta (2013) revealed that pre-service training often lacks practical utility due to challenging subsequent placements, and in-service training seldom focuses on language development. It seems more ritualistic than a genuine vehicle for teacher development. In conclusion, the pre-service TE in Nepal is degree-oriented rather than preparing a skilled teacher.

A research on TE against teacher training was conducted by Panthee (2018), which concluded that both the pre-service TE and in-service trainings provided for the schoolteachers in Nepal are not efficient and relevant. He suggests that the current tendencies in TE have undergone an astounding paradigm shift, i.e., "Replication to reflection," "academic to efficiency," "competency based to demand based," "informative to transformative," "environment based to inquiry based," and "behaviorist to constructivist" are some examples of these themes. He claims that there has not been any remarkable change to the Nepalese TE system or delivery culture so far. It still revolves around the teachers' teaching and regular classroom rituals. This means that effective training should center on the learning of the students rather than the teacher and should be transformative rather than a method of imparting knowledge.

Practice of TE at the international level

Meanwhile, the study conducted by Zhang et al. (2021) identified several factors influencing teacher motivation for professional learning, including prior experience, self-efficacy, school environment, and leadership. Notably, teacher self-efficacy is closely intertwined with the formation of narrative identity, a connection elucidated by Marschall and Watson (2021). The presence of self-efficacy instills confidence and motivation in teachers as they engage in their profession.

Achieving a comprehensive and effective professional development for teachers necessitates not only relevant teacher training and education but also the cultivation of high teacher morale. Ensuring elevated teacher morale involves providing opportunities for professional growth, fostering an appropriate academic environment, and making the teaching profession an attractive and rewarding pursuit.

Future educational development in China aims to establish a modern national educational system by 2020 and to establish a lifelong education system by 2050. It is very important to coordinate development among different regions, advance the quality of education in an all-

round way, improve the quality of higher education, build world-class universities, deepen the educational system reform, speed the educational structure adjustment, promote the coordinated development of education of all types and all levels in the next 15 years (Sharma & Sharma, 2009). Since the early twenty-first century, China has undergone curriculum and teaching reforms associated with "learning to learn" and quality-oriented education, respectively (Lee, & Song, 2016). This indicates that China has initiated a visionary step towards educational development.

Similarly, in India, according to the National Policy in Education (1986), teachers should have the freedom to innovate, to advise appropriate methods of commission and activities relevant to the needs, capabilities, and concerns of the community (Bhatia & Ahuja, 2004). Dr. Sarvapali Radha Krishan, therefore, said teachers should be the best minds in the country (Manna and Tattwasarananda, 2018). Hence, to become the best teacher ever, TE is crucial. According to the Kothari Commission (1964-66) of India, to make the professional preparation of a teacher effective, TE must be brought into the mainstream of the academic life of the universities on the one hand and of school life and education developments on the other (Bhatia & Ahuja, 2004). Here, India is also moving towards the professional development of teachers.

The apex regulatory authority of TE in India is the National Council for TE (NCTE), which was established as a statutory body after a Parliamentary Act (1993) in 1995. The main goal of the NCTE, as per the National Curriculum Framework for TE (2009), is to carry out planned and coordinated development of the TE program in the country as well as regulation and proper maintenance of norms and standards in all respects in the TE program, both primary and secondary (Manna and Tattwasarananda, 2018). At present, India has made considerable progress in school and college education since its independence, with reference to overall literacy, infrastructure, and universal access and enrollment in schools. However, the quality of education, more specifically producing quality teachers, is yet to be met, although efforts have been initiated over the past few years to gradually develop a network of institutions like the District Institute for Education and Training (DIET), Institute of Advanced Studies in Education (IASE), and Career Technical Education (CTE) in recent years (Lal, 2016). To sum up, although India has made notable institutional setups to uplift TE at present, the quality side still remains a challenging task.

A study on teacher competence carried out by Pantic et al. (2011) on Balkan countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia had shown that a set of competencies related to "system understanding and development" is perceived by teachers across the region as less important compared to other aspects of teacher competence. The educational decentralization is fragmented, as there is a gap between the transferred responsibility and the actual involvement of actors.

Another study on TE in Ghana, carried out by Buabeng et al. (2020), highlights the structure and changes in Ghana's teacher development policies and practices, considering that improved teacher qualification and a conscious effort to link theory to practice will result in improved teacher knowledge and skills required for a professional teacher. A case study carried

out by Shinn (2012) on TE reforms in Palestine argued that Palestinian teacher, development hinders the possibilities for improving the quality of instruction for all Palestinian teachers, particularly given the absence of policy integrating and aligning reforms within a framework for large-scale improvement.

Teacher education in OECD countries

Likewise, in the United States of America, education is regarded as a means of improving the individual and their society. Individual dignity, personal liberty, equality of opportunity, and qualities of a free society are basically considered in the areas of education. The development of the ability to think is the common thread of education, which is regarded as a central purpose of education (Bhatia & Ahuja, 2004). Studying TE of the USA, Futrell (2008) concludes that the process of education reform is very complex, but it continues to evolve steadily. Schools, colleges, and departments of education, especially teacher preparation programs, must maintain and improve ongoing efforts to redesign the teaching-learning paradigm to more effectively ensure that American citizens are well-educated and well-prepared for our global society. For some years, US education has been a degrading and uncertain destination from a quality point of view. The data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) that surveys 15-year-olds in principal industrialized countries indicates that high school students in the US are not competing at expected levels, especially in mathematics and science (Imig, et al., 2016).

Despite the enormous changes underway to transform every aspect of TE in the US, there remains great uncertainty about whether such changes will lead to more high-quality teachers and teaching (Imig et al., 2016). The aforementioned studies indicate that even in developed countries, TE is one of the toughest tasks today. Despite many efforts, the education in the US is degrading, and hence, it indicates the growing importance of TE and a profound change in the existing TE.

Darling-Hammond's study (2017) describes TE in jurisdictions around the world that have considered well-developed systems for teacher development. It compares the TE practices of Australia, Canada, Finland, Singapore, and the USA. She found that programs in Finland, as well as a growing number of institutions in Canada, Australia, and the United States, have created new models for student teaching, often in 'training schools' or professional development schools. His study reveals diverse approaches to TE and support in various countries, including Canada funding for professional development, the US adopting a two-stage certification process, Australia integrating professional development into daily work, and Singapore providing extensive support for new teachers.

Similarly, Singapore incentivizes teaching candidates with substantial financial support (the equivalent of \$30,000–\$50,000 per year in salary, plus tuition, books, and laptop computers) for a 3 to 5-year bond, contingent on a service commitment. If the service requirement is not fulfilled, this funding must be repaid. In Finland, teachers are encouraged to continue their education, with many earning Ph. D.s in educational studies while actively teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Norway's hybrid educators are expected to bridge gaps in TE, emphasizing the importance of embracing differences in these roles (Risan, 2021). Dutch TE, as studied by

Meij, Smits, & Meeter (2021), faces questions about the balance between theory and practice in higher education. Their findings challenge the conventional wisdom that theory should underpin internship and question the necessity of this connection.

Heppt et al. (2021) conducted an experimental study on TE in Germany, highlighting significant treatment effects on teachers' language support skills and classroom teaching activities. These findings underscore the practical impact of TE on teachers' performance. Additionally, Isore's (2009) study delves into teacher evaluation systems in OECD countries, revealing a wide diversity of approaches, stakeholders, and criteria for "good" teaching. While many countries aim to implement comprehensive teacher evaluation systems to enhance educational quality, there is a consensus on the importance of involving teachers in the development of these processes. Developing a comprehensive approach, though potentially costly, is considered essential to strike a balance between improving internships and recognizing teacher knowledge and skills while upholding educational quality.

Teacher Education of 21st Century

Boaduo et al. (2011) assert that 21st-century teachers need innovative approaches in their training to meet the evolving challenges, emphasizing the necessity of a globally inclusive TE, training curricula, and a global teachers' council to enhance the teaching profession's adaptability in the 21st century. Their argument aligns with research conducted in Finland, which highlighted the successful development of 21st-century competencies among student teachers, particularly excelling in collaborative skills (Niu et al., 2021). The OECD reinforces the significance of these competencies, emphasizing the global competence of citizens (Niu et al., 2021). Finland's educational system underlines the importance of comprehensive academic master's degree programs for teachers, with universities concentrating on research and knowledge creation, while universities of applied sciences emphasize practical projects (Niu et al., 2021). Finland has made rigorous provisions on teacher preparation and selection process for the quality education system. Hence, teaching has become the most appealing job in Finland.

In the pursuit of dynamic TE and training in the 21st century, institutions in Africa and the globalized world must develop programs that enable prospective teachers to deeply comprehend various aspects of teaching, learning, and their social and cultural contexts. Boaduo et al.'s (2011) research on TE in Africa offers three crucial suggestions: (a) establishing common-core TE and training curricula, (b) prioritizing research as a core subject to equip educators with practical knowledge and skills for addressing daily classroom challenges, and (c) making the core curricula globalized for academic and professional faculties.

However, the National Campaign for Nepal's (n.d.) study on pre-service TE reveals a different reality, pointing out that 21st-century skills demand higher-order thinking abilities. The study found that very few candidates pass the B. Ed examinations, with a negligible percentage of them gaining employment. This situation underscores the challenges and disparities in TE, highlighting the need for comprehensive reform to meet the demands of the 21st century.

To sum up, the literature review highlights the current TE in Nepal is not fully academic or professional, and developed countries face challenges in implementing quality 21st-century

competencies. Major concerns include theory-practice link, inadequacy of professional skills, sufficient budget, and policies. A paradigm shift is needed for transformation and innovation.

Methods

The study used an empirical phenomenological approach and exploratory cum interpretive research designs to explore participants' experiences. Data were collected through content analysis, interviews, FGDs, and purposeful sampling. It used textual analysis and interpretation techniques to assess course contents, participants' views, interpretations, realities, and values using paraphrasing. Trustworthiness ensured through data triangulation, and ethical standards through taking participants' consent and pseudonyms.

Results and Discussion

This section encompasses the examination of qualitative textual data, the understanding and explanation of the outcomes, and a comprehensive analytical conversation. The data analysis is grounded in the real-world information gathered during the study, it also combines insights from this empirical data with relevant theoretical literature and the researcher's personal perspectives. The pseudonym has been given to all the participants whose responses are presented in the text here.

Relevance of Teacher Education Course

Relevance of TE of TU was explored, assessing the course compatibility through content analysis of TSC's secondary level teacher license course (TLC) and teacher selection general course (TSGC) with TE (core courses) of TU. It also used interview and FGD techniques to explore the relevance of TE on teachers' professional skill development e.g., proper use of teaching skills, lesson plan, classroom management, and being familiar with the new trends or innovations, e.g., ICT products and worldwide practices on TE. The explored relevance can be well explained through the following tasks:

Achieving a Teaching License

The students with B.Ed. or Bachelor's degree with pre-service training from a recognized university or institution in the specific subject or level can apply for the secondary level licensure exams. Similarly, intermediate or +2 for lower secondary or basic level, but recently, in the fiscal year 2023/24, the government has taken a flexible policy that it is open even for those who did not have pre-service training or a TE course. Recently, the government has also announced minimum entry qualification for basic level (grade 1-8) is a bachelor's degree, and the master's degree for the secondary level (grade 9-12) through the registered education bill. In this context, respondent Jiblal, working as an administrator and a teacher, says, "Certainly, there is a need to reevaluate the qualifications of teachers. A minimum requirement of a Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) for lower-level positions and a Master of Education (M. Ed.) for upper-level positions should be considered."

Regarding this policy, there were mixed opinions among the research participants and respondents. Mainly, professors and students had stood in opposition, whilst bureaucrats stood in favor of the policy. In this respect, a former school supervisor and now teacher named Hari says:

I hold a somewhat divided perspective on this matter. In the case of certain specific subjects such as mathematics, science, computer science, and accounting, we have faced a shortage of qualified human resources in previous examinations. However, it's worth noting that these individuals also require pedagogical expertise. Following their selection, it is imperative to provide them with in-service training to equip them with the necessary professional skills.

Although the government led by P. K. Dahal, through its fiscal year 2023/024 budget, announced candidates without pre-service teacher training or TE can also appear in the licensure exams offered by TSC, under normal conditions, it needs to complete a pre-service TE (preparation) course to be eligible for a teaching license and a professional teacher. Completing a certain number of teaching training hours and an internship is often a requirement. This can be achieved through a practical teaching experience under the guidance of experienced educators in or outside universities. Usually, TU offers such training through its TE programs, namely: Four-year B.Ed., two-year M. Ed, and one-year B. Ed., and M. Ed. TU also conducts one year's M. Ed through the Open and Distance Education Center (ODEC, TU) mode since 2015. Recently, FOE, TU has started a Master's in Social Studies Education (MSSEd) program through online teaching mode. In addition to this, TU also offers MPhil in education and PhD programs as its regular programs.

Before attending the teacher selection exams, a teacher has to pass a licensure exam conducted by the TSC. This exam assesses knowledge of teaching methods, pedagogy, subject matter expertise, and other relevant skills. The licensure exam for secondary level is of 100 marks with pass marks 50. It comprises 50 questions of two marks. The time allotted for the exam is just one hour. The TSC's paper checking policy is also tight, examiner has to score between 40 to 70%, which seems more rigid than the university's one. The content analysis shows that most of the content (about 90%) of the licensure exam is different from the content offered by the TE programs of TU. The high failures in the recent years' TSC exam, as shown in the table one, might have such causes. In this context, an interviewee administrator cum teacher named Jiblal says:

Following research, it has been discovered that there is also a lack of uniformity in evaluation methods. There are disparities in the complexity of questions and the grading criteria. For instance, in PSC examinations, candidates can receive a maximum score of 6 out of 10, while in TSC exams, they can attain a maximum of 7 out of 10. There should be a rationale for awarding higher scores, but this is not consistently applied in university evaluations. In the university setting, a typical written assignment may yield an average of 50% in terms of marks, but such a performance would not suffice for passing the exams in TSC or PSC due to their more stringent grading standards.

Previously, getting a teaching license was limited to students of education, but now, the government has changed its policy so that everyone from any discipline can take a teaching license, and it is not limited to the university's education faculty only. In this respect, an interviewee named Jiblal, an administrator of EDCU, says:

In terms of quality, it holds promise. It has the potential to attract teachers with strong subject expertise. As for teaching methods, those can be imparted through training post-selection. Currently, there's a shortage of science and math educators in the job market. In this regard, one could consider that this policy may help bridge the gap and guarantee a high standard of education.

In summary, the TSC's licensure examination is not only excessively challenging but also lacks relevance to students with an educational background. This is substantiated by the content analysis. Primarily, it is imperative to reevaluate the content of the Teacher Preparation (TP) course, the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) program at TU, and the evaluation criteria used by TSC. Furthermore, it is crucial to emphasize the need for enhancing the quality of education provided by both TU and TSC.

Facing the Teacher Selection Exam

The Teachers Service Commission (TSC) oversees the competitive teacher selection exam process in Nepal. Eligible candidates must pass two papers: one general and one subject-specific. The general paper is a one-hour, 100-mark written exam covering general knowledge on teaching (TE). The subject-specific paper tests candidates' knowledge in education, teaching methodology, IQ level, ICT, teaching pedagogies, new trends, legal systems, and other subject-specific content. The pass mark for the general paper is 50. The exam content differs from the teacher preparation course offered by TU. In this context, EDCU head Homnath says:

The teacher selection course includes various components, such as a 10-mark intellectual test and 10 marks related to topics like the Constitution, Education Act, Rules and Regulations, and Local Self-Government Act. As a result, approximately 50 marks out of the total 200 in the teacher selection test are unrelated to teacher preparation.

Consequently, students are required to independently study and prepare for the exam.

Hence, the teacher preparation course does not appear to be directly correlated with the development of proficient teachers.

The candidates should also face a three-hour written test of 100 marks with 40 pass marks in the specific subject as the second paper. The exam contents for the second paper can vary depending on the subject and the exam.

The examination systems taken by the TSC and TU were also criticized by the participants and respondents in the study. Mainly, the pass marks and marking system, i.e., 40 to 70% of TSC, seems unscientific, and the script of the question paper in the B.Ed exam of TU seems unjustified. In this context, during FGD, participants shared their views as:

During our B.Ed program at TU, questions are presented in English, but in the TSC examination, all questions (except for some technical subjects, including language) are asked in Nepali. This discrepancy can be quite perplexing, and we would appreciate it if the university could formulate questions in a format more akin to the TSC.

The Teacher Service Commission (TSC) conducts interviews for meritorious candidates who pass written examinations. The interviews assess personality, attitude, motivation, teaching skills, communication abilities, and subject expertise. Shortlisted candidates submit their

certificates and documents for verification. However, the TSC rarely conducts practical tests during the selection process. In this context, the administrator who have been involving in teacher selection process for some years, named Jiblal put his opinion as:

I believe there are no standardized assessments designed to gauge behavioral skills.

While there is a provision for a 25% practical examination in the TSC's test, it is offered as an optional provision and faces challenges in its effective implementation. This is primarily due to concerns about potential misuse, political influence, and the absence of privacy safeguards, unlike written tests that can be anonymized. The TSC evaluation system, like that of universities, is primarily focused on theoretical assessment.

A merit list is compiled and released considering the overall performance in the written examination, interview, practical assessment, and document verification. Applicants are chosen for teaching positions based on their respective positions on this merit list. Additionally, eligible candidates may also secure teaching positions through government-designated reserved quotas.

Learning pedagogies

Teacher education at TU focuses on equipping educators with the necessary skills, knowledge, and pedagogical skills to effectively teach and support students' learning. Teacher education programs aim to develop teachers who can create engaging and inclusive learning environments, utilize effective teaching strategies, innovations, and adapt to the evolving needs of students and the education system. Here's an overview of TE for learning pedagogies in TU:

Foundation and Pedagogical Courses. The education discipline (TE) at TU is distinguished by its foundational and pedagogical courses. It offers Bachelor's and Master's degree programs in Education (B.Ed. and M.Ed.) through its colleges, providing aspiring teachers with knowledge in educational philosophy, teaching methods, psychology, curriculum development, assessment, and classroom management. The FGD participants had suggested reforming TP courses to address the missing content of TSC's courses. They collectively suggested:

In TE, our focus should extend beyond simply reviewing various textbooks; instead, we should analyze the curriculum itself before delving into the specific books. Hence, the curriculum should consider the students' interests. It should incorporate missing topics of TSC's course, such as constitution, general knowledge, IQ, computer skills, and others.

Besides the core foundation courses, TE also includes subject specialization and the respective teaching methods. Teacher education programs in TU include specific pedagogy courses that focus on teaching methods, strategies, and approaches tailored to different subjects and grade levels. These courses emphasize student-centered learning, active engagement, critical thinking, and effective communication. However, participants and respondents in the study found that content and practical skills are inadequate.

Applying New Teaching Strategies. The focus on multilingual inclusive education has grown in recent years, with TE programs aiming to address diverse student needs, including those with disabilities. These programs also involve ongoing professional development workshops, service training sessions, and reflective practice, introducing new teaching methods

and pedagogical approaches. In this context, a question - How helpful was or is your B. Ed. TE in preparing you for your current teaching job? Was asked a university's professor named Hem, he answered:

Most of the contents taught in TE were very much useful for me. However, the way I was instructed was more about developing knowledge than skills. I think the aspect that was lacking in the program for me to be a teacher was the pedagogical skill.

Teacher education programs promote continuous self-improvement, experimentation with innovative teaching methods, and integration of technology into education. They also foster collaboration among educators, encouraging the sharing of best practices, challenges, and the development of innovative teaching strategies.

Alignment with Modern Educational Practices. TU's TE course aligns with contemporary teaching methods and approaches, with subjects A (Philosophical and sociological foundations of education), B (Educational psychology), and D (Classroom instruction) describing different teaching and learning methods. Unit III of subject A focuses on behavior modification techniques, models of teaching, self-instruction, and group techniques. However, it needs gradual improvement to keep up with the changing trends of education. The course also highlights teaching methods specific to different philosophies.

In this respect, Professor Pramod suggested adding digital pedagogical skills, subject-specific market-based learning contents, and providing teachers with more practical skills to address the classroom needs. Similarly, the EDCU head Homnath says:

The teacher preparation course appears to be falling short in keeping up with the latest advancements in the field of education, particularly in areas such as information technology, intelligence testing, and mathematical ability. These emerging concepts have not been adequately incorporated into the curriculum. This deficiency is evident in the first paper of the TS, TU's teacher preparation course, as it fails to cover the content of approximately 20 to 25 questions.

The shortcomings are even more concerning in the second general paper, where roughly 20 questions span topics like general knowledge, national and international events, contemporary issues, as well as scientific concepts related to the universe and the ocean. These subjects, which hold significance in shaping a well-rounded educator, are notably absent from the teacher preparation course.

As a result, the current teacher preparation course seems to lack relevance in nurturing the development of competent and knowledgeable educators. The absence of vital subject matter and contemporary ideas, coupled with the failure to address crucial educational advancements, raises questions about the course's efficacy in producing qualified and effective teaching professionals.

Internship

The internship program at TU is a crucial part of TE, offering practical experience in real classrooms to apply theoretical knowledge. It aims to enhance students' understanding of program goals, enhance their competency in lesson planning, teaching techniques, assessment,

and report preparation. Assessing the same, FGD participants had shared their opinions as, "certainly, it provides support in the field of teaching; it is helpful to build confidence in classroom teaching, however, it lacks specific guidance. It would be beneficial if it comprehensively addresses all the requirements for TSC's examinations."

The practical subject: teaching practice or practicum is useful for the novice teacher. In this regard, a question- Does practice teaching or practicum assists in your teaching ? was asked to a person Jiblal, a teacher cum administrator then he replied as:

Absolutely, the two-week practice teaching experience significantly supported my actual teaching work at the college. The practicum also proved beneficial in my career, particularly in enhancing skills related to report writing, planning, establishing public relations, and more. However, currently, it tends to prioritize certification over genuine learning.

This course provides students with practical experience in teaching and professional development, focusing on four major activities: orientation, on-campus teaching, operational calendar construction, micro teaching, peer evaluation, test item construction, curriculum analysis, and seminar conduction. Assessing the relevance of present teaching practice, Professor Ananda says:

The current arrangement for on-campus instruction, which includes 15 micro-teaching and 15 peer-teaching lesson plans, should be expanded to include 30 of each type. Additionally, there should be an emphasis on enhancing teaching skills related to curriculum development, instructional material preparation, and effective utilization, as well as on improving student assessment methods, techniques, and item analysis.

TU's TE course incorporates practical experiences like classroom observations and teaching internships, while TSC's course lacks practical content, but may offer classroom observation or teaching performance during selection.

Internships in TE programs offer practical experience in lesson planning, management, and delivery. These programs involve teaching practice in schools, preparing aspiring teachers for future roles. Feedback from mentors and supervising teachers helps identify strengths and areas for improvement. Practice teaching establishes connections between theory and practice. An interviewee, teacher trainer Indra suggested:

Primarily, there is a need to modernize the curriculum and enhance the effectiveness of teaching practices, incorporating methods such as laboratory school experiences and mentorship programs. Students should receive training in ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and stay connected with emerging educational trends. Furthermore, it's essential to ensure that a minimum of 25% of each subject in TE consists of practical components.

Similar understandings were derived from the FGD participants on campus. They said that the content of TP seems to follow a teacher-centered approach. It leans towards theory with limited practical application. One of the FGD participants said, "From my recollection, I only engaged in 5 days of actual classroom teaching during our practice teaching internship, with the

remaining days focused on attendance. There is a need for a more rigorous emphasis on practical implementation. Having a 50% practical component in every subject of TP would be beneficial." Similarly, they believed that not all students intend to pursue careers, so there is a need for content integration that emphasizes skills development, such as mushroom farming and beekeeping.

The TU outperforms the TSC in partnerships, collaborations, and engagement with schools, communities, and stakeholders in both courses, primarily due to its collaboration with community schools during teaching practice and regular feedback from school head teachers. In this regard, an interviewee, school supervisor Hari says:

The primary issue at hand is the lack of effective collaboration among various educational agencies, including the university (FOE), TSC, CDC, education board, developers, and experts. These problems could be avoided if they were to come together and work in concert to develop courses. Otherwise, such shortcomings tend to occur regularly.

Teacher trainer Indra suggests that education stakeholders should collaborate for the best TE. University teacher trainees are less exposed to external educational contexts, as they need competitive skills for market jobs. They often receive these skills through shadow schooling, private tuition, and coaching centers. The current practice teaching framework is inadequate, as outcomes can vary depending on factors like program design, school environment, mentor guidance, and broader educational context.

Teachers' Professional Development

Teacher education plays a crucial role in the professional development of educators in Nepal, as it equips teachers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and strategies to educate students and adapt to the evolving educational landscape effectively. Teacher education introduces educators to innovative teaching approaches, strategies, and technologies that can enhance student learning and engagement. To make the classroom teaching method effective, trainer Indra says:

The classroom should implement the Philip model, which involves initially presenting students with subject matter content, allowing them to independently engage in critical thinking, connections, analysis, and interpretation. Subsequently, the appropriate pedagogical approach is applied as per the specific context. This model encourages students to relate the problem to their existing theoretical knowledge. It's characterized by a project-based and constructive pedagogical approach.

This allows teachers to stay up-to-date with modern educational trends. The TE also promotes a student-centered approach to teaching, where the focus is on the individual needs, strengths, and learning styles of each student. The child-centered approach leads to more personalized and effective instruction. In this context, a question: how well has the B.Ed. The TE program helped you with the new teaching methods and technology-friendly skills you need to teach in your teaching? Asked a professor Hem, he responded as:

My B. Ed program was useful for me to develop my knowledge in teaching, rather than the pedagogy. During my time, there was no use of technology. It was long ago, more than 15 years ago. I learnt new technological skills later while in the teaching profession.

Similarly, Nepal's diverse student population requires teachers to be prepared for inclusive education. TE of TU equips educators with skills to accommodate students with diverse learning needs and create inclusive classrooms. Here, regarding the use of new trends or thinking, there were only 25% course similarities. In this regard, Professor Pramod said, "I don't think there is a specific measurement for such skills. But in general, there is a gap in skills required for teachers, and the potential teachers have not obtained such required skills in the current B.Ed. program."

A teacher with yesterday's knowledge cannot prepare the students for tomorrow's world. Therefore, a teacher must be updated and familiar with the new technologies of education. Examining the extent to which TU's TE course integrates technology in instructional practices. The subject classroom instruction (Ed. 442) units 7, 8, and 9 fulfill the requirement of ICT knowledge that is given in the TL course unit 13 and the TS course part 4.3. In this context, the TE course of TU seems compatible with the TL and TS courses of TSC. Comparing the incorporation of digital tools and platforms in TU's course with the approach taken by TSC's teacher license course, TU found more updated as it has recently taught its students with online teaching programs like MS Teams. Since the introduction of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal in 2020, TU immediately trained its in-service professors and students through making digital id and online training conferences and started teaching. At present, TU in some selected courses adopts a hybrid or blended model of teaching in order to provide access to the maximum number of students and utilize the latest ICT products of education.

Effective classroom management is crucial for a productive learning environment. Teacher education programs provide strategies for behavior management, positive discipline, and orderly classrooms. These programs help educators develop leadership skills, enabling them to take on roles beyond the classroom, such as mentoring colleagues and contributing to curriculum development. To know the implications of the BED course in school management, a question was asked of an interviewee, Professor Pramod. He replied, "I think the program includes some sections that inform them of the educational plans and educational management in schools. However, such issues have not been the focus of the overall program in several subjects."

Teacher education at TU fosters reflective practice, continuous assessment of teaching methods, and improvement through motivational and reinforcement skills. It also offers opportunities for collaboration with peers, mentors, and experts, enhancing professional development and ongoing learning. Students are motivated towards high scores and certificates. In the context of making relevant TP, an interviewee educator, Jiblal analyzes the course of TU as:

The current approach is geared towards theory and exam-based assessment, but it should shift towards being project-centric and hands-on. In the past, there was a 25% practical evaluation component in the TP course, but some students managed to obtain full marks

without actually completing it, highlighting issues related to the way it was implemented and managed.

In summary, the majority of the study's participants expressed the opinion that the existing curriculum at TSC appears to be well-suited for the current situation. Nonetheless, it is recommended that TU reevaluate its Teacher Preparation (TP) course to better conform to the changing context and the curriculum at TSC.

Teacher education is a lifelong process and it doesn't end after initial training. It encourages teachers to engage in continuous learning by attending workshops, conferences, and further education programs. In this context, a teacher trainer Indra during interview, says:

To attract top-grade students to the teaching profession, it is crucial to shift the focus from lower grades to top grades. This can be achieved by offering attractive compensation packages, assigning additional responsibilities, organizing educational tours, providing access to facilities and resources comparable to other public services, and offering opportunities for job enrichment, rotation, and timely transfers. This will help keep teachers mentally refreshed and engaged in their roles, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of education.

Hence, teachers equipped with relevant and up-to-date knowledge from TE programs contribute to the overall quality of education in Nepal. They are better prepared to provide meaningful learning experiences for students.

Nepal's teacher education prioritizes professional ethics, integrity, and student rights, addressing challenges like resource limitations and limited access to quality education. However, the government's policy allowing students to participate in teacher's license examinations has sparked controversy among educators and bureaucrats.

An ethical dilemma is a complex situation where individuals must make difficult choices between conflicting moral principles, often without a clear solution. These dilemmas can arise in various contexts, such as personal relationships, professional settings, political decisions, and legal matters. They can be challenging or an issue due to contradictions in solutions or decision-making processes, making it essential to carefully consider and navigate these dilemmas. In this context, Professor Hem expressed his opinion as:

I think this came out as a policy because of the deteriorating situation of TE programs. The government thought otherwise. The thing was that teaching should be understood as both an art and a technical area. I do not agree with the government's policy on teacher licenses. It was an immature decision.

The government's policy on license eligibility is outdated and immature, as education is a technical profession with specific skills and degrees. It treats education as a political issue, allowing anyone without qualifications to participate. Non-teaching educators argue that this policy is legal, but requires a five-year training course. Likewise, professor Ananda says, "theoretically it is absolutely wrong but it has some practical implications as well. So, the state should rethink and restructure its TE policy and practices." He also found an ethical dilemma on

practical support. He says, if the students and teachers are honest in practicing the contents assigned for it, it certainly provides support to them."

Ethical dilemmas emerge when conflicts arise between competing interests, principles, or societal norms. Teacher education in Nepal is crucial for professional development, but structural and ethical dilemmas in policy making may affect students and the entire education system.

Making TE Innovative

Teacher education is immensely relevant for the use of new trends and innovations in education in Nepal. As education systems around the world evolve to incorporate modern technologies, pedagogical approaches, and changing student needs, teachers must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to effectively integrate these trends and innovations into their classrooms. Here's a question - why is TE crucial for embracing new trends and innovations in Nepal? The educational landscape is rapidly changing due to advancements in technology and shifts in pedagogical paradigms. Teacher education ensures that educators are prepared to adapt and incorporate innovations effectively. However, there are some inconsistencies found in the curricula between TE (TU) and TL/TS (TSC). This statement can be justified through a statement of Professor Hem:

I think in some subjects there are recent contents and materials. However, they are still not adequately aligned with the curriculum, teaching license, and the TSC examination. For example, in TSC, there are topics like action research, which are not much emphasized in teacher education curricula.

Teacher education is crucial for integrating technology into teaching methods, promoting innovative approaches like project-based learning, flipped classrooms, and gamification. It encourages research engagement and student-centered learning, utilizing data and analytics for personalized experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought online and blended learning, necessitating effective teaching and management. Teacher education focuses on developing higher-order thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities.

The FGD participants had a critical look at the new trends adoption by TSC. They said that the TSC's curriculum contains some new but limited elements, which may not adequately meet the needs of today's educators. Our current curriculum does not promote the utilization of teaching materials that can engage a child's interest. Additionally, we focus solely on introducing the local curriculum here, without covering its more extensive aspects. Similarly, assessing the TE course of TU, Professor Ananda says, "To make teaching more effective, the focus should be given to pedagogical aspects. Project-based learning strategies, e- pedagogy, and personalized system of instruction should be added in the current curriculum, but the implementation aspect of the curriculum should be monitored by the concerned authorities."

Teachers trained in these approaches provide engaging, relevant, and up-to-date learning experiences for students. Incorporating new trends and innovations in education is crucial for global advancements and meeting student needs. Teacher Education bridges theory and practice, ensuring teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills.

Discussion

The global relevance and importance of Teacher Education (TE) programs are significant in the sense that TE programs determine competent teachers and have implications for the quality of education. The study of Rhee and Oakley (2008) suggests that the certification providers need to align their programs to the very real needs of new teachers and provide rigorous, relevant programs like the practitioner teacher programs (PTP). TE effectiveness is assessed through obtaining teaching licenses, succeeding in teacher selection exams, and enhancing classroom teaching with professional skills. However, persistent gaps exist between theory and practice, as revealed in a global study by Manna and Tattwasarananda (2018). Even in the US, teaching fellows report that the overall rigor and expectations for coursework, academic engagement, and discussion are extremely low (Rhee and Oakley, 2008).

The teacher training and education system in Nepal has a similar problem; TU has focused on theory, and TSC has focused on practical tests. Further in-service teacher training conducted by TTCs seems not to be successful in teaching new skills to teachers. Karunakaran and Bhatta (2013) identified pre-service and in-service teacher training in Nepal as a formality instead of teaching new skills. To resolve this gap, there must be substantial changes, such as those that a new course on basic needs would provide. Collaboration between institutions is essential for a more holistic approach. International cooperation, like OECD, is encouraged to identify best practices in diverse contexts. In this regard, stressing a teacher appraisal system as a quality imperative, OECD (2013) states that developing teacher-appraisal systems may be costly and challenging to implement, but it is critical to reconcile the demands for educational quality, the enhancement of teaching practices through professional development, and the recognition of teacher knowledge, skills, and competencies.

TE plays a central role in both pedagogy and practice. Kitts (2022) states that the documentary film approach is utilized, while Panthee (2018) highlights Nepal's focus on theoretical knowledge and practical skills. Efforts to extend teaching practice and increase the relevance of courses are favorable. Government policies are enacted in an effort to improve the overall education standard, such as the opening up of the teaching license exam and the mandatory license for teachers of private schools.

The focus is that educators are informed of both the theoretical and practical knowledge required for this profession. To have competent educators, reforms in the curriculum, cooperation, and discourse worldwide are critical in terms of how teachers need to develop to be competent in contemporary classrooms. While there is an argument by researchers and policymakers about the need for stronger ties between schools and universities within teacher education, we know very little about micro-level practices in which professionals use to make connections between these two spheres (Risan, 2021). During the reform and collaboration process, there is an important need to have balanced subject knowledge and pedagogical skills. Tackling discrimination, increasing course compatibility, and implementing reforms will undoubtedly bring Nepal to a higher level of education. Working together between the universities, the TSC, and others is important for this transformation process.

Overall, in Nepal, the implementation of the teaching license policy has led to a heated debate where, on one hand, proponents argue that the policy is aimed at addressing teacher shortage, while others highlight how it would affect the teaching profession and professional practices, raising issues of equity and competence in pedagogical skills and career choice. With subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, addressing discrimination, enhancing course compatibility, and thoughtful implementation of policies would assist Nepal in raising its educational standard.

Conclusion

This study examines the relevance of teacher education (TE) programs at Tribhuvan University (TU) and the teacher licensure and selection courses of the Teacher Service Commission (TSC). It aims to explore the contextual significance of teacher education, identify the root causes of differences, and highlight innovative practices in TE. To enhance the relevance of TE, the study suggests several remedies, including aligning TE programs with TSC courses, re-evaluating licensing policies to promote professionalism, incorporating practical teaching pedagogy, ensuring well-equipped laboratory classrooms for high-quality on-campus practice, extending the duration of off-campus internships, making institutional collaboration, and integrating innovative approaches throughout TE programs.

Implication

Further, based on the discussion and conclusions, the following implications are drawn:

Policy-level Implications

- a) To ensure effective teaching and professionalism, teachers must require a license and the government must enforce a strict time-bound renewal policy.
- b) A comprehensive TE curriculum should include innovations, legal regulations, and practical skills, necessitating the adoption of new policies.
- c) Improvements in curriculum, extended internship, financial support, and entrance exams with minimum B-grade students are needed to elevate TE program standards, requiring changes in existing policies and laws.
- d) Amendments to existing TE policies to adopt professional and nonprofessional license policies are crucial.

Practice-level Implications

- a) The duration of off-campus practice teaching should be extended to enhance necessary professional skills.
- b) Effective classroom management relies on professional skills, prompting the need for testing and development.
- c) TU, the largest TE provider, faces issues like low investment, politics, and poor coordination. Hence, it requires income diversification, service improvement, and collaboration with education stakeholders.
- d) Implementing a laboratory classroom, logbook system, and ensuring adequate physical resources can make teachers accountable and facilitate remedial teaching.

Research and Planning-level Implications

- a) To ensure quality teachers, the state can conduct joint research on Human Resource Planning and development in coordination with the university.
- b) Continuous research and planning are required to integrate innovations into the TE programs.
- c) The universities require isometric evaluation research to assess their program effectiveness.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that this research has no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

Data from this study are available from the author.

Author Contribution

I anticipate that this research will contribute to developing relevant TE curriculum and policy options.

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