Research Article

In-Service Teacher Training for Professional Development: Voices from Secondary Level English Teachers

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Abstract

 In-service teacher training is a structured programme designed to help teachers refresh and enhance their professional knowledge, skills, and practices. This study aimed to explore the perceptions of secondary level in-service English teachers on the appositeness of in-service teacher training for professional development. We employed a narrative inquiry design. For our research participants, we purposively selected three (two male and one female) secondary level English teachers teaching in three different community schools in Rupandehi district for more than seven years. They were interviewed using semi-structured in-depth interview techniques to elicit the data. After transcribing and coding the data, they were analysed under the themes created. The study revealed that teachers were positive toward in-service teacher training. They viewed that in-service teacher training supported them to grow professionally with innovative knowledge, skills, and methods. However, they often found it difficult to apply the knowledge, skills, and practices they acquired in the training sessions in their classroom contexts. Further, they emphasized the need for regular, need-based, and ICT-focused training. Besides, they expressed that there was a mismatch between teachers'

expectations from the training and what they learned in the training hall. This study contributes to the understanding of in-service teachers and other stakeholders about the suitability and challenges teachers face in applying the knowledge learned from the training in real classroom situations. The study has opened a venue for further research to be carried out on how teacher training impacts student performance.

Keywords*:* in-service, professional development, transfer of training, teacher training

Introduction

Training is a systematic process designed to develop and enhance the skills, knowledge, and abilities of individuals for a specific purpose. It is an organized effort to improve performance in a particular area, whether personal, professional, or organizational.

Teacher training is a teacher-focused programme that helps teachers gain experience, practice skills, share ideas, and prepare to handle challenges and responsibilities in their teaching journey. In a similar context, Kshetree (2018) argued training involves preparing individuals to become competent, skilled, and effective in performing their tasks. For an extension worker, training encompasses education designed to foster positive changes in the trainee's behaviour.

According to Barbour and Hodges (2024), a teacher training programme is designed to equip teachers for online and blended teaching during prolonged school closures. In-service teacher training is essential to help teachers prepare for various circumstances. It is provided to teachers who are actively engaged in classroom teaching to enhance their skills, knowledge and pedagogy. With the pace of time, the curriculum gets changed. In this context, training plays a crucial role in conducting the activities as per the curriculum's objectives. Moreover, in this era dominated by technology, where students increasingly rely on the Internet and AI tools like ChatGPT and others, teachers must stay updated on the latest advancements and adopt innovative teaching methods. Petrenko (2024) emphasized that training is increasingly inevitable to prepare teachers to adapt and thrive in the ever-changing educational environments.

In-service teacher training is a program designed to improve the skills, knowledge, and abilities of teachers currently working, while also fostering positive changes in their attitude toward their profession. Moreover, it supports teachers in promoting students' educational achievement. Teachers in Finland frequently participate in training sessions to be up-to-date with the current and innovative pedagogies (Sahlberg, 2011). Furthermore, in-service teacher training in the US and South Korea incorporates blended learning techniques

(UNESCO, 2020). In Singapore, the Ministry of Education provides funding and time off for teachers to attend training programs (OECD, 2018). In our context, limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of trained trainers hinder the effectiveness of training programmes (Bhattarai, 2019).

In-service teacher training is a structured learning process offered to teachers from the start of their careers until their retirement. For successful teaching and learning activities training is always needed. In-service teacher training is additional or supplementary training designed for teachers already employed, typically conducted during the free time allocated to them by school authorities (Mohan, 2011). Therefore, any experience a teacher gains throughout their career can be considered a form of in-service training. Some of the in-service teacher training includes workshops, seminars, refresher courses, need-based training, ICT- focused training, classroom management strategies, assessment techniques, curriculum dissemination sessions, webinars, mentorship programmes, action research, and so on.

For a good teacher, every facet of his knowledge, skills, potentiality and interests is of potential value. In the same context, Nakpodia (2008) stated that an in-service teacher training programme continuously updates a teacher's knowledge, experiences, and expertise in the selected field. Such training is committed to giving teachers ideas about managing classrooms, selecting teaching techniques, motivating students in learning, and making classes interactive and interesting. It assists the teachers in increasing levels of expertise and understanding for their professional development. Teacher development taps into teachers' internal resources for growth, encouraging them to reflect, explore ideas for positive change, and enhance their self-awareness (Head & Taylor, 1997). In addition, teacher development always motivates teachers to continue their professional lives successfully.

Teachers' professional development focuses on enhancing their expertise and effectiveness, enabling them to perform at their highest potential. In essence, it equips teachers to apply their knowledge and skills in classroom practices effectively. Teacher development consists of formal and informal ways of supporting teachers in learning new skills, expanding their knowledge, and gaining fresh perspectives on their teaching methods, practices, and personal growth needs (Joshi, 2012). To grow professionally and for effective teaching, a teacher is required to integrate his knowledge, skills, and practices. In the same line, Fullan (1995) described teacher professional development as the combination of formal and informal learning that teachers engage in, driven by a process of significant and dynamic change. In the same context, Bredeson (2002) viewed professional development as a combination of three interconnected ideas: learning, engagement, and involvement. He

described it as opportunities for educators to learn, fostering creativity and reflection while improving their teaching abilities. Teacher development is a component of professional development. In-service training plays a key role in enhancing teacher professionalism by helping educators gain new knowledge, skills, and methods, and effectively apply them in real classroom settings.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) has conducted in-service teacher training since 1971 to refresh, strengthen, and update teachers' knowledge, skills and practices to be used in their teaching environment. Similarly, the National Center for Educational Development (NCED, 2009) was founded to offer in-service training for teachers. The Centre for Education Human Resource Development (CEHRD) has recently been working on creating policy guidelines, programs, and handbooks for in-service teacher training. Likewise, the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP, 2009) has included a provision to guarantee that all in-service teachers have access to 30 days of TPD training within a five-year period. The policy depicts that in-service teacher training provides various opportunities to make them updated and competent in their profession. However, few teachers seem to apply the skills and knowledge they learned in the training in their actual classroom settings. Is it because of their negative perceptions towards the in-service training? How do teachers perceive in-service teacher training? What prevents teachers from applying their training in the classroom? How does in-service teacher training contribute to their professional growth? What challenges do teachers face in implementing their training in classroom settings? These questions keep haunting us. So, our interest here is to explore the views of secondary level English teachers about the appositeness of in-service teacher training for their professional development.

Literature Review

Here, we have presented the reviews of some theoretical literature to internalize the theoretical concepts about the issue we raised.

Need of in-service teacher training

In-service teacher training aims to improve teachers' skills, knowledge, and practices while fostering positive attitudes toward their profession. It is specifically designed to support teachers' professional growth and strengthen the overall education system. Mahara (2024) noted that in-service teacher training is provided with the expectation that it will prepare teachers to tackle the changing challenges within their institutions. In a similar vein, as mentioned by Johnson and Sloat (2006), it is carried out in five stages: instruction,

information, guided practice, performance, and coding practice. To adapt to changes, improve professional skills, and achieve job satisfaction, teachers require ongoing professional development, with in-service training being one effective approach. In a similar line, Iqbal and Ali (2024) highlighted that the swift shifts in educational paradigms, curriculum updates, and innovative teaching methods pose significant challenges for in-service teachers in addressing the diverse needs of their students. In-service teacher training helps improve teachers' knowledge and understanding of the contents they deal with, practical skills and competencies, learning new teaching strategies and technologies, and strengthening professionalism and ethics (Dhakal, 2016). In addition, In-service teacher training positively impacts students' academic performance as they are engaged in peer, group, and collaboration in their learning process. Thus, in-service teacher training plays a crucial role in teacher development and the effective implementation of curriculum innovations.

Professional development of teachers

Each teacher is expected to engage in professional development throughout their teaching career. The knowledge and skills they get in their college and university education are not enough for them to be skillful and competent in their professionalism. With the pace of time, new teaching ideologies and techniques are emerging in the teaching and learning arena. So, to keep themselves fit and apposite with the current teaching pedagogies, they need to update professionally (Pennington, 1990). Talking about teachers' need for professional development, Underhill (1997) affirmed that professional development involves teachers constantly learning about their practices and discovering and using their potential. In this regard, for Head and Taylor (1997), teacher professional development draws on the teachers' inner resource for change.

Teachers can develop professionally in various ways such as self-reading, taking a new responsibility, collaborative learning, attending conferences, seminars, and workshops, and so on. In the same vein, Richards and Farrell (2010) added that reflection, self-inquiry, self-monitoring, teacher support groups, analyzing critical incidents, and keeping a journal are some strategies for fostering the professional development of teachers because they help teachers develop specific skills and knowledge about the contents and pedagogies. Moreover, teachers are better informed about designing teaching materials, coping with professional problems, writing and publishing journal articles, and making plans for their professional growth.

Besides, teachers can enhance their professional growth by reflecting on and assessing their practices, making adjustments when necessary. In the same context, Wallace (2010) stressed that teachers' self-evaluation and reflection help them be critical towards their self-practice, and eventually, develop them professionally.

Teacher professional development (TPD) in Nepal was introduced by the policy in 1971 (NESP, 1971). As stated by National Education System Plan (NESP), the professional qualifications for teachers consist of training of at least ten months. The National Center for Educational Development (NCED) was founded in 1993 under Nepal's Ministry of Education (MOE) to offer formal professional development opportunities to teachers through in-service training programs. By 2009, NCED had trained 98.2% of permanent teachers in community schools across Nepal (MOE, 2009). More recently, the School Sector Reform Program (SSRP) has introduced a provision for Teachers' Professional Development (TPD), planning to ensure that all in-service teachers receive 30 days of TPD training within a five-year period. The TPD training has also been suggested as a key factor, alongside qualifications, performance, and seniority, for teacher promotions.

The TPD programme comprises three interconnected components: training workshops, self-study exercises, and instructional counseling. Conducted annually, each session lasts 10 days and integrates all three parts. The primary goal of the TPD program is to refresh, enhance, and update teachers' knowledge and skills, leading to noticeable improvements in classroom practices and student learning outcomes. The Ministry of Education (MOE) alone is not sufficient to meet the professional needs of English language teachers in Nepal. To address this gap, international organizations like the Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA) play a significant role in supporting the professional growth of teachers and enhancing the overall English Language Teaching (ELT) landscape in the country. NELTA organizes various professional development activities, including teacher training programs, workshops, seminars, and conferences, among others, to help educators improve their skills and knowledge. Additionally, institutions like the British Council and the US Embassy in Nepal also contribute significantly to the advancement of ELT. Their initiatives and programs are instrumental in improving the quality of English language education and supporting the professional development of English teachers across Nepal.

Issues in teacher training in Nepal

The knowledge and skills that teachers gain from training programmes contribute significantly to their professional growth. These programmes not only enhance their expertise but also expose them to the latest teaching trends and practices being adopted worldwide. As a result, teachers become better equipped to implement innovative methods in their classrooms, stay updated with global advancements in education, and continuously improve their teaching effectiveness. Such training serves as a bridge between traditional approaches and modern educational strategies, ensuring that teachers remain competent and well-informed in an ever-evolving field. They modify their teaching strategies and planning for better performance. At the same time, it is generally accepted that when they perform well, the students will do better in the examinations. However, this comparison appears unconvincing in the context of numerous teacher training programmes, not only in Nepal but also in more developed nations. A study conducted by Jacob and Lefgren (2004) in the US context shows although teacher training is considered important in most school districts, there is surprisingly limited evidence on its impact on student achievement. Likewise, Harris and Sass (2006) carried out a study to find out the effects of various trainings to promote student achievement. The results showed training for teachers has no significant role to play in student achievement.

Teacher training in Nepal reflects a similar scenario when examining its impact on high school student performance. According to the Education and Developmental Service Center (2011), there is no positive correlation between having trained teachers in schools and the success rates of students. Furthermore, the average scores of students taught by trained teachers show no significant difference compared to those taught by untrained teachers. This suggests that teacher training has not influenced students' academic achievements, as it has not resulted in noticeable improvements in their performance.

Application of training skills in the real classroom context is another issue. The knowledge, skills, and practices that teachers acquire during training can sometimes be challenging to implement effectively in their actual classroom environments. This is because of the heterogeneous classroom with social, cultural, economic, and linguistic variations. Moreover, each teacher operates in a unique and diverse classroom environment, where a single set of methods and techniques may not always be universally applicable or effective. One of the reasons could be that the current approaches to teacher training are heavily focused on lectures and confined to classroom settings. (CHIRAG, 1995). In a similar

context, in most of the observed classes, the relevant skills gained during training were not applied in actual classroom teaching (CERID, 2002).

Monitoring and follow-up remain challenges in our teacher training programme, as there is no system in place to assess how trainees perform in schools once the training concludes (NCED, 1998). Shrestha (2004) highlighted issues with the primary teacher training programme, noting that problems began when the Nepalese government shortened the 10-month training programme to just six months. He further argued that political decisions, such as granting permanent tenure to temporary teachers regardless of their qualifications or performance, were another major factor contributing to the decline in school performance across Nepal.

Likewise, inadequate physical facilities, low teacher motivation, the need to seek part-time jobs due to insufficient salaries, and limited preparation time for classes were significant factors contributing to the underperformance of trained teachers. In this regard, a study conducted by NCED (1998) revealed that while the delivery of the training programme appeared satisfactory, the actual implementation of teaching in classrooms was not, highlighting a challenge in effectively transferring training to practice. Mathema and Bista (2006) highlighted in their research that teachers, including head teachers, in remote rural schools often avoid teaching responsibilities. They tend to seek training opportunities as a way to avoid work, leading to increased absenteeism among teachers instead of improving school effectiveness. This indicates a significant lack of motivation among teachers to fully engage with and benefit from the training sessions.

Instead of viewing these programmes as valuable opportunities for professional growth, many teachers perceive them as mere distractions or a way to take a break from their regular teaching responsibilities. This attitude suggests that training is often treated as a routine obligation rather than a meaningful chance to enhance their skills and improve their teaching practices. Consequently, the intended purpose of the training is undermined, and its potential impact is significantly diminished.

A mismatch between training objectives and trainees' needs is another issue. The objectives of training programmes are not tailored to address the specific needs and interests of the trainees. Sometimes, the training duration is reduced by the training providers demotivating the trainees to attend the training programme honestly. In the same line, Thapa (2007) asserted many training components fail to address the actual needs of teachers and the

challenges they encounter in real classroom situations. For instance, strategies for innovative and interactive teaching in large class sizes are often overlooked.

Theoretical framework

It is widely accepted that learning theories offer a foundational framework for training activities (Higgins & Elliott, 2011). However, in the context of teacher training, andragogy, a theory of adult learning, is generally emphasized. Koellner and Greenblatt (2018) argued that there has been a noticeable transition in the way educators are trained, moving away from behaviorist theories of learning and teaching towards more cultural and constructivist approaches. They highlight that this shift reflects a deeper focus on understanding the social and contextual aspects of education. Similarly, Nishimura (2014) emphasizes that traditional methods of professional development have largely failed to produce meaningful or lasting changes in teachers' practices. In recent years, transformative learning theory developed by Jack Mezirow has emerged as a widely accepted model for fostering change in adult learners. This theory frames learning as a deliberate process of deriving insights from personal experiences, enabling teachers to critically evaluate their ideas and refine their practices for continuous improvement (Holliday & Brennan, 2021).

Building on the concept of transformative learning theory, this study views in-service teacher training as more than just a professional requirement. It is seen as a valuable opportunity for teachers to engage in self-reflection, gain new perspectives, and cultivate the ability to initiate meaningful changes within themselves. This theory emphasizes personal growth and transformation as integral parts of the learning process, encouraging educators to rethink their practices and attitudes in ways that lead to lasting improvements.

Methodology

In this qualitative study, we deployed interviews to elicit relevant data as Rossman and Rall (1998) stated, "interviewing is the hallmark of qualitative research" (as cited in Richards, 2003, p.47). For the selection of participants, first, we administered our interview questions to ten secondary level in-service English teachers from different community schools of Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City, Rupandehi district, who attended at least three in-service training for professional development (TPD) conducted by national or international associations such as NELTA. We purposively selected three of them (one teacher from each school) for our study, this was determined based on two criteria: the extent to which they demonstrated a substantial level of understanding about in-service teacher training and their

intention to participate in the study. Their teaching experiences ranged from seven to fifteen years at the secondary level.

We adopted narrative inquiry as our research design. This design focuses on studying the narratives (chronologically connected spoken utterances or written texts of an event/action) of an individual or a small number of individuals. In it, a researcher collects, analyzes, and represents people's life stories as narrated by them (Schwandt, 2007). In our study too, we gathered the narratives of our participants who have received in-service teacher training. The reason for selecting narrative inquiry as our research design is as Mertova and Webster (2020) affirmed that narratives of people help them to make sense of their lives. Furthermore, this method helps us to explore our participants' experiences through their life stories. For this, we took the consent from the participants.

Two rounds of semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the participants' perspectives on the relevance of in-service teacher training. The average duration of the first interview was approximately forty minutes, while the second interview lasted around thirty minutes. The data gathered from the interviews were transcribed, coded and categorized under themes through qualitative techniques. The codes were organized around the objective of the study, and instead of participants' real names, we used pseudonyms, P1, P2, and P3 to ensure the research ethics and the confidentiality of the research participants.

Findings and discussion

Based on the data collected from the participants, we have presented the findings and discussed them under the themes: relevance between the training objectives and the needs of the trainees, application of training in the classroom situation, and the role of in-service teacher training for professional development.

Relevance between training objectives and the needs of the trainees

When we inquired with our participants about the connection between the objectives of the training programs they attended and their actual needs, or whether the training had effectively met their expectations, P1 stated that he had expected a lot to learn from the training sessions for his professional development. However, he felt it was incomplete after the training and learned only limited things he was already familiar with. In a similar context, P2 responded "*teachers were never asked to raise the issues and challenges faced by them in their classroom.*" He further shared his experience in this way,

> *Once, I was invited to attend the TPD training in Education Training Centre, Bhairahawa. But I did not know the details of the training. I only knew the topic of the training. The details and schedules were unfolded after the training started. I never found the training fascinating as it is often one way. I was never asked about my needs before the training.*

Responding to the same question, P3 also had a similar view. She exposed,

> *Trainees come to know about the training objectives when they enter the training hall. During the session, they were never asked to analyze the issues and identify the strategies to address them. Training would be fruitful if trainees' needs were to be considered.*

Considering the views above, the training objectives in the sessions were not created with the trainees' needs in consideration. Trainees were not motivated to come with their classroom problems to discuss them. Rather, trainees did what they were asked to do as mentioned by P2. So, their opinions reveal that though training sessions were interesting, they were not so contextual to address the problems trainees had in their real classroom.

Application of training in the classroom situation

The participants' views on applying the training in a real classroom setting were almost similar. One of the participants affirmed that the training was mostly theoretical. Therefore, the knowledge and skills he learned in the training could hardly be applied in the diverse classroom context. He opined *I did not get any practical tips to deal with the classes where students are from diverse cultures, ethnic groups, languages, and social backgrounds.* When he was asked whether the training had fulfilled his expectations in addressing classroom issues, he reported *the training did not provide me the ideas about how to solve the problems of my classroom situation.* He further stated *the skills and practices I attained in the training can be hardly applied in the real classroom because my classroom comprises students who possess different cultures and linguistic backgrounds. The pedagogies I learned in the training rarely give satisfaction to my students.* Moreover, he shared his story in this way,

> *Once I was using the inductive method to teach passive sentences in class ten. I also used relevant images so that they could have a better understanding. I asked them to generate five passive sentences as shown in my examples. To my great surprise, they could not write a single sentence, rather for their ease, they wanted me to write*

passive structures on the board and explain in Nepali language. I felt ashamed as I could not satisfy them with a new method.

Similarly, expressing her views regarding the same query, P3 revealed,

In-service teacher training is interesting and supportive to update and grow us professionally. However, because of the poor physical facilities, predominated traditional pedagogies of schools, and the variant learning styles of students, I could not apply the knowledge, skills, and strategies I learned in my training sessions to my real classroom situation. Frankly speaking, the primary value lies in the certificate. And, training is neither need-oriented nor ICT-based.

The voice of the participant revealed that teachers are attending training for the sake of certificates and allowances. Full transfer of training is far a cry. And, a minimal transfer of knowledge is a waste of resources and energy. So, it is illogical to think that everything learned in the training is applied in real classroom settings. Almost everything, such as the participants' nature, physical infrastructures, and teaching-learning materials is different from the training hall. As a result, teachers fail to apply what they have learned in the training in their classroom context. The voices of the participants were very similar to Kilag et al. (2023) who stated that technology enhances students' academic performance by facilitating more effective and efficient integration of ICT into the teaching and learning process.

Role of in-service teacher training for professional development

When we asked my participants whether in-service training helped them improve their classroom practices and grow professionally, almost all of them agreed. They opinioned that in-service training increased their knowledge and skills, but remained silent to improve their attitudes and sense of responsibility towards their profession. They reported that most of the trainings were theoretical and content-based and, therefore were difficult to apply in diverse classroom settings. So, they have neither satisfied the students with their innovative teaching trends and practices nor with their academic achievements. One of the participants expressed,

I got opportunities to develop my performance. I learned the ways and techniques about how to motivate the students and make the classroom interesting. In addition, I learned to deal with teaching listening and speaking skills that I often used to ignore since these skills are tested only in their practical examinations. He further asserted *training updates me for my professional practices too.*

When we asked the same question to P2, he opined that *in-service training is necessary for the professional growth of the teachers. Training provides content and pedagogical knowledge to the teachers. Besides, they help teachers become sincere and honest in their profession.* However, trainings are rarely contextual due to which he sometimes fails to address the needs of the students in the classroom. He stated *trainings are good if they are less theoretical and more practical or contextual.* He added that *from the training, I learned different strategies, such as reflecting writing, keeping a journal, teaching a portfolio, self-monitoring, action research, and so on, to develop myself professionally and sustain my profession.*

P3, responding to the same question reported that in-service teacher training conducted over time helps teachers build up their confidence level in their field. Revealing her personal experiences, she mentioned,

> *Before training, I did not know, though I had heard, about team teaching and how to carry out action research and its advantages. But, now I can do all these things confidently. Apart from getting new knowledge, skills, and practices in the teaching and learning arena, I got the sense of developing a culture of cooperation, collaboration, and group discussion among my colleagues.*

Based on the responses of the participants, it can be inferred that most of the sessions in the training are theoretical. Training would be effective if they emphasized the practical aspects and needs of the trainees. As stated by the participants, though trainings help them enhance their pedagogical knowledge, they are less supportive of the teachers to address their classroom issues. Further, the information indicates that participants expressed a desire for more ICT-focused training, specifically in-service training on this topic. Their views were with the line of Hernández, et.al (2018) who highlighted the need to develop pedagogical frameworks that outline the competencies teachers require to adapt to emerging technological trends.

Conclusion

In this 21st century, teaching and learning paradigm has been shifted. Every teacher is expected to be updated and find a way of teaching that is apt as the context demands. In-service teacher trainings help teachers develop their teaching techniques and address everyday classroom problems. Undoubtedly, in-service training has given teachers ground-breaking insights about content and pedagogical knowledge. In this sense, training is important. However, the knowledge, skills, and experiences that teachers attain in the training

hall are not transferred to the real classroom setting. This is because the classroom context is not similar to the context of the training hall. So, receiving training is one thing, but addressing the actual issues in the classroom is a completely different challenge. Based on the findings, I hope this small-scale research will act as a pushing agent for ELT professionals and other stakeholders to rethink in-service and other teacher training and their classroom implications.

Implications

This study is expected to have significant impacts on the field of education. It assists teachers, trainers, policymakers, and training organizations. For teachers, it provides updates and insights into innovative pedagogies and methodologies. Trainers can use the findings to reassess and redesign training programmes and packages based on teachers' voices.

Based on the opinions of teachers, trainers can utilize the results to reevaluate and adapt training curricula and packages. For improved planning, training institutions like the Education Training Centre (ETC) can apply the findings. Policymakers are also urged to update in-service teacher training regulations in light of the findings. Therefore, the main findings promote the ongoing professional development of in-service teachers and, more crucially, help improve education.

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