

Book Review

Teacher development in the EFL contexts: Principles and strategies

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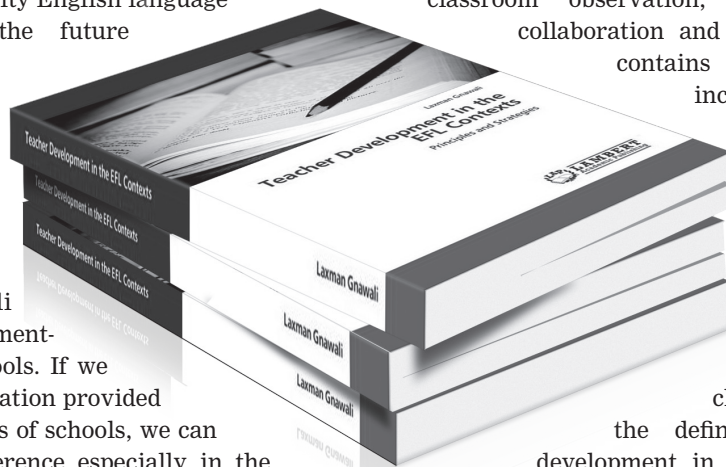
Gnawali, L. (2011). *Teacher development in the EFL contexts: Principles and strategies*. Saarbrucken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.

Why is there a higher failure rate in the Nepalese government schools in English? Why does English as a subject hold the second highest failure rate in the national level SLC examination? These are some of the questions that are needed to be researched by EFL teachers in order to tackle these pertinent issues and thereby contributing to the efforts in imparting quality English language education for the future generation.

Two different kinds of schools function in Nepal: private English medium schools and Nepali medium government-aided public schools. If we compare the education provided in these two kinds of schools, we can find a great difference especially in the English subject. Private schools are promoting teaching of the English language and teach all subjects except Nepali with English as a medium of instruction whereas the translation method still exists in public schools where students may simply read the text written in English but they are really poor in speaking and writing. Addressing this problem and suggesting ways to improve the situation, Laxman Gnawali has tried to contribute

his ideas on the same problem with a framework of a teacher development model in his recently published book entitled *Teacher Development in the EFL Contexts: Principles and Strategies*. This book tries to establish the problems under discussion that relate to the issues of teacher professional development and proposes a program embedding the teacher development strategies such as classroom observation, action research, collaboration and others. The book contains five chapters including an in-service teacher training course designed by the author himself based on his research findings.

The first chapter begins with the definition of teacher development in which the author has tried to build up the concept of teacher development with a literature review. The author says, "I believe that developed teachers are those who can identify their own potentials and problems and find their way forward" (p.13). His view towards teacher development is that teachers cannot be forced to develop but they can be helped to develop and that help can be provided through training. It is an ongoing process through



which teachers keep growing with their own voluntary efforts. Then he turns towards the sub-topic “*How do the teachers develop?*” in which he presents the points as the result of research done by him. Teachers can develop themselves in different ways. The author researched among the teachers and teacher educators from different countries viz: England, Georgia, Nepal, Romania and Uzbekistan. This showed that teachers develop themselves if there is challenge and responsibility. Another factor indicted by the research in teacher development is to be in contact with other professional teachers either by working with them. Similarly, the next factor is reading to gain new ideas based on the experiences and on research. He shows the differences between teacher training and teacher development under. Teacher training is one of the means for the teacher development. Training is time bound but teacher development is a continuing process. The condition for the teachers to develop is presented on the topic “*Developmental aspects into teacher training*”. Thus the main idea of the author in this chapter is that carefully organized training courses can help develop teachers’ professional expertise.

In the second chapter the author present a comprehensive picture of teacher development strategies viz in- service training, classroom observation and action research. He tries to say that there is a gap between the research and classroom practices. He says, in order to minimize the gap and to encourage critical thinking about new approaches, reflective model is appropriate.

The author’s idea is that if the teaches reflect themselves about their teaching, they can learn better by undergoing five stages proposed by Bartlett (1990) according to which, in the first step the teachers reflect themselves by using diaries, journals, audio and video means. In the second step the teacher tries to look for the meaning behind one’s own actions. The third step is to find out the reasons behind the actions and fourth is to search the alternative ways to improve their teaching and the final step is to act based on the findings. His focus point is teachers can survive if they adapt and update themselves for the changing situations. He has supported his ideas with the help of different citations.

The techniques of classroom investigations and the tool for capturing everyday happenings are also mentioned in the book as; checklists, video recording, diaries and journals. These are explained in the book.

The author claims that classroom observation as a powerful tool for teacher development that helps teachers in professional and personal growth in number of ways. The ideas on class observation and the ways that an observer can provide feedback to the teachers are the issues dealt under the section *Observer’s skills for observation and feedback*. The points he has presented are very helpful for the observers those who need to provide feedback to the teachers after observing their classes.

The other important issue he has dealt in this chapter is the concept of action research that can be conducted inside the classroom. It is the best way for teachers to develop professionally as well as the best idea to solve the problems that arise inside the classroom. He also highlight the role of reflective practice in making teachers’ strategies effective. The main undercurrent in this chapter is the theme that teachers can develop themselves professionally by investigating their own practices.

The third chapter analyzes the EFL teacher education contexts taking Nepal as a case. In this chapter he highlights the efforts made by the educational authorities such as the Ministry of Education (MoE) and other bodies to improve the situation in Nepal through pre-service and in-service teacher training though the outcomes aren’t satisfactory. His research shows that the students, who pass SLC, leave the school having very low English language competence and a remarkable number of students fail the examinations because they fail in English. He concludes this chapter by claiming that there is an urgent need of some program that guides working teachers to improve their practices through investigations in the job.

The fourth chapter describes a thirty-week teacher development course for secondary school teachers of English in Nepal. The author’s main focus is school-based teacher development through classroom investigation and reflective practice. As a complete training course, he has presented the outline of the course, its aim and objectives,

teacher development principles, rationale of the course components, structures and methodology with assessment and evaluation process. As the ultimate aim of this course is to help teachers to learn and develop their own, he has proposed the methodology based on the principle of action learning.

In the fifth chapter the author discusses the issues relating to the implementation of the program. He starts by describing planning and executing and evaluating the training program. He outlines the program management structure and the responsibilities of the members of managing body. This chapter concludes with a view that successfully implementing a course is as important as designing it. His epilogue at last highlights the main factors in teacher development which are: reflecting themselves and their own actions and the importance of working collaboratively.

This book deserves appreciation for several reasons. The book is well planned and presented systematically and based on the research done in the Nepalese context. It is published by an international publication which proves that even Nepali authors can publish and be read internationally. Another important aspect of this book is that it presents a course designed for teacher development which is suitable for the teachers of secondary level in Nepal.

This book is useful for those who are planning to be involved in teaching profession as well as for those who are planning to develop themselves with the help of training and for those who are planning to conduct action research in their classroom. Similarly, policy makers and the program designers of the training in teacher development can gain practical ideas from this book while designing the program. This book is a good guide for the teachers who are trying to develop themselves and bring changes in their

teaching and learning process.

This book is well planned and presented with a good variety of themes and deserves appreciation. It is a good initiative by a Nepali author. However, the one weakness it has is that it presents a proposed training course but hasn't discussed about how to implement it successfully by minimizing the failure rate of previous training conducted by the MoE, NELTA (Nepal English Language Teacher's Association) and other agencies. The book has focused on reflection and action research and discussion on the same issue during the training. Though it seems attractive, it is quite difficult to implement as we are facing problems of participation of the trainee in most of the cases.

To be critical, the book is silent for sociological and cultural nuances for teacher development in Nepal. More than action research, reflective practice and observation, leadership role are also a basic skill needed for teacher development because teachers are front liners in the society and the book lacks to address these points. Similarly, the author does not address the strategies and principles for teacher development practices in Nepal in the book. As technology has an important role for the development of a teacher, the author lacks to focus on the use of technology. So, if I were discussing on the same issue and designing a book, I would add one more chapter including the role of technology as well as the cultural and social aspects for teacher development. I would also add the point that getting published also a powerful way to professional development.

The Reviewer

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