Exploring Professional Development Practices: Insights from Gurukul, Sanskrit, and General Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the professional development strategies used by teachers in Gurukul, Sanskrit, and general schools in Karnali and Gandaki provinces. The purpose of the study is to gain insight into the strategies teachers employ to advance their professional development. Through focus group discussions with a purposeful sample of six teachers, the study investigated the variety of professional development strategies used in these institutions. The study's findings revealed that teachers employ numerous strategies, including professional development training, field trips, peer collaboration, workshops, seminars, sharing of best practices, and technology integration. In addition, the study considered cultural norms, infrastructure constraints, and regional challenges as contextual factors that influence the implementation and efficacy of professional development strategies.

Keywords: Collaboration, General schools, Gurukul schools, professional development strategies, qualitative research, Sanskrit schools, workshops

Introduction

Professional development is an essential element of teacher growth and plays a crucial role in enhancing instructional practices and student outcomes. Understanding the strategies teachers employ in their professional development in the context of Gurukul, Sanskrit, and General Schools in Karnali and Gandaki provinces is essential for designing effective training and support programs. The purpose of this study is to investigate the professional development strategies used by instructors in these institutions to improve their professional growth and increase student achievement.

Recent research studies have emphasized the importance of teacher professional development and investigated various strategies implemented in various educational settings. According to a study conducted by (Lo 2021), collaborative professional learning communities are effective in supporting teacher development and fostering a positive effect on student achievement. This finding highlights the importance of peer collaboration, one of the strategies investigated in the present study. In addition, technology integration has emerged as a prominent strategy for professional development. (Lawrence 2020; Zhang & Zhu 2020) found that the use of technology-enhanced professional development programs positively impacted teacher knowledge, skills, and confidence in integrating technology into their instructional practices. This finding is consistent with the strategies identified in the present study, in which Gurukul, Sanskrit, and General School instructors incorporated technology to enhance their professional development. Similarly, Gyawali (2020) discussed some applicable models for pedagogical transformations such as unidirectional, electronic participation, and mobile teaching as alternative pedagogies of Nepalese educational institutions to continue teaching-learning for various disciplines. Furthermore, the models could apply to professional development.

However, despite existing research on professional development strategies, little is known about the specific approaches used by teachers in Gurukul, Sanskrit, and general schools in Karnali and Gandaki provinces. To address this research void, this study will conduct focus group discussions with a prospective sample of six instructors. This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of effective strategies for teacher growth in the context of Gurukul, Sanskrit and General Schools in Karnali province and Gandaki province by examining the variety of professional development strategies implemented in these schools. Furthermore, this study considers cultural norms, infrastructure limitations, and regional challenges as contextual factors that may impact the implementation and effectiveness of professional development strategies. These factors are crucial to consider because they influence the specific challenges and opportunities that instructors face on their path to professional growth.

This study seeks to shed light on the professional development strategies used by teachers in the Gurukul, Sanskrit, and General Schools of Karnali and Gandaki provinces, based on previous research in this area. This study aims to contribute to the design of tailored and effective professional development programs that address the specific needs and contextual factors of teachers in these educational settings by examining the diverse range of strategies used, including professional development training, field visits, peer collaboration, workshops, seminars, best-practice sharing, and the incorporation of technology.

Review of the literature

Teacher continuing professional development (CPD) is shaped by a complex interplay of personal, institutional, and contextual factors, making it context-specific. These personal and contextual elements influence the goals teachers can set for their CPD, the suitable content, and the learning methods they can employ. Regarding the theoretical framework of teacher PD, two theoretical perspectives, Adult Education Theory and Rational Choice Theory, are both accommodating and complementary to one another (Njenga, 2023). Adult education theory posits that adult learning is self-directed and goal-oriented, aligning with rational choice theory, which views human actions as purpose-driven. Furthermore, Rational Choice Theory, an action theory,

examines how beliefs, interests, and opportunities shape goal-oriented decisions and actions. In this context, it explores how teachers' beliefs, interests, and opportunities influence their choices and learning practices (Hedström & Swedberg, 1996).

The professional development (PD) program for teachers is an essential programme that supports them in updating the professional skills required for their daily teaching. Therefore, the demand for this program is increasing day by day in all schools, both public and institutional. However, teachers use various practices to improve their professional efficiency depending on the available resources and institutional support. In the United States, Desimone & Garet (2015) reported that teachers are involved in various PD activities such as teacher workshops, classroom observation and coaching through video devices, peer observation, and teacher training. He suggested linking PD practices with classroom teaching. In a different context, Darling-Hammond (2017) viewed the need for PD activities that connect with skills of the 21st century, including critical thinking, problem-solving, effective communication skills, and collaboration. They also found seven characteristics of effective professional development, such as content-focused, incorporating active learning, providing coaching and expert support, collaboration, using models of effective practice, expert support and peer coaching, and feedback and reflection.

Highlighting the crucial role of teachers' PD, Sancar et al. (2021) argued that since the quality of students' learning outcomes depends on the quality of their teacher's PD, focus should be given to teachers' needs, emotions, prospects, and dreams while designing PD programs. In a different context, Popova et al. (2022) opined that teacher PD programs can be an effective tool in low and middle-economic countries. He further reported that face-to-face training with follow-up visits to provide feedback to support teachers in transferring the skills in their classrooms is meaningful for novice and experienced teachers in developing countries. In high-income countries, Kennedy (2019) proposes that the impact of teacher PD programs be compared with a much less costly 'community of practice' model in which teachers help each other. In a mixed research design in Zambia, Muyunda et al. (2023) revealed that teachers perceived PD as an important program as it improved their pedagogical knowledge, teaching skills, and content knowledge. Similarly, teachers involved in various PD activities such as workshops, in-service training, and continuing education play an instrumental role in enhancing their career development.

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is the process of enhancing a teacher's academic qualifications and increasing their competence and effectiveness in fulfilling professional responsibilities both inside and outside the classroom. TPD encompasses a range of organized activities aimed at preparing teachers for their roles, including initial training, induction programs, in-service training, and ongoing professional development within school environments.

In Nepal, TPD seems to be a process of updating teachers with pedagogical knowledge and teaching skills. Pokherel and Behera (2016) reported that teachers primarily expect effective delivery methods, practical implementation of training skills and knowledge, and a participatory approach to professional development. Trainers should act as role models in classroom management, providing learning experiences that help teachers develop and execute activities successfully. Previously, in a survey, Shah (2015) found that many Nepalese teachers did not have PD opportunities except for short training and workshops, and these training and workshops

were inadequate to address the needs of teachers. He further questioned the quality of teacher training as they failed to reform teachers for PD. However, Kshetree (2021) observed that the TPD program supported Nepali teachers to become professionals, as they are perfectly designed despite some implementation lacunas in many cases.

The literature above analysed the practices of TPD in various contexts. Although TPD is not a new concept in Nepal, teachers have always raised some questions about its effectiveness and quality. Therefore, this article aimed to critically analyze and explore the PD practices in Karnali and Gandaki provinces in Nepal, which is a less researched study. This study has bridged this gap in Nepal and provided information about the practice of PD activities.

Methodology

I used a qualitative survey design as suggested by Flick (2022) to investigate the experiences of teachers who currently teaching in institutions of Gurukul, Sanskrit, and general education in Karnali and Gandaki provinces, Nepal. Using focus group discussions (FGD), the researcher collected information from six selected teachers. Six teachers currently teaching in schools of Gurukul, Sanskrit and General education in Karnali and Gandaki provinces, who possess pertinent experiences and knowledge on the research topic, were purposively selected. The information collected from the FGD was transcribed, coded, recoded, and developed into themes as suggested by Braun and Clark (2006). The qualitative data were analysed thematically.

Results

The findings of this study shed light on the numerous professional development strategies used by instructors in Karnali and Gandaki provinces. Through focus group discussions with a purposeful sample of six teachers, the study determined that teachers employ a variety of professional development strategies. These strategies included professional development training, field visits, peer collaboration, workshops, seminars, sharing of best practices, and technology integration.

> *I am pleased that this study has highlighted the importance of professional development in our discipline, as perceived by participants. As a remote teacher, I realize how difficult it can be to access professional development opportunities. Peer collaboration and sharing of best practices have proven to be the most beneficial strategies for my development. It is wonderful to see that other instructors in our province are also using these strategies and incorporating technology to advance their professional development. [T1]*

> *I found it interesting that teachers in our province use field trips as one of their instructional strategies. I have always believed that learning from other institutions and instructors can be beneficial. Due to our region's limited infrastructure, it can be difficult to plan and execute such excursions. I hope that this study will help policymakers and educational leaders in our region provide more resources and support for field trips and other professional development strategies. [T2]*

> *I appreciate that this study considers the contextual factors that may impact the implementation and efficacy of professional development strategies. As a teacher who has worked in various regions of Nepal, I have observed that cultural norms and regional obstacles can have a significant impact on the success of professional development programs. I anticipate that this research will lead to the development of more targeted and effective professional development programs that address the specific requirements and contextual factors of teachers in Gurukul, Sanskrit, and general schools of Karnali Province.* [T3]

The teachers' perspectives are favorable and provide vital insight into their professional development experiences. The first teacher emphasizes the difficulty in accessing professional development opportunities in remote locations and the importance of peer collaboration and sharing of best practices, which are accessible regardless of location. The second instructor draws attention to the limitations of the region's infrastructure and the potential benefits of field trips while acknowledging the difficulties associated with planning and executing such trips. This perspective could inform future professional development policy decisions. When designing professional development programs, the third teacher recognizes the importance of contemplating contextual factors such as cultural norms and regional challenges. This is consistent with the study's consideration of these variables and highlights the need for individualized approaches to professional development. These perspectives offer a nuanced and realistic perspective on the strategies discussed in the study.

Existing research has highlighted the importance of peer collaboration and technology integration in professional development, which is supported by the findings of this study. The use of technology-enhanced professional development programs had a positive impact on teacher knowledge, skills, and confidence in the integration of technology into their instructional practices. For example,

> *I am convinced that the use of a variety of professional development strategies is essential to our growth and success as educators. I am pleased to see that instructors are enhancing their professional development through a combination of strategies, including professional development training, field trips, peer collaboration, workshops, seminars, best-practice sharing, and technology integration. [T4]*

> *My experience has taught me that relying solely on one strategy for professional development can result in stagnation and limit our growth potential. We can learn from a variety of perspectives, acquire new skills, and stay informed about the latest educational trends and technologies by employing a combination of instructional strategies.* [T5]

Additionally, contextual factors can influence the implementation and efficacy of professional development strategies in these institutions. Cultural norms, infrastructure limitations, and regional challenges were identified as crucial factors to consider because they

influence the specific challenges and opportunities instructors face on their professional development journey.

In the context of Gurukul, Sanskrit, and General Schools in Karnali province, this research contributes to our understanding of effective strategies for teacher development. This study provides information on the design of effective professional development programs that address the specific needs and contextual factors of teachers in these educational settings by examining the wide range of strategies used. This study highlights the importance of continuing professional development in improving instructional practices and enhancing educational outcomes.

Discussions

The perspectives conveyed by the instructors in this study emphasize the importance of a diverse approach to professional development. According to (Wong & Jhaveri, 2015), teachers in Gurukul, Sanskrit, and General Schools of Karnali and Gandaki provinces have used a variety of strategies to improve their professional development, including professional development training, field visits, peer collaboration, workshops, seminars, best-practice sharing, and technology integration. Similarly, this is consistent with existing research (Khadka 2021; Rezaei & Meshkatian 2017; Banihashem et al. 2023), which suggests that collaborative professional learning communities and technology-enhanced professional development programs are effective in fostering teacher growth.

However, the study also acknowledges the contextual factors that may affect the implementation and efficacy of professional development strategies in these institutions. Infrastructure limitations, cultural norms, and regional challenges can have a significant impact on the success of professional development programs; therefore, individualized approaches that address the specific needs and contextual factors of teachers in these educational contexts are indispensable. The findings can inform policy decisions regarding professional development and support the development of more effective and influential professional development programs in Nepal's remote regions.

It should be noted that the teachers in this study have expressed favorable opinions on the influence of professional development on their instructional practices and overall professional development. They have been able to learn from a variety of perspectives, develop new skills, and remain informed of the most recent educational trends and technologies using a combination of strategies. This highlights the importance of ongoing professional development to improve instructional practices and improve educational outcomes.

This research contributes to understanding effective strategies for teacher development in remote areas. This study provides information on the design of customized and effective professional development programs that address the specific needs and contextual factors of teachers in these educational settings by highlighting the variety of strategies used by teachers and the contextual factors that impact their success.

Conclusion and Implications

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is the process of enhancing a teacher's academic qualifications and increasing their competence and effectiveness in fulfilling

professional responsibilities both inside and outside the classroom. TPD encompasses a range of organized activities aimed at preparing teachers for their roles, including initial training, induction programs, in-service training, and ongoing professional development within school environments.

This study reveals the professional development strategies used by teachers in Gurukul, Sanskrit, and General Schools in the Karnali and Gandaki provinces of Nepal. The findings indicate that teachers use a variety of strategies to advance their professional development, such as professional development training, field trips, peer collaboration, workshops, seminars, sharing best practices, and the incorporation of technology. The study emphasizes the importance of a diverse approach to professional development and the importance of continuous professional development in improving instructional practices and enhancing educational outcomes.

The teachers' perspectives in the study provide valuable insight into their experiences with professional development strategies, and the study acknowledges contextual factors that can influence the implementation and efficacy of these strategies in remote regions of Nepal. Infrastructure constraints, cultural norms, and regional challenges are crucial considerations, and individualized approaches that address the particular requirements and contextual factors of instructors in these educational contexts are essential. The study contributes to understanding effective strategies for teacher development and highlights the need for effective and individualised professional development programs that take into account the specific needs and contextual factors of teachers in remote areas of Nepal. The findings can inform policy decisions on professional development and facilitate the development of more effective and influential professional development programs.

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