

Exploring the Factors Influencing the Professional Development of Secondary English Language Teachers

Mohan Singh Saud¹, Krishna Kumari Mahara²

Article History:

Submitted 10 Jan 2024

Reviewed 15 May 2024

Accepted 30 July 2024

Corresponding Author:

Mohan Singh Saud

Email:

mssaud35@gmail.com

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.3126/eltp.v9i1-2.68718>

Copyright information:

Copyright 2024 Author/s and Department of English Education, FoE, P.N. Campus

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution- Non Commercial 4.0 International License



Publisher

Department of English Education
Faculty of Education, P. N. Campus,
Tribhuvan University, Nepal
Email: enged@pncampus.edu.np
URL: www.pncampus.edu.np

Abstract

Professional development for English language teachers is the process of becoming professionally competent in the classroom and keeping up with the most recent advancements in teaching and learning. In this context, this study explores the factors that influence the secondary level English language teachers' professional development. Employing the phenomenological research design, four English language teachers were purposively selected from four community schools of Kailali district. Semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions were used as the tools of data collection. The participants were provided open-ended questions to collect information and later on, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant for supplementary information. The study reveals that for the professional enhancement of teachers, it is essential to provide sufficient time, resources, chances to attend workshops, equal treatment to all staff, collaboration, support, encouragement, incentive and feedback from administration, peers and students. The findings suggest that since professional development is crucial for improving pedagogical skills and keeping up with current educational trends, English language teachers need institutional, financial, social, and psychological supports.

Keywords: Enhancement, teacher educator, collaboration, feedback

Introduction

Professional development for English language teachers is an ongoing process of reflecting, acquiring and updating their knowledge, skills and abilities in order to improve their pedagogical practices. Supported by a professional learning community, it is grounded in research and practice-based evidence (Berry et al., 2007). Professional development is the process by which educators keep up with the skills and knowledge required for efficient professional practice (Hoyle, 1982).

English language teachers' professional development can be enhanced by both formal and informal experiences such as participating in workshops, seminars or professional events under the guidance of a mentor, reading professional magazines or viewing academic documentaries on various topics (Gausser, 2000). English language teachers require participating in different professional development activities in order to make themselves more advanced and updated (Lunenberg et al., 2007; Smith, 2003). Teachers' professional development is possible by examining their own teaching systematically and by gaining experience (Glatthorn, 1995).

Teachers must participate in in-depth reflection that entails examination and explanation of their own views, values and mission in order to support their professional development (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Loughran 2014; Loughran & Hamilton, 2016). Smith (2017) reveals that individual motivation and needs are the primary factors enhancing professional development. However, the main obstacle to taking part in professional development programmes is a lack of time and workload (Czerniawski et al., 2017). In this regard, Sprott (2019) explicates the necessity for educational institutions to offer unique developmental chances and frameworks in order to fulfill the various requirements of educators.

For teachers' professional development, it is necessary to conduct different types of training and sharing programmes. Although education policy of the government envisions training each teacher through various professional development programmes and recent pedagogical trends to enhance the student's knowledge and learning outcome, the majority of the teachers are still lacking such programmes that help develop teacher's professionalism in regular basis. Research studies are insufficient to investigate the factors causing issues with a teacher's professional development in the context of Nepal. Furthermore, there are even fewer of these studies in the fields of professional development and teacher education in Kailali district. Therefore, this study explores the factors that influence the effective implementation of the secondary level English language teachers' professional development in the community schools in Kailali district.

Review of Literature

There are various ways such as reviewing theories, principles and previous studies of conceptualizing teacher professional development. However, this study basically reviews some relevant previous studies to conceptualize teacher professional development. Teacher professional development is comprehensive than staff development (Glatthorn, 1995). Zepeda (2013) explicates that professional learning is independent and can be enhanced with the help of strong willpower, initiative, and self-motivation. According to Setiawan and Kuswandono (2020), teachers' professional development programmes can adopt a variety of strategies which can be cooperative, supportive, job-embedded, instructionally focused and ongoing. According to this strategy, teachers' pedagogy is more likely to advance the more professional development they participate in.

For the professional growth of a teacher, self-initiation or self-motivation is essential. Sprott (2019) argues that for professional development of teachers, self-initiation is more effective than being guided by other people. The ability to reflect on and evaluate oneself in a way that allows for correction is improved via self-directed professional growth. The teachers can improve their self-reflection with more influence over their professional experiences and motivation from significant tasks or issues. In order to enhance students' competencies, knowledge, abilities, and attitudes, vocational teachers

can organize, execute, and evaluate their activities (Djatkiko, 2011). Lunenberg et al. (2007) reveal that teacher educators might lack the skills, emotional strength, and knowledge needed to accept the emotional risk of being exposed in front of their students. The teachers should be self-directed for their professional development to enhance the student learning. As Husby (2005) opines, as a part of their reflection, instructors who self-direct their professional development work together to diagnose the state of other teachers. Teachers who self-manage their professional development are better able to pinpoint their own areas for growth and then direct their own development. According to Torres et al. (2009), the essential skill for both short- and long-term academic success in teaching and learning is self-directed learning. Professional development for self-directed learning includes a number of initiatives, strategies and methods. Furthermore, Djatkiko (2011) mentions three elements as necessary to manage self-directed professional development: “independence to choose goals, support in the form of human and non-human resources to achieve goals, and personal competence required to achieve goals” (p.4). Similarly, Blumbers and Michael (2009) claim that an expert can learn on their own by developing specialized abilities, realizing the need for new information, setting learning objectives, outlining acceptable learning questions, investigating pertinent information, and delving deeper into the opposing viewpoint. Since teaching practices enhance student learning and other aspects of professional development, they ought to be the primary focus of self-directed professional development (Lopes & Cunha, 2017). In a similar vein, Joshi et al. (2018) reveal that the best resources for EFL teachers in Nepal are peer support, self-monitoring workshops, and classroom experiences.

Professional development is an ongoing process and essential for learners’ enhancement. Though everyone knows the importance of professional development of a teacher, there are some factors that are hindering the professional growth of a teacher directly or indirectly. In this regard, Sprott (2019) reveals structural barrier to collaboration and hierarchical mandates as the main hindrances to their professional development. Furthermore, he explains that working with students as collaborators in their professional development, travelling as educators, learning from scholars who challenged their preconceptions, establishing solid and long-lasting professional relationships, and pursuing careers outside of teaching are all ways that teachers can broaden their experience or keep themselves up to date.

The challenges like a lack of common planning time as a barrier to solve the problem cooperatively reduce their capacity to respond to meet the needs of their students. Such structural barriers to collaboration are frequently criticized as having a negative impact on teachers’ professional development (Boston Consulting Group, 2014). Similarly, Abdal-Haqq (1996) reveals that a lack of time is the largest barrier to implement the teachers’ professional development effectively. Therefore, teachers must set adequate time to incorporate professional development into their daily responsibilities (Bush, 1999). Despite having a wide range of complex tasks, teacher educators receive minimal professional development chances or preparation for their jobs.

This brief review of literature shows that teacher professional development is a broad concept that covers all sorts of education programmes, trainings and strategies for the all-round development of a teacher. The literature also shows that there are several challenges in effective implementation of teacher professional development programmes in different contexts. Nevertheless, research on the professional development of Nepali teachers is insufficient to investigate the root causes of problems.

Thus, this study proves to be significant to explore the factors influencing the secondary level English language teachers' professional development.

Methodology

This research study employs a phenomenological design. This design involves a deep diving into the lived experiences of individuals about a specific phenomenon, aiming to understand the essence of the experience. Therefore, this research design is quite suitable to explore the factors affecting the English language teachers' professional development.

As the participants, we selected four English language teachers from four community schools from Kailali district. The participants were selected purposively from Dhangadhi secondary school, Attariya secondary school, Phulbaari secondary school and Malakheti secondary school (pseudo names for ethical consideration)

As a tool for data collection, open-ended questions were distributed to the participants with prior information. After the responses to open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews (for 10-15 minute each) were conducted with each participant for supplementary information. The interviews conducted in English were recorded and transcribed. We applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic framework for analyzing the data. After the analysis, we generated into four themes: institutional factors, financial factors, social factors and psychological factors. To maintain the ethical consideration of the study, the participants are coded as T1, T2, T3, and T4 instead of their real names. The names of the schools from which the participants were selected is also not disclosed.

Results

The results of this study are based on four themes developed from the analysis of the data. The following section discusses these themes namely institutional factors, financial factors, social factors and psychological factors.

Institutional Factors

Institutions where the teachers work can be the barriers in their professional development. The participants argued that professional development activities conducted sometime in school are valuable in enhancing professional skills but they mentioned that such activities are not conducted in their schools. Professional development activities are essential and beneficial because they give them chances to improve their teaching abilities updating with recent educational trends. The support and encouragement of the institution is essential for all-round professional development of a teacher.

The positive influence or negative influence on teachers depends on the support of any institution. The support of any institution provides positive influence in professional development of a teacher. The development of learners depends on the development of a teacher. Therefore, the teachers need to get chance to attend the workshops, seminars, trainings during working hours too. The participants viewed that the support of the institution has positive impact on them. The institution should support teachers to improve the teaching strategy and learning environment. Most of the institutions have no constraints on participation in various workshops, seminars, refreshment training and conferences.

The administration should treat equally and address the need of each individual in the institution for the development of the students. Regarding this, T1 and T2 said that administration do not treat equally and address their need as an individual. T3 expressed:

T3: The administration is somewhat involved in addressing individual needs. However, there is room for improvement in ensuring fair treatment and support for all teachers' professional growth.

The response of T3 reflects that administration addresses the need of every individual to some extent. However, all teachers need to receive equal treatment and support for their professional development. It is essential to address the need of each individual for the professional development of the teacher.

Financial Factors

Time and resources play a vital role in professional development of a teacher. Without sufficient time and resources, required goal cannot be achieved. Regarding the barriers (like time and resources) they have faced while participating in professional development programme, the participants viewed:

T1: Yes. Time, resource and lack of interest from school management and head sir.

T2: I did not get sufficient resources and time.

T3: One of the main barriers I have faced in participating in professional development programmes is the lack of time. As teachers, we have a busy schedule with classes, grading, and other responsibilities, making it challenging to find time for additional training. Limited availability of relevant resources and funding for such programmes is another hindrance.

T4: Both time and resources sometimes are barriers to attend such programme

All the participants agreed that lack of sufficient time and resources are the main barriers they face while participating in professional development programmes. T1 said that he has the barriers like time, resource and lack of interest from school management and administration. Both T2 and T4 reflect that insufficient time and resources are the barriers to attend such programmes. Similarly, T3 explicates that lack of time, insufficient funding and availability of necessary resources for such programmes are the main barriers to attend teacher professional development. Finding time for additional training can be difficult for teachers because of their hectic schedules with regular classes, grading and other responsibilities.

The participants viewed the professional development programmes as a component of professional development of a teacher, not associated with additional pay. Even though they attended such training outside regular working hours, they are not paid for that. However, sometimes they typically earn some compensation as a reward.

Regarding a salary supplement for undertaking the professional development activities that took place outside regular working hours, T2 said that he did not receive any kind of supplement. It is essential to provide some incentive to motivate the teacher for their professional development. T1 and T2 expresses that they received some incentives for attending professional development training but they did not mention the type of incentives they received. Similarly, T3 reflected that he had received some incentives for attending programmes such as small financial rewards, recognition certificates for participating in workshops and educational events. These kinds of incentives motivate teachers to improve teaching skills of a teacher. The rewards encourage teachers positively and show that they are making an effort to become better teachers.

Social Factors

Professional development of a teacher is impossible without feedback from supervisors, peers,

or students. The professional development of a teacher can be enhanced with the help of feedback. Regarding the role of feedback, all the participants viewed that it motivate and encourages the teachers for their better performance thereby enhancing teaching strategies in the classroom.

After attending the training, as the participants expressed, they implement the innovative strategies in the classroom, and share the strategies and knowledge with the colleagues that they received from the training. However, they rarely get feedback from the staff. More frequent and timely feedback would be helpful to make correction and improvement in their innovative strategies but the teachers from their staff rarely receive feedback. T1 and T4 mentioned that they receive the feedback sometime. However, T2 mentioned that he rarely gets feedback about the work. Similarly, T3 reflects that he receives feedback occasionally after observations or during staff meetings. He further added that more frequent and timely feedback would be beneficial for self-improvement.

Teachers can learn in a better way by collaborating with each other. Collaboration with other teachers has significant impact on professional growth of a teacher. Regarding collaboration, T1 revealed that they were not interested in learning. Similarly, T4 viewed that his staff are always supportive but some of them are not interested in learning from their peers. T1 further revealed said that neither they have changed behaviour towards him nor they were interested to learn anything from him.

All the participants had learned many important things through professional development programmes. T1 claimed that he learned to share knowledge and these kinds of professional development programmes made him more confident. Similarly, T2 reflected that he became updated with recent pedagogical practices and learned to solve the problems related to teaching learning processes. T3 mentioned that he learned the use of technology to create interactive learning experiences from professional development programmes. T4 explicated that he had learned innovative teaching and learning strategies for teaching writing skill.

Professional development makes the teachers updated with pedagogical practices. All the teachers learned innovative teaching and learning strategies, the use of technology to create interactive learning experiences, and how to solve issues related to the teaching and learning activities. Such activities enhance the students' learning and make the classroom more engaging and effective.

Psychological Factors

Professional development does not only mean the enhancement of a teacher, it is enhancement of students as well. If teachers are updated with recent pedagogical practices through professional development programmes, it has positive impact upon students. Implementing new instructional strategies and incorporating innovative approaches in the classroom enhanced student engagement and learning outcomes.

Regarding the impact of professional development, all the participants mentioned that it has positive impact on students and the responses from students were encouraging.

As the participants reflected, practising new strategies in classroom is always beneficial. This encourages students to participate more actively and with greater enthusiasm in the lessons and classroom activity. Participant T1 reflected that he had used new teaching strategy, i.e., integrate ICT in classroom. After using that strategy, students and staff were influenced positively by his work. Participant T2 mentioned that he had used new strategy and told that staff and student showed

positive responses to him. T3 stated that the use of new instructional strategies after the training made the students encouraging. Moreover, he mentioned that after experimenting new strategies in the classroom, student showed increased interest and active participation in the lessons. Other teachers also appreciated the positive changes they observed in the classroom.

The participants viewed that attending professional development training changed their attitudes and beliefs about teaching and learning. They felt empowered with new knowledge and confidence in their teaching abilities, which translated into a more effective and student-centered approach. They experienced a higher level of job satisfaction after receiving professional development training. Similarly, after using new teaching learning strategies in the classroom, the learning outcome of the students increased. This outcome provides high level of job satisfaction to them. As such, professional development of a teacher is essential for the holistic development of a student and learning outcome.

Discussion

The findings of this study reflect the factors that hinder professional development of a teacher. Regarding this, all the participants viewed financial problem, politics, halo effect, insufficient time, lack of incentives, school leadership, government policy and lack of communication as the barriers to their professional development. Structural barrier for collaboration and the lack of available professional development programmes in the local areas prevent the teachers from participating in such opportunities. Moreover, the context specific programmes hinder the professional development of teachers.

Similar hindering factors are also experienced in other contexts. Abdal-Haqq's (1996) study showed that financial problem, politics, halo effect, insufficient time are factors that hinder professional development. Pedemonte (2016) argued that the programmes which are effective in one place may not be effective or less effective in another place and as such this is also a factor which hampers professional development of a teacher. Similarly, time constraints and structural barrier for collaboration as found by Sparta (2019) and Boston Consulting Group (2014) are other barriers to teachers' professional development.

Feedback is essential to motivate people and to make improvement in their weakness. But as the participants viewed, they are rarely getting feedback from their colleagues and as such, it also discourages them for better performance applying the skills they have learned from training programmes. Teachers are happy with the feedback they receive from their staff because it helps them to make improvement in their teaching learning activities. This leads towards better learning outcome. Some studies have highlighted the importance of feedback to enhance professional development of teachers (Henderson et al., 2005; Voerman et al., 2015; Van den Bergh et al., 2014). Feedback and comments are valuable in shaping teaching and making teaching learning fruitful. However, as the participants experienced, they are not getting such feedback.

Teachers need to update themselves time to time for effective teaching and apply innovative strategies in teaching. For this, they should get opportunities to attend different workshops, seminars, conferences and other training programmes. They can improve themselves only if the schools where they work provide them opportunities. Schools themselves need to conduct some professional development programmes because such programmes are occasionally conducted by some other agencies. The study by Zein (2016) also found the inadequacy of professional development.

Similarly, Derakhshan et al.'s (2020) study realized the needs of continuing professional development. If concerned schools organize such programmes time to time, all teachers can get chances to update themselves in their own areas.

Collaboration plays a significant role to enhance the professional development of a teacher. Therefore, it is necessary that teachers should work collaboratively even if they do not attend professional development programmes conducted by some other bodies. The importance of collaboration is also shown by various studies (Adhikari, 2010; Alfaki, 2014; Banegas et al., 2013; Kabilan et al., 2011). Therefore, realizing the role of collaboration, teachers need to involve in collaborative work and the schools also encourage the teachers to work collaboratively. Further incentive can be provided by the institution to encourage the teachers for collaboration for their professional development.

Conclusion and Implications

This study explored the factors that influence the professional development of secondary level English language teachers of government-aided school in Kailali district. The study highlighted the facing institutional, financial, social and psychological barriers hindering the ability of teachers to pursue professional development. The study reveals that even though the institution has positive attitude towards professional development of a teacher, they are unable to provide sufficient chances to attend workshops, sufficient resources, feedback, support, salary supplement, incentives, motivation and encouragement to English language teachers.

The results of this small-scale study, which only included four English teachers teaching at secondary level in community school in Kailali district, may not be generalizable. However, the findings of the study can have wide range of implications. The study can be useful to make further investigation for the researchers who want to work on issues related to professional development of a teacher. Similarly, the study can be useful for the administration and English teachers who want to make improvement in professional growth of a teacher. Additionally, this could be beneficial for the relevant authorities who wish to enhance teacher professional development initiatives. Furthermore, it can be important for language planners and policy makers who require up-to-date knowledge on the topics covered in policies in order to conduct additional research and enhance professional development initiatives.

References

- Abdal-Haqq, I. (1996). Making time for teacher professional development. *ERIC Digest*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education.
- Adhikari, K. (2010). *Collaborative learning for teachers' professional development* [Doctoral dissertation]. Department of English Education, Tribhuvan University.
- Alfaki, I. M. (2014). Professional development in English language teaching: A teachers' view. *British Journal of Education*, 2(7), 32-49.
- Banegas, D., Pavese, A., Velázquez, A., & Vélez, S. M. (2013). Teacher professional development through collaborative action research: Impact on foreign English-language teaching and learning. *Educational Action Research*, 21(2), 185-201.
- Berry, A., Clemans, A., & Kostogritz, S. (eds.) (2007). Dimensions of professional learning: identities, professionalism and practice. *Dordrecht*. Sense Publishers.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in*

Psychology, 3(2), 77-101.

- Bush, W.S. (1999). Not for sale: why a bankroll alone cannot change teaching practice. *Journal of Staff Development*, 20(3), 61-64.
- Czerniawski, G., Guberman, A., & MacPhail, A. (2017). The professional developmental needs of higher education-based teacher educators: an international comparative needs analysis. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40 (1), 127–140.
- Derakhshan, A., Coombe, C., Zhaleh, K., & Tabatabaieian, M. (2020). Examining the Roles of Continuing Professional Development Needs and Views of Research in English Language Teachers' Success. *TELS-EJ*, 24(3), n3.
- Djarmiko, I. W. (2011). *Self-directed professional development approach: An alternative to enhance vocational teachers' character* [Conference paper presentation]. International Seminar on Vocational Education and Training at Saphir Hotel, Yogyakarta on July 9th, 2011. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228843043>
- Ganser, T. (2000). An ambitious vision of professional development for teachers. *NASSP BULLETIN*, 84(618), 6-12.
- Glatthorn, A. (1995). Teacher development. In L. Anderson (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of teaching and teacher education* (p. 41). Pergamon Press.
- Henderson, P., Ferguson-Smith, A. C., & Johnson, M. H. (2005). Developing essential professional skills: a framework for teaching and learning about feedback. *BMC Medical Education*, 5, 1-6.
- Hoyle, E. (1982). The professionalization of teachers: A paradox. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 30(2), 161-171.
- Jamil, H., Razak, N. A., Raju, R., & Mohamed, A. R. (2011, March). Teacher professional development in Malaysia: Issues and challenges. In *Africa-Asia university dialogue for educational development report of the International Experience Sharing Seminar: Actual status and issues of teacher professional development* (pp. 85-102).
- Joshi, D. K., Gnawali, L., & Dixon, M. (2008). Experience of professional development strategies: Context of Nepalese EFL teachers. *Pakistan Journal of Education*, 35(2), 53-78.
- Kabilan, M. K., Adlina, W. F. W., & Embi, M. A. (2011). Online collaboration of English language teachers for meaningful professional development experiences. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 10(4), 94-115.
- Korthagen, F., & Vasalos, A. (2005). Levels in reflection: core reflection as a means to enhance professional growth. *Teachers and Teaching*, 11 (1), 47–71.
- Loughran, J. (2014). Professionally developing as a teacher educator. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 65 (4), 271–283.
- Loughran, J., & Hamilton, M.L. (2016). Developing an understanding of teacher education. In J. Loughran and M. L. Hamilton, eds.), *International handbook of teacher education* (Vol. 1, Ch. 1). Springer, 2–22.
- Lunenberg, M., Korthagen, F., & Swennen, A. (2007). The teacher educator as a role model. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23, 586–601.
- Murray, J., & Male, T. (2005). Becoming a teacher educator: evidence from the field. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21 (2), 125–142.

- Pedemonte, F. (2016). *High-quality teacher professional development and classroom teaching practices: Evidence from TALIS 2013*. OECD.
- Richards, J., & Farrell, T. (2005). *Professional development for language teachers*. Cambridge University Press.
- Setiawan, W. A., & Kuswandono, P. (2020). Review of teacher's professional development research studies in South East Asia. *International Journal of Pedagogy and Teacher Education*, 4, 19–32.
- Smith, K. (2003). So, what about the professional development of teacher educators? *European journal of teacher education*, 26(2), 201-215.
- Smith, K. (2017). Learning from the past to shape the future. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40 (5), 630– 646.
- Sprott, R.A. (2019). Factors that foster and deter advanced teachers' professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 77, 321-331
- Torres, P. E., Whitebread, D., & McLellan, R. (2018). The role of teacher regulatory talk in students' self-regulation development across cultures. In V. Grau and D. Whitebread (Eds.), *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* (1-26).
- Van den Bergh, L., Ros, A., & Beijaard, D. (2014). Improving teacher feedback during active learning: Effects of a professional development program. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(4), 772-809.
- Voerman, L., Meijer, P. C., Korthagen, F., & Simons, R. J. (2015). Promoting effective teacher-feedback: From theory to practice through a multiple component trajectory for professional development. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(8), 990-1009.
- Zein, S. (2016). Factors affecting the professional development of elementary English teachers. *Professional Development in Education*, 42(3), 423-440.
- Zepeda, S. J. (2013). *Professional development: What works* (2nd ed.) Routledge.

¹**Mohan Singh Saud** is an Associate Professor of English Language Education at Kailali Multiple Campus, Far Western University, Nepal. He is the visiting faculty at Chandigarh University, India. His areas of interests in research include English language teaching and learning, ELT material development, teachers' professional development, English medium instruction, assessment, English language teachers' training and education, linguistic diversity and globalization.

²**Krishna Kumari Mahara** is an MPhil leading to PhD candidate in TESOL at Far Western University, Nepal. She is a secondary level English language teacher at Sudurpashchim Secondary School, Attariya, Kailali, Nepal. Her areas of interests in research include teachers' professional development, teaching English and language assessment.