

A WALK ON THE THORNY PATH: CHALLENGES FACED BY NEPALESE TEACHERS IN THE BEGINNING OF THEIR CAREER

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Abstract

Teaching is taken as challenging job throughout the world. It is even more challenging in developing countries like Nepal where it has not developed as a profession very well. Although there are challenges throughout teachers' career, the frequency and intensity of the problem is very high during the initial phase of career. This paper reports on the nature of challenges faced by beginning teachers in Nepalese schools based on a small scale survey research. Data were drawn from a survey study conducted in the Kathmandu valley. I adopted qualitative method of data collection and analysis. Forty teacher with less than three years of teaching experience and five head-teachers were purposively selected for the study. The study revealed that the beginning teachers face a range of problems and most of them result because of lack of link between what they learn in the colleges/universities and their work places. It was also found that they face various challenges because of lack of preparation and support from different stakeholders.

Key Words

Beginning teacher, Induction, Challenges, Problems

Introduction

Teachers around the world have witnessed tremendous changes in many aspects related to their profession in recent time. These changes have also created challenges for them to update themselves according to the changing demands of the time. The teachers who face these challenges the most are the novice teachers - the ones who have just begun their career in the field of teaching. These newly qualified teachers face an array of personal and professional problems and have difficult time to manage their professional stability and growth. The beginning years of teaching prove to be most challenging as teachers are usually feel difficulty with transitioning into the teaching profession. These years are most critical because they contribute to the future teaching practices (Bartell, 2004).

Everyone faces problems in the beginning of the career due to the lack of the practical skills needed to perform the assigned tasks (Ozturk, 2008). These newly appointed teachers are not provided with any induction program to familiarize them with the possible challenges. This further adds the woes of the fresh candidates. In addition, the nature of challenges continues to change as teaching is a dynamic profession and new challenges emerge with time. Moreover the world in the universities and real school teaching situations are entirely different and on many cases people fail to transform themselves from a student to a teacher. This kind of transformation from a good student to a good teacher is very crucial for success in teacher's career.

In the sections that follow, I explain the concept of the beginning teachers followed by the major challenges faced by teachers in the beginning phase of their career. With a view to look for implications in teacher education and induction for teacher placement, I claim that teachers are helpless in this phase. Borrowing Clement's (2011) ideas, I argue that the teachers are left to 'sink or swim'. I present the theories related to the issues and then present and discuss the data collected from a study with the findings.

Conceptualizing the idea of beginning teachers

The beginning teachers are also called novice teachers. Although there is no uniform definition, someone who has just started his/her career as a teacher is referred to as a novice or beginning teacher. Some people consider teachers with less than five years of teaching as novice teachers but on most occasions, the teachers in their first three years of classroom experience are considered novice. These teachers differ from the experienced and expert ones in "different ways in which they relate to their contexts of work, and hence their conceptions and understanding of teaching, which is developed in these contexts (Tsui, 2003 as cited in Richards and Farrell, 2010, p. 7). In this paper, I use the term 'beginning teacher' to refer to someone who has got an experience of teaching for less than three years.

Beginning years are very crucial for teachers to continue their career and develop skills to teach. According to Ozturk (2008, p. 5) "Existing knowledge and belief of novice teacher is mostly built during their pre-service education years. Similarly, their further understanding and beliefs will be shaped by the first experiences during their induction years". Therefore, this period is very crucial for the professional development of the teachers throughout their life.

The challenges faced by beginning teachers

Beginning teachers face a lot of challenges because of the lack of knowledge and skill to perform different tasks effectively. They also face challenges because of lack of familiarity with different aspects of the school system like the school administration, co-teachers, students, etc. University graduates have a lot of expectations when they enter the teaching profession. But as they start working in schools, they realize that their path is not as comfortable as they had expected it to be. The problem arises mainly because the courses in the universities primarily focus on disseminating the theoretical knowledge and do not focus much on the practical aspects. Consequently, the new teachers fail to link the theory with practice. As Ojha (2015) argues "knowing the theories to teach well and actually delivering the lessons in a real classroom in front of students were completely different" and therefore, it is very difficult for the students to transform themselves into teachers.

Beginning teachers are typically less familiar with subject matter, teaching strategies, and teaching contexts and lack adequate ways to plan and execute them (Richards and Farrell, 2010). Furthermore, the novice teachers are supposed to deliver all the skills and services to the students, guardians and the school which causes a kind of pressure in them to perform like the experienced teachers. Mudzingwa, and Magudu (2013) claim that "In most instances newly appointed teachers are given the most difficult tasks and unpopular extracurricular responsibilities that experienced teachers do not want to tackle" (p. 41). Mudzingwa and Magudu (ibid) mention that "during this period new

teachers are gripped with fear, anxiety, anticipation and excitement emanating from the uncertainties that the new professionals are likely to encounter in the field of teaching".

Teaching in the beginning is very challenging and demanding and teachers may perceive their first years of teaching as negative because of the unrealistic expectations that the school administration places on beginning teachers (Allen, 2000). Many believe that teaching is about merely transmitting information and underestimate the challenges the teachers have to face to make themselves fit the ever-changing needs of the pupil and the society.

The early years of teaching are often characterized by a "sink-or-swim" or "survival" mentality because the teachers do not get careful support and thoughtful development of teaching expertise over time. The beginning teachers are anxious about their performance and career too. Therefore, they report an inability to cope and describe feeling isolated, frustrated, disenchanted, demoralized, and overwhelmed by the demands of the profession.

Many schools assign the new teachers to take the most difficult subject and students. The new teachers may not have skills to deal with students with varied abilities, needs and motivation. Clement (2011, as cited in Lunenburg, 2011, p. 1) asserts that "There is recognition that the induction period, the first two or three years of teaching, is critical in developing teachers' capabilities, and that beginning teachers should not be left alone to sink or swim".

The last decade saw a significant increase in the complexity of needs and challenges in the teaching practice. This has resulted into a shift or change in the number and nature of challenges faced by beginning teachers in recent time. Jarvis & Algozzine (2006, as cited in Ozturk, 2008), mention five major concerns for beginning teachers that are reflected in researches (a) work load, time management, and fatigue; (b) content and curriculum knowledge; (c) relationship with students, parents, colleagues, and supervisors; (d) evaluation and grading; and (e) autonomy and control.

Dunn (2002, as cited in Cantu and Martinez, 2006) classifies the difficulties faced by novice teachers in four areas - (a) problems in the academic area, (b) organizational problems, (c) social problems, and (d) problems having to do with material and technology. Among the academic problems, He includes issues related with discipline and motivation, evaluation of student work and effective use of different teaching methods and assessment, among others. Regarding organizational problems, she mentions issues concerning the organization and planning of work, including those related to policies and regulations, to the conditions in which the teacher works, and in general, to the guidance and support offered by the institution.

Most new teachers identify classroom management, student motivation, differentiation for individual student needs, assessment and evaluation, and relationships with parents as major concerns. Yalcinkaya (2002, as cited in Ozturk, 2008) claims that the early problems of newly qualified teachers are: inexperience, conflicts between pre-service training and in-service applications, pressures on new teachers, effort to be able to finish more tasks, fear of inspection, and adaptation to school and environment. Many new teachers enter their first year of teaching with the same teaching load and responsibilities as teachers with many years of seniority. Beginning teachers are also often given the

most difficult classroom assignments and are expected to perform the same duties and responsibilities as experienced teachers with the same level of expertise, efficiency, and efficacy.

Classroom management, discipline and dealing with difficult students are the main challenge mentioned most often by the teachers as the challenges in the preliminary phase of their teaching career (Flanagan, 2006). Making a lot of preparations at the very beginning without much experience is a key challenge for novice teachers. This is reflected in Van Hover and Yeager's (n.d.) idea when they say that the beginning teachers face a lot of problems like

Heavy teaching loads, multiple preparations, the least 'desirable' classes, extracurricular duties, few instructional resources, little collegial support, discipline issues, professional isolation, inadequate salaries, high parent expectations, poor administrative support, unfamiliarity with routines and procedures, and a mismatch between their expectations of teaching and the realities of the classroom. Flanagan (2006) has mentioned making the transition, classroom management, the teaching environment, isolation and loneliness, meeting diverse needs of students as the challenges for the beginning teachers. Yalçınkaya (2002, as cited in Ozturk, 2008) proclaimed the early problems of newly qualified teachers as: (a) inexperience, (b) conflicts between pre-service training and in-service applications; (c) pressures on new teachers; (d) effort to be able to finish more tasks, (e) fear of inspection, and (f) adaptation to school and environment.

Brock and Grady (2006, as cited in Ozturk, 2008) argue that "The source of their difficulties may stem from a variety of issues, such as immaturity, lack of teaching experience, inadequate educational preparation, workplace conditions, and or newness of the school culture" (p. 16). The following table contains the major concerns or challenges faced by the beginning teachers along with some reflective questions that they can use to find the problems. McCann, & Johannessen (n.d.) have summarized the problems faced by beginning teachers briefly in the following table.

Issue	Reflective Questions
Relationships Relationships with students	<i>Will students like me? Will they accept me as a bona fide teacher?</i>
Relationships with parents	<i>What will I do if a parent is upset with me? Will parents accept me as a legitimate teacher?</i>
Relationships with colleagues	<i>Will my colleagues believe that I know what I am doing? Will they respect my efforts?</i>
Relationships with supervisors	<i>Will I satisfy the expectations of evaluators? Am I doing what "real" teachers do?</i>
Workload & Time Management Fatigue	<i>How can I get it all done? Do I have a life anymore?</i>
Knowledge of Subject & Curriculum Focus and framework	<i>In the end what is really important to teach? What principles guide the development of the curriculum?</i>
Evaluation and Grading Value judgements	<i>What am I measuring? What do I do when the numbers do not match my subjective impressions?</i>
Autonomy and Control Independence and integrity	<i>Can I teach the way that I was prepares to teach and the way that I believe is the best way to teach?</i>

Source: McCann, & Johannessen (n.d., p. 139, as cited in Ozturk, 2008)

Effects of problems on professional development

Many teachers face challenges in the initial stage and that affects their choice to continue teaching as a long-term profession. If the teachers undergo positive experience in the beginning of their career, they feel comfortable and continue showing their devotion to the profession but if they undergo negative experience, they don't feel comfortable and may not be committed to the profession or may even think of quitting it. According to Ozturk (2008), "For the novice teachers, it is crucial to understand that teaching, in ways, is quite different from what they have learned in their past experiences as students" (p 28).

There are a range of challenges and many of these are reflected in the career of the teachers later in their life. Some of the effects are obvious and can be seen clearly but there can be many psychological problems as well. VanHover and Yeager (n.d.) argue "Novice teachers often struggle both psychologically and instructionally as they enter their first few years of teaching. The teachers may not feel it easy to take decision on crucial aspects because of the pressure to perform as good as the experienced teachers". Teachers may even think of quitting their profession or present institution as many beginning teachers leave their profession because they face a lot of challenges in the very beginning of their career and think that they will have similar problems throughout their life. This issue of adoption has affected the educational institutions too as they have to find and hire new teachers on a regular basis and train them to prepare for the job.

The objective and method of the study

The research objective of this study was to find out the nature of problems faced by teachers in the beginning of their career. This paper is based on a small-scale survey study. For this, I selected forty teachers having less than three years' experience and ten head teachers from the Kathmandu valley using purposive non-random sampling procedure. A set of questionnaire was used to collect data from the beginning teachers and an interview schedule was used to collect data from the head teachers. I used qualitative method to collect and analyze the data.

Results and Discussion

Beginning teachers face a lot of challenges because of the lack of knowledge and skill to perform different tasks effectively. They also face challenges because of lack of familiarity with different aspects of the school system like the school administration, co-teachers, students, etc. based on the data collected, the following section reports the challenges faced beginning teachers in different dimensions of their professional life.

Major Problems faced by Beginning Teachers

Teachers face a lot of problems in their life. Some of the problems are faced by all the teachers while some are unique to a few only. When the beginning teachers were asked to report five major challenges they faced, they reported that maintaining discipline in classroom, difficulty to adjust with co-workers, satisfying the administration, managing to accomplish given tasks in time, and feeling hesitation/lack of confidence were the most prevalent problems.

The beginning teachers mentioned a lot of challenges related to different aspect of school, administration and their personal weaknesses. Besides the above mentioned problems, the beginning teachers reported to have faced the problems like students not doing homework regularly, lack of teaching materials, not having appropriate level of English (poor proficiency in English), less interaction between students and teachers, lack of content knowledge, problem to deal with individual difference of the students, students not understanding English lack of information about students and guardians, unable to use chalk properly on blackboard/not able to write with good hand writing, unable to speak fluently and loudly in class, getting confused over the selection of techniques and methods and difficulty in preparing materials.

When asked about the most crucial challenges that beginning teachers face, the head teachers shared a variety of responses. Some of the most common responses included maintaining discipline in classroom, dealing with the guardians, completing the course and other tasks in time and classroom management. According to a head teacher, beginning teachers face various challenges mainly because of lack of confidence. They know the things but are not sure of it. He mentioned:

Beginning teachers sometimes face challenges in managing time to plan the lessons they have to teach. They ask even the minor details with the seniors. I feel that they lack confidence and cannot decide which way they should go. As they get experienced, they are able to solve all these problems on their own.

Transition to be made by the beginning teachers

When asked about the major changes that beginning teachers need to make from a student to teacher, the head teaches replied that most of them lack sincerity and sense of responsibility towards their duties. They reported that the beginning teachers need to develop confidence, ability to lead and the school culture. Most of the head teachers reported that the beginning teachers do not show matured behavior and this is the biggest problem for the administrators.

Challenges Related to Various Areas

Teachers face challenges related to various areas. The challenges faced by beginning teachers in six different areas have been discussed below.

a. Problems related to classroom management

One of the biggest challenges for the beginning teachers is to manage their classroom effectively. One of the teachers reported -"Sometimes I feel difficulty in classroom management. Due to large number of students, the class becomes very noisy; I cannot focus on the weak students". Many other teachers reported that the size of the furniture used in the classroom was not appropriate and created problem for them. To quote a teacher, "The size of the desks and benches in my classes is not suitable according to the age of the students. The classrooms are small but they have too many students". Some other problems reported by the teachers included -not having enough benches, bigger benches than students' age and size, students speaking different languages with their friends, and difficult to arrange seats for group discussion.

b. Problems related to student behavior

Student behavior causes a lot of problems for beginning teachers as they do not know the proper way to deal with them. When the teachers are new, the students do not obey them and the class goes out of order. The beginning teachers reported that dealing with undisciplined students is a major challenge for them in the class. They are helpless due to the mischievous behavior shown by the students. A teacher reported - "I find students' behavior so different from each other. Sometimes, it is so difficult to handle students like hyperactive, slow writers, introvert, etc." Teachers feel interfered and cannot concentrate in their activities due to the disturbance caused by such students. Another teacher mentioned - "Students are much talkative, out of manners and they try to interfere in my teaching". Some other problems that beginning teachers reported about student behavior are playing and fighting in class, crying or weeping in class, sleeping in class, not respond to teacher well, and not serious in class while teaching/insincere to studies.

c. Problems related to content/subject matter

Beginning teachers not only have problems because of external factors. They also face problems because of the lack of knowledge related to the subject matter. But most of the teachers in this study mentioned that they did not face problems due to lack of content knowledge; they had problem in the presentation of the content in the class. A teacher asserted - "I think I know the content well but I have problem to present it in front of my students in the class". The teachers also claimed that they did not have problems related to subject matter because of their preparation. Another teacher claimed - "I do not face much problems related to content and subject matter because I do a lot of homework/preparation before taking the class". But some teachers confessed that it was difficult for them to make the students understand the content well.

d. Problems related to teaching techniques:

Because of lack of experience, the beginning teachers face a lot of challenges in the selection and use of effective techniques in the classroom. They have a lot of new ideas and techniques but they do not feel comfortable to apply them while teaching in the class.

The beginning teachers in this study mentioned that they have very limited techniques to use in their classes. They are not familiar with many techniques and have to repeat the same techniques every day. The teachers also reported problems related to the use of the English language in their classroom as the level of English of the students is lower than their expectation. A teacher mentioned - "I am supposed to teach in English medium but most of the students do not understand English properly". The teachers mentioned that they have enthusiasm to use modern and child-centered techniques but they are unable to execute them effectively. A teacher claimed - "I want to use student centered teaching techniques but I am unable to make it effective. Because of large number of students, the class becomes noisy. It is so time consuming to use new techniques". On similar note, another teacher said - "I wanted to use games, role playing, and group activities but could not implement them properly".

The teachers also reported that they are not satisfied with their own teaching and shared their frustration over this matter like this - "On many occasions, I do not get satisfied with my own teaching and repeat the same lesson in the next class. This is time consuming and tiring for me". This shows that the beginning teachers face challenges to execute whatever they know. The major reason behind this is that they have not practised using various techniques they have studied about.

e. Problems related to administration

Because of coordination between the beginning teachers and the administration, many problems occur in novice teachers' life. Most of the teachers did not report any problem from the administration and some of them did. The beginning teachers reported that the administrative people turn deaf ears to their problems. They do not fulfill their demands. This is reflected in the statement made by a teacher - "They do not take any action on the problems reported to them. They just listen and do not take any step to solve it". They also reported that the senior administrators behaved with them like inferiors. They behaved strictly and demanded a lot from them. A teacher blamed - "Sometimes the administrators are too strict and it is very difficult to talk to them". The beginning teachers also reported that the administrators had high expectations to perform which was hard as a beginning teacher. Some other problems that teachers reported about administration are - challenge to be updated in every meeting, too much demanding, limited time to complete everything, and providing difficult task.

f. Problems related to relationship with co-workers

It is important for the beginning teachers to have healthy relation with the existing staff of the school. If they have good relation, the new teachers find it easy to adjust in the workplace but if they have bitter relation with the seniors, they may suffer a lot. The senior teachers and other staff may not co-operate the beginning teachers and there can be conflicting environment. The beginning teachers in this study reported both types of relationship with co-teachers. One teacher mentioned - "They are supportive and good. I do not have any problem from them". But many teachers shared unpleasant relation with the co-workers. A teacher reported - "They think themselves superior. They try to show attitude to new teachers. It is very odd to ask anything to them". Some other problems reported by beginning teachers about their co-workers are - lack of self-esteem and loss of status, unable to be frank, difficult to adjust with them, and showing hate culture.

Head teachers' view on the nature of challenges faced by beginning teacher

It is believed that the nature of challenges that teachers face are same regardless of the place they work, experience they have and academic qualification they have obtained. When the head teachers were asked either the problems or challenges of beginning teachers were similar or different over the years, they shared mixed responses. Some of the head teachers mentioned that the nature of problem remains the same over the years but the frequency and intensity of problem decreases. But a few head teachers mentioned that there is an immense change in the nature of challenges that teachers face. A head teacher mentioned:

Although most of the areas of challenges are similar over the years, the teachers face different type of challenges as they get experienced. In the beginning the teachers mostly have challenges related to student behavior and adjustment with the co-workers but as time passes, they report fewer problems related to student behavior but they still have unique problems related to their relation with the co-workers.

Arguing that the teachers have the same problems over the years, one head teacher also expressed his frustration. He commented - "All the teachers are alike. They always blame others for the problems and never feel it their responsibility. They have the same problems for years. I do not understand it. They should improve their skills".

Some head teachers believed that the challenges that teachers face differ over the years. They mentioned that the area of difficulty they face is same but the frequency and intensity of problem decreases. The novice teachers develop skills to deal with their problems themselves as they get experienced. They do not knock at the door of the principal or senior teachers for usual duties like planning lessons, dealing with students, preparing materials, etc.

Conclusion

Everyone faces problems in the beginning of the career due to the lack of the practical skills needed to perform the assigned tasks. Like all other professions, teaching has its own unique requirements. The people who join this noble profession face a lot of challenges and the problems are more intense in the early stage of their career. These initial years of teaching are usually described negatively, with phrases such as frustration, anxiety, isolation, and self-doubt (Hebert & Worthy, 2001). But a good workplace can reduce the uncertainty and increase the opportunities for teachers to achieve success and satisfaction (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). For this, it is important for the schools to organize a proper induction program to help the new teachers cope with the dynamics of the school system. But in Nepalese schools, there is no proper system of induction to support these new comers. Consequently the frequency and intensity of the problems faced by the novices becomes even higher.

The school/college and the senior colleagues should help the beginners develop professional skills realizing that they too were beginners once and struggled to reach the position they have at present. As Ojha (2015) says "it is important for the administrators and senior teachers to realize that if they were not supported by other teachers in the beginning of their career, they would not be able to achieve the position they have at the moment". It is also important for the teachers to take initiation for their development themselves. With their motivation to learn and support from the school administration and the senior staff members, they can make their journey towards successful teaching career.

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