Research Article

"My productive life is gone with this job": Constructing the Professional Identity among Part-Time University Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the professional identities of part-time teachers working within Tribhuvan University, focusing on their personal narratives and lived experiences. I use the narrative inquiry method for data collection. I conducted in-depth interviews with the three part-time teachers under the Faculty of Education at Prithvi Narayan Campus, Tribhuvan University, Pokhara. In addition to the narrative interview, I have also used the narrative memos based on the fieldnotes and informal conversations as supplementary sources of information. A reflexive thematic analysis is used to analyze the data. This study concludes that the professional identities of part-time teachers are multifaceted, dynamic, and contextual, particularly within the context of precarious work. The professional identities of university teachers are shaped by the institutional policy of the university and other situations, such as limited job opportunities in the country. The study identifies four major identities of part-time teachers, which include: *the resilient identity* shapes through ongoing negotiation demonstrating it as a dynamic and lifelong process between their present struggles and future aspirations; *the marginal identity* that marginalize them relies on the tension between teachers' personal values and institutional structures; *the adaptive identity* shapes through the negotiation as their survival strategy for being university teachers between their future aspirations, and institutional policies that teachers use; and *the fragmented identity* disjunctions between their aspirations for professional upliftment in university teaching and the reality of an unstable work environment created by limited recognition, job insecurity, and a lack of stability. These

four identities do not follow a linear path; instead, they evolve, shape, and reshape over time and across different places.

KEYWORDS: Professional identities, part-time teachers, higher education, university teaching

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the professional identity of university teachers, particularly those in teacher education, is a crucial aspect of the teaching profession. As professional identity is "central to the teaching profession" (van Lankveld et al., 2017, p. 325). It is an ongoing, dynamic, and complex phenomenon that is critical to enhancing the professional development of teacher educators. Professional identity is conceived as "how teachers see themselves as teachers and how others see them as teachers" (Barkhuizen, 2023, p. 8). The professional identity of university teachers not only helps them be recognized as university teachers but also influences their professional journey and self-esteem. While Part-Time Teachers (PTTs) are at the lowest rank of the Tribhuvan University (TU) teacher management system, they struggle to maintain their distinct professional identity compared to permanent and contract teachers. Understanding PTTs' identities not only provides the basis for assessing their roles and teaching performance but also demands a framework for reforming TU's teacher education program. However, the teacher preparation program in Nepal is often criticized as inadequate (Bista, 2025, June 19), theory-driven (Gautam, 2016), and poorly aligned with the marked demand, as graduates lack adequate competencies (Poudel, 2022). Like earlier studies (Bista, 2002; Faculty of Education, 1998), which have raised similar concerns closely related to the identity construction of teacher educators.

As the professional identity continually evolves and changes, the PTTs have struggled to develop their identity as university teachers in Nepal. Developing professional identities is a crucial component of a teacher education program, which provides them with a framework on "how to be, how to act, and how to understand the job and their place in society (Martínez-de-la-Hidalga & Villardón-Gallego, 2019, p. 2)." The lived experiences of PTTs help to explore how they position themselves as university teachers. University teachers', particularly the teacher educators,' identity is shaped by the context in which they work, with the working conditions and the incentives offered by an institution significantly influencing their role as teacher educators. Part-time teachers' work at TU is similar to that of a daily wage employee (Tribhuvan University, 1994, 2021) and lacks job security. Working under the pressure of job uncertainty could shape their weaker identity, as professional identities are constructed within the working context of an institution (Hong et al., 2024). Working as daily wage teachers, the PTTs lack several government or institutional benefits and gratuities (Gaihre et al., 2022). In addition, they are working in a 'precarious condition' (Rana, 2022), which is often blamed for exploitation. Working under such conditions can influence PTTs' motivation and negatively affect their professional and personal lives. Similarly, the management of PTTs is a critical issue of efficient TU functioning, which has remained an unresolved problem due to the inconsistent teacher management policy of TU.

The professional identities of school teachers and their associated issues have been broadly discussed in the literature (Hong & Cross Francis, 2020; Li, 2020; Martínez-de-la-Hidalga & Villardón-Gallego, 2019; Olsen et al., 2023); however, little has been explored regarding university teachers (Kaasila et al., 2025). Studying the professional identities of university teachers is receiving growing attention, particularly in the field of teacher education (Olsen et

al., 2023; van Lankveld et al., 2017). In the global context, there is a notable lack of literature addressing the issue in the context of Nepal (Paudel, 2019; Phyak & Baral, 2019; Subedi, 2023). As the professional identities of PTTs remain unexplored, this study aims to explore their identities by capturing the stories and experiences they have during their professional journey at TU as teacher educators. Notably, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

How is the professional identity of part-time university teacher educators shaped in the university context?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional identity is an integral component of teacher education programs, and it cannot be ignored when studying teachers' lives and their identity construction in the university context. The professional identities of teacher educators, which have gained significant attention in recent decades (Barkhuizen, 2023; Beijaard et al., 2023; Hong et al., 2024), are a crucial construct in teacher preparation programs. In the higher education context, the professional identity of university teachers is an 'ongoing, dynamic, and negotiated process' (Hong et al., 2024). Similarly, it is considered a dynamic and multifaceted process of shaping the identity of teacher educators in a university context (Flores, 2020; Yuan & Lee, 2016). The multifaceted identity development process is influenced by teacher preparation, in which teacher educators play a crucial role (Kessler, 2021). As such, Kessler (2021) states that the pedagogical training enhanced their teaching competencies for adopting the student-centered approach, which shapes teacher identity. A professional identity helps teacher educators understand who they are as teacher educators and who they aspire to be in the future. For instance, van Lankveld et al. (2017) report that university teacher identity proceeds through five processes,

which include "a sense of appreciation, connectedness, competence, commitment, and imagining a future career trajectory" (p. 325). Similarly, in a comparative study of Chinese and Dutch teacher educators, Ping et al. (2020) concluded that teacher educators need to recognize and practice the aspects (i.e., content, reason, and activity) of professional learning.

As the professional competence of teacher educators is closely related to their identity development, teachers are the "key agents" (Buchanan & Olsen, 2018) for facilitating students' learning. In supporting their students' learning, teacher educators play a crucial role in selecting effective pedagogical strategies and assessment techniques. A number of literature (Kaasila et al., 2025; Kessler, 2021; Tavakol & Tavakoli, 2022) suggest that teacher professional identity has a strong influence on the teaching behaviors and competence of teacher educators in preparing prospective teachers within teacher education programs. For instance, Izadinia (2013) notes, "there is a close connection between identity and practice and how teachers teach is in direct dialogue with who they are" (p.706). Therefore, teacher education needs to pay serious attention to the role of teachers and the pedagogical strategies employed by teacher educators in teaching their prospective future teachers (Sachs, 2005). Similarly, construction and reconstruction, which is contributed by pedagogical approach and the sociocultural context of the teacher education program, is a "dynamic phenomenon, and the student teachers shaped and reshaped their identities during the teacher education program" (Gholami et al., 2021, p. 14).

The social and cultural context of teacher education programs has a significant impact on teacher preparation and the quality of students who complete the program. In a similar vein, Flores (2020) argued that the social, cultural, and economic context affects the shaping and

reshaping of a teacher's professional identity and supports a teacher's professional learning. Moreover, professional identity has a powerful influence on faculty career choices, motivation, and productivity, and they often struggle with constructing their identity. Considering the importance of the contextual setting in preparing teachers under the teacher education program, it is essential to pay serious attention to the sociocultural context. In addition, the professional identity of a teacher is a negotiated phenomenon that "negotiations occur during teachers' day-to-day activities, which are embedded in and influenced by various social-cultural-historical contexts. These negotiating or regulating processes are integral to teachers' identity development" (Hong et al., 2024, p. 5). Given that teacher identity is shaped through a process of negotiation, it occurs from both teacher experiences and institutional context (Yuan & Lee, 2016). As a result, teachers form multiple identities (Zhai et al., 2024).

The professional identity of a university is not a static process; instead, it is a changing and intersubjective process that is constantly being (re)interpreted (Rodrigues & Mogarro, 2019) within a particular working context. Professional identity influences the sense-making and contexts" (Hong et al., 2024). As PTTs are working under precarious conditions of uncertainty about their jobs (Rana, 2022), their identities are changing, which is influenced by the 'working and wider context' (van Lankveld et al., 2017) of the teacher education program at TU.

A study by Kaasila et al. (2025) on Finnish teachers using a narrative inquiry approach reports that university teachers possess multiple identities, which can be fragmented and complex. Likewise, Karlsson (2020) argued that the narrative identity of student tutors in the Swedish context highlights the important role that time and space play in shaping teacher identity. (Karlsson, 2020, p. 14). Similarly, a study

by van Lankveld et al. (2017) indicates that teacher professional identity "can be seen as both an understanding and as a presentation of oneself, shaped and reshaped in constant dialogue between a person and their social environment" (p. 125). Furthermore, they conceptualize teacher identity as the interaction between the teacher's features and relational phenomena. A strong sense of teacher identity motivates them to pursue the teaching profession, accompanied by a sense of enjoyment. As such, several studies report that complexities exist in teacher identity, and studying them is a focused area (Jones & Kessler, 2020; Li, 2020; Tsui, 2007; Yazan, 2019). In her narrative inquiry study on how language teachers shape their teacher identity, Li (2020) argued that there is "a dynamic and intricate relationship among teacher emotions, beliefs, and identities" (p.15). Moreover, she illustrates that teachers negotiate their professional selves through their beliefs, emotions, and interactions with the social context. Similarly, the study by Jones and Kessler (2020) also found that teachers' emotions are closely linked to their identities. According to Leigh (2019), teachers construct multiple identities and capture the sense of being a teacher from identity constructions that shape engagement, motivation, and performance, improving teaching quality.

In summary, the above review suggests that professional identities of university teachers are an intersubjective, ongoing, and negotiated process. The social context of higher education, institutional working context, and university policies influence it. Several studies have discussed the professional identities of teacher educators; however, there is a paucity of knowledge concerning the construction of professional identities among part-time university teachers, both in global and Nepali higher education contexts. Therefore, this study aims to fulfil this research gap.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical lens for this study is the "Professional Identity" theory by Beijaard et al. (2004), which examines the construction of professional identity, a concept that can be explored through teachers' daily work or their experiences. In addition, it focuses on exploring 'Who am I at this moment? 'and 'Who do I want to become? (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 122). In addition, they argued that a teacher professional identity is an ongoing process that involves both the person and the context, contains sub-identities, and agency plays a significant role as well. As this theory clearly states, the teacher professional identity is never static; instead, it changes over time, influenced by the institution's working environment and the local context in which the teacher operates. While professional identity is a changing and ongoing process, a teacher shapes their multiple identities or is shaped by contextual factors into several sub-identities. Such a notion helps me identify how PTT's professional identity is changing and how their multiple identities are shaped over the time of their university teaching. This study considers professional identities as (re)presentation of teachers' stories (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 120). As teachers navigate multiple experiences throughout their professional lives, these experiences shape sub-identities that can be discerned through the presentation and representation of teachers' stories and experiences. Such a notion helps me identify the professional identities of PTTs within their workplace environment.

RESEARCH METHODS

I explored the phenomenon of PTTs' professional identities by capturing their stories, employing a narrative inquiry research design. In recent years, narrative inquiry has become a popular approach to studying the lives and professional identities of teachers and teacher educators (Hong et al., 2024). Moreover, narrative inquiry studies the complex phenomenon by exploring the participants' stories (Clandinin, 2016) to unpack the complexity of the professional identities of teacher educators. Particularly, narrative inquiry focuses on how teachers view themselves as they share their stories of experiences about teaching, exploring teacher professional identity (Søreide, 2006). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explored and flourished the narrative inquiry as a new philosophical and methodological approach (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

I have purposively selected three PTTs (i.e., Prabhat, Bibek, and Swikrit, all pseudonyms) who are currently working as part-time faculty members under the Faculty of Education in PNC, as the narrative inquiry methodology allows me to study with a small number of participants (Barkhuizen, 2014; Subedi, 2021). To identify the rich informant participants, I consulted with the HOD of four departments, namely Education, Nepali, Health Education, English Education, and Science Education Departments, under the faculty of education at PNC, and prepared the list of possible participants. I have found that twenty-two part-time teachers are currently working in these four departments. To select the three participants from among twenty-two, I established a selection criterion that required at least five years of teaching experience in B.Ed. and M.Ed. without interruption under the faculty of education, as well as experience as a part-time teacher at PNC. Finally, after reviewing the details, I shortlisted six participants. After meeting with them, I finally identified the three PTTs I had chosen as participants for this study.

The data source for this study is the PTTs' stories of their experiences of their journey as teacher educators. As a good relationship with the participants is necessary to obtain rich data, I have built such a relationship through prolonged engagement with them. Such a prolonged field engagement proved helpful in obtaining the required

information from them. I am cautious and understand that qualitative fieldwork requires careful planning and that the researcher must spend considerable time in the field (Subedi, 2024a). The tool for this was in-depth interviews. Additionally, I have utilized the field notes, narrative memo, and informal conversations. As the participants were familiar with me and my previous background as a part-time teacher at the PNC, it helped me establish rapport with them easily. Therefore, I did not need to put extra effort into preparing them to participate in my study. I began the conversation by clarifying that my earlier role as a part-time teacher-educator at PNC was the motivation for conducting this study. Sharing my previous status facilitated the data collection and helped me present myself as an insider (Thwaites, 2017) with them.

After obtaining informed consent, I performed two formal in-depth interviews with each participant separately, meeting in person. For the interview, I used the interview protocol to conduct an in-depth interview; however, I was aware of the unintended influence of power relations from my permanent position (Subedi & Gaulee, 2023). I was aware and cautious that a structured and pre-planned approach, such as fixed interview protocols, may not be suitable for capturing the rich information from participants (Hong & Cross Francis, 2020). Therefore, considering the interview protocol as a medium for administering the interview, I used open-ended questions followed by probing questions, depending on the interview context (Roulston, 2019; Wells, 2011). As widely used in qualitative research, I found that the probing questions supported my prolonged engagement with the participants (Hong & Cross Francis, 2020). I recorded the interview in a voice recorder. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 80 minutes. The interview was conducted during May, June, and July 2024. As the formal interview was conducted in a formal setting, I was always cautious in

listening carefully and refraining from interrupting, as Clandinin (2016) suggests.

I had three informal conversations with them, either meeting in person or using social media tools, particularly Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. Several types of literature (Lobe et al., 2020; Rice, 2023) suggest using virtual environments to build relationships and collect data remotely.

Engaging in informal conversations with participants is an effective strategy for building trust (Swain & King, 2022). Being a relational researcher (Caine et al., 2022). I always prioritized their personal, emotional, and ethical concerns over imposing any pressure on them. I always committed to representing their voices authentically and exactly during the data analysis and report writing, which is my axiological standpoint in this study.

Considering the suggestions from Emerson et al. (2011), I wrote the fieldnotes in my diary immediately after finishing the interview to capture field jottings. Based on the fieldnotes, I wrote each narrative memo on the same evening, which was more detailed and contained my insights and reflections. The fieldnotes and narrative memos not only helped me to be reflexive but also supported me in 'storying and restoring the teachers' (Caine et al., 2022). As a supplementary data source, the fieldnotes and narrative memo helped me to re-store the PTTs' stories to understand the phenomenon of their professional identities. I have used the narrative memo, an extended reflexive account of fieldnotes, as a supplementary data source. As the 'mutuality, reciprocity, and respect' (Clandinin et al., 2018, p. 20) with the participants, the heart of relational commitment in narrative inquiry, I always respected my participants. I never imposed any pressure to share their story.

I have employed the 'analysis of narratives' as a data analysis method, as suggested by Polkinghorne (1995), which focuses on developing themes from participants' stories. In addition, I have

combined the 'analysis of narrative' with the 'reflexive thematic analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2022), a flexible and reflexive approach. As I suggested by reflexive thematic analysis, in the initial stages of meaning-making from the collected data, I listened to the audio records at least three times to facilitate easy transcription in the next step. I have transcribed the audio record in Nepali, as the interview was conducted in Nepali, which helped me become familiar with the teacher narratives (Gregory et al., 2012; Nasheeda et al., 2019). I translated the Nepali transcription into English. I never became selective during the translation and covered all the audio records. To understand the 'story as a whole' (Haydon et al., 2017), I conducted multiple readings that supported my interpretation of the participant's intent. It helps me to become deeply familiar with the data, which is the first step in a robust data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). During the multiple readings of the transcription, I used different colors to highlight the important parts. Similarly, I underlined the important portion of the text and provided them with meaningful descriptions, which are codes. I frequently revised and modified the codes as I reviewed the transcription, adopting a recursive process of multiple readings. Then, I moved into generating initial themes based on coding that best represent the intent of coding, which were 'broader and shared meanings' that Braun and Clarke (2022) call. In the next step, I developed and reviewed the initial themes, which I later named the final themes. Finally, I started the more formal writing to make meaning; however, the write-up had already started with generating initial themes. During this final step, I attempted to integrate the data from fieldnotes and informal conversations with the participants. After that, I compared the data from multiple sources, and the final four themes were developed.

To maintain the trustworthiness of the study, I employed member checking, prolonged engagement, and carefully adhered to the ethical considerations. First, to seek consensus in the interview data or transcriptions, I initially shared the interview transcripts and later excerpts of verbatim to obtain their agreement. Second, I engaged with the participants for a prolonged time with in-person formal interviews and informational communication. Third,

I strictly followed informed consent principles, avoiding harm to participants during data collection, ensuring justice in data analysis, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity in data protection, and writing the report. (Flick, 2014; Subedi, 2025).

I have presented the participants' stories in the next section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section comprises two major subsections: the first section presents brief stories of the participants, and the second section provides a reflexive thematic analysis of the findings.

Section 1: Storytelling
Prabhat's Story

I grew up in a village with a low-income family. We were dependent on my father's army pension, but after my father's death, my mother raised five children through hardship, ensuring our education. Initially, my dream was to join the government service, but due to my family's low income, I was forced to continue my studies and earn a living on my own. Then, I quit my dream and began working at a boarding school. I completed my M. Ed. in BS 2065 with a good first division, and joined as a part-time university teacher in BS 2079. It was the happiest moment, and I had a strong sense of commitment and high self-esteem during those initial days. Though my identity has changed after working for a decade in the lowest rung of TU teacher as a PTT, I realize I have lost my productive age, feel inferior and insecure, and have a low self-image. I feel ruined by TU's policy, and less hopeful about my future career growth.

I would have already gone into depression if I had no job outside. However, I have a respectable identity as a university teacher, *'Leuchar'* in the outer community, which is motivating me to continue as a teacher educator at TU. Therefore, I feel my identity is an oxymoron.

Bibek's Story

I grew up in a low-literacy family, having struggled to survive. I do not want to remember those school days of scarcity. After my father died when I was in grade three, my mother struggled to support my education, and I almost dropped out. With the help of my school and teachers, I continued studying while working for daily wages and making bamboo crafts to support myself. My dream was to complete my B.Ed. and become a secondary school teacher, but I was forced to work as a delivery boy while pursuing my education. Ed, and later my M.Ed. in BS 2070. After having an M.Ed., my dream changed to be a university teacher, and I finally joined PNC as a PTT. It was a period when I was filled with high self-esteem, a strong sense of self-image, and a passion to contribute to TU. However, after working for years at PNC, despite my dedication, I faced discrimination and exclusion. Nowadays, I am gradually feeling undervalued and insecure about my career growth at TU. However, I gained some recognition as a teacher educator. For instance, when you teach that day, you are paid; otherwise, you are not…I feel like a *"Khetala teacher".* But, as a PNC teacher, I never contributed less than a full-time teacher. So, my identity here is 'dismal', my work is 'uncertain and fragile', and my continuity is not ensured. Sometimes, I think, I lost productive years without remarkable progress…

Swikrit's Story

I grew up in a relatively stable middle-class family and did not face financial challenges until my SLC. My dream was to join the security forces, but it was put on hold after my father's business collapsed.

To support my family, I began teaching in private boarding schools, gradually paying off the debt and completing my B.Ed. Although I attempted to join the police force, I failed and shifted my goal toward teaching. I completed my M.Ed. and became a university teacher at PNC. Joining PNC initially felt like a continuation of my teaching journey, since many of my former students were now pursuing a B.Ed. program. Motivated by my grandfather's wish, I pursued an MPhil and now aim to complete a PhD. However, being a PTT has led me to systemic neglect. Despite being aware of the PTT category, I had not expected the extent of marginalization and policy instability. Over eight years, I have witnessed how insecure, underpaid, and undervalued PTTs are within TU. Despite this, my experience as a university teacher has expanded my knowledge, networks, and confidence. Society respects university teachers, but internally, PTTs are treated as *"daily wage labor."* While I take pride in my professional ethics and contributions, I believe TU must end the PTT system and ensure fair recognition and security for all faculty. Working in such an uncertain context, I feel like "my life is ruined".

Section 2: Thematic Analysis of Findings

The institutional working context, changing time, and local culture influence teacher educators' professional identity (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007; Kaasila et al., 2025; van Lankveld et al., 2017). Participants' stories reveal that they have been experiencing an identity crisis, yet their identity has not been developed and shaped straightforwardly. Instead, it follows negotiated and recursive paths with ups and downs. Participants' stories reveal the following four types of professional identity development among part-time teacher educators.

Struggle of Working and Studying Together: The Resilient Identity

Working and studying together in higher education is a common trend among

most graduate students in the B.Ed. and M.Ed. programs at PNC. It indicates that their identity is shaped by struggles over time, which shapes their prudent identity as future graduating student teachers, as they struggle to earn enough to survive and manage university fees and other expenses. Coincidentally, all three participants, including myself, experienced the same trend. As the participants' stories reveal, survival was a significant concern for them, compelling them to work in any way they could. For instance, Prabhat shared:

I came from a low-income family. After my father's death, my mother relied on a pension to educate her four children. I hardly completed my B.Ed. Once, I asked my mother for Rs. 2500, but she could only give me Rs. 500 and told me, "Chhora, could you look for a job to manage your expenses?" It hurt me. (he became emotional…) I stopped asking her for money and eventually secured a challenging position as a hostel warden in a private school.

During the interview, I maintained my fieldnotes:

As the interview progressed, Parbat became emotional while sharing his struggles managing study expenses and living in Pokhara. He fell silent and wiped, masking his face with his hands. I, too, was moved, recalling my own days juggling teaching and B.Ed. studies from three decades ago. After a moment, Prabhat composed himself and apologized for his emotions. (Fieldnotes, July 30, 2024)

Bibek shared:

I am from a low-income family. My mother took pains to feed and educate us after my father's death. As she failed to manage my school expenses, I had to leave school. Thankfully, the school supported me, and some of my teachers provided financial assistance and encouraged me to continue my education. Anyway, I completed the School Leaving Certificate (SLC). To continue studying at PNC, I started a part-time job at an express delivery service company.

Like Prabhat and Bibek, Swikrit also struggled with higher education after SLC. Despite his family's financial condition, managing the family's food, clothes, and medicine was a challenge, but it still failed to support him in pursuing higher studies at PNC. He shared:

I do not have a serious problem with food and clothes, but I have no other income. As my family could not provide me with the necessary funds, I sought employment and began working at a boarding school on a low salary. I hardly completed up to M.Ed. as an underpaid boarding school teacher.

The above quotes refer to the stories of participants who continue their studies. These could be similar stories of many SLC graduates from Nepal's villages, who often struggle to work and study simultaneously. Similar to these findings, a recent study (Subedi, 2024b) confirms that even primary school teachers have experienced the same cases of studying and working together to complete their higher education while working as school teachers. The verbatim offers three suggestions. First, school graduates are compelled to work for low salaries, as they must earn enough to survive and cover the expenses of their higher education. Second, they may also have family responsibilities and require financial support from their family. Third, working and studying together adds extra pressure to cover their study appropriately. They failed by focusing solely on their study, which could have improved their performance and earned them higher marks in university exams/assessments. Hence, the above stories illustrate that poor financial conditions or low-income family income negatively influence their study. In addition, these stories help to understand the dynamics and complexity of professional identity constructions among PTTs and how the contextual milieu influences the shaping of identity (Beijaard et al., 2004). It could have prevented them from obtaining better

academic performance.

I am Just a Part-Time Teacher: The Marginalized Identity

After working for years as PTT, they consider themselves a teacher who has lost their identity within the entire TU system, although they still maintain their reputable professional identity outside. PTTs seem undecided about quitting their job immediately or exploring possible positive initiatives from TU to address their issue. Professional identity theory (Beijaard et al., 2004) suggests that teacher identity can be explored through their stories. It is meaningful that teachers consider themselves to have no significant values. PTTs are in a wandering stage; on the one hand, they still have little hope of being recognized and valued for their contribution at TU; on the other hand, they are working with low self-esteem. Working with lower self-esteem leads them toward a crisis in their professional identity (Gim, 2020; Hong et al., 2024; Rana, 2022). For instance, Bibek feels that the issue of PTTs remains in the shadows since their identity at TU is in crisis. He further shared:

I am a PTT who is unrecognized as a university faculty member and often overlooked by my permanent colleagues from the same institution. Being at the lowest hierarchical level, I am less prioritized everywhere, as the full-time teacher is always at the forefront in utilizing the facilities provided. As I am responsible for the same teaching work, I was unable to take any leave.

Like Bibek, Swikrit shares a similar view on the lack of a specific identity for PTTs. He shared that he entered PNC knowing all about the PTTs' roles and status. So, why am I worried? Participants reported frequently experiencing exclusion from campus events. For instance, Prabhat had a bitter experience where they were often given the lowest priority in participating in various professional growth opportunities. Swikrit shared that equity in remuneration could be the first initiative to uplift the lower self-esteem of PTTs and enhance their professional identities. He further states that an unjust payment system is a critical issue in shaping their identities. However, the semester system, introduced at the Master's and PGD levels in recent years, has resulted in comparatively higher remuneration for the PTTs than the traditional annual system programs. Regarding these odds with the PTTs, Prabhat shared that it is not a matter of discrimination or injustice concerning PTTs' payment; instead, the lack of recognition as a teacher is a serious concern.

The above quotes and remarks suggest that the PTT are working under precarious conditions of job security, stability, and identity. Since the university does not consider them faculty and treats them just as hired wage workers, they feel hurt and a sense of systemic suffering (Rana, 2022). Such painful stories of PTTs not only indicate their precarious working conditions, as theory suggests (Beijaard et al., 2004), but also represent the lives and work of teachers. When the university system makes them feel hurt and leads them to believe they have low self-esteem, it results in a lack of interest (van Lankveld et al., 2017). It also helps to categorize them as a certain type of university teacher with a lower commitment to teaching (Hong et al., 2024). While the PTTs enter a university teaching job with high self-esteem and motivation, having no specific roles or responsibilities and being deprived of university facilities makes them feel inferior to teachers, a sentiment similar to that of Beijaard et al. (2023). Even PTTs are deprived of the opportunity to obtain leave and enjoy government or university holidays since they are not paid for such holidays. Similarly, they are not allowed to enjoy several professional development opportunities, including incentives and gratuities, and increased workshops are influential aspects of professional identity development as several studies indicate (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007; Hong et al., 2024; Izadinia, 2013; Kaasila et al., 2025;

van Lankveld et al., 2017). This scenario leads PTTs to think of them with questions like Who are they? Why are they working at the university? What is their actual recognition? As PTTs are unidentified and unrecognized as their regular faculty in TU's teacher management system (Tribhuvan University, 1994, 2021), their professional identity is in crisis. These findings are also consistent with the study of +2 teachers (Rana, 2022) in the Midwestern region of Nepal.

Negotiation During Teaching Journey: The Adaptive Identity

While working as a university teacher, PTTs frequently negotiate with university policies and campus/ departmental preferences. Participants unanimously agreed that one of their major intentions in joining PTT is to be promoted to the course contract teacher (i.e., also referred to as a teaching assistant who receives a full monthly salary, including festival pay increments and leave). However, only a small number of PTTs are allowed to be promoted to a course contract teacher. In addition, participants also experience that compared to the PTTs, course contract teacher status is more prestigious and is considered a teacher recognized by a university's teacher management system. For instance, Prabhat is unsatisfied with the TU policy that "TU lacks a consistent, long-term, and visionary policy regarding managing existing contract teachers and selecting new ones. In previous years, contract teachers were treated like regular teachers, with their service years being counted as regular years after they became permanent". However, in recent years, TU abandoned the contract teacher system and adopted the provision of course contracts.

More importantly, as the PTTs' stories (i.e., Prabhat's and Swikrit's stories) reveal, teaching was not the preferred choice of some participants at the time of SLC. Therefore, teaching is a negotiated profession, as teachers often deviate from their initial career plans in the field of education. Empirical studies from Nepal (Rana, 2022; Subedi, 2023, 2024b) also confirm that teachers' negotiation, particularly due to the working context and institutional environment, is a common phenomenon. For instance, Prabhat said:

I aimed to be a government officer, for which I prepared for the *Lok Sewa* exam and made a few unsuccessful attempts. After being unable to devote myself, I abandoned the plan and initially became a schoolteacher, later transitioning to a university professor. If I had not had a financial crisis to prepare for *Lok Sewa*, I would have joined the government service".

Like Prabhat, Swikrit shared:

I aimed to join either the Nepalese army or police, as I was deeply interested in being a police or army officer at the time of my SLC. However, due to the family's financial situation, I had to decline his earlier aim of joining the security forces. Because my family could not afford the study expenses and the costs of preparing to join the security forces, I ultimately abandoned the plan and became a teacher.

Stories of PTTs reveal that after joining a university, they must negotiate with the institutional contexts and circumstances at the local level and are broadly influenced by TU's fragile teacher-hiring university policies. However, after teachers, particularly PTTs, protested, TU again began hiring teachers on a course contract basis, essentially acting like contract teachers. Despite the unstable policy, Swikrit said:

I hoped to become a contract teacher soon, which would almost secure a job at TU, having practiced in the previous year. However, this is my sixth year of working as a PTT. I do not hope to be appointed to a contract status in the coming days due to the unstable and inconsistent teacher hiring policy at TU. My future days at TU are dismal, but there is little chance of addressing this issue.

Concerning the departmental role in the

teaching load assignment, Bibek explained: We, the PTTs, are often overlooked and underprioritized. We cannot attend the departmental meeting on important issues, particularly the load distribution. Only the full-time teachers attend and assign the load. The remaining load is distributed to the PTTs at the department head's discretion. I am always afraid of whether the HOD will assign me a load. No one can ask a counter-question to the HOD's decision.

Similarly, the PTTs must negotiate with the working context and the load assigned. The dialogue between the working context and the person helps shape the identities of teacher educators (Kaasila et al., 2025; van Lankveld et al., 2021). They often feel ignored and overlooked when it comes to assigning tasks and responsibilities. As the PTTs have been working daily basis, they often work outside PNC to make a living.

The above quotes suggest that PTTs are working in critical conditions and receive low pay for the same work as full-time teachers. Furthermore, the above quotes illustrate how the PTTs are obligated to negotiate within the working context, which is the primary focus of professional identity theory (Beijaard et al., 2004). Working in challenging conditions negatively affects their professional life (Rana, 2022). PTTs' stories reveal that they struggled to continue their higher studies and had to negotiate during their professional journey. Several studies suggest that negotiation is a common phenomenon in one's professional life that (re)constructs their identity (Barkhuizen, 2020; Beijaard et al., 2023; Yuan & Lee, 2016; Zhai et al., 2024). They must earn enough to manage their studies and other expenses. Additionally, they are also responsible for supporting their families if they come from low-income backgrounds. So, working and studying together is not their preferred choice; instead, it is an obligation and a strategy to survive and obtain a higher degree. In some cases, as Bibek shared, "PTTs must be loyal to the

HOD to receive the load; otherwise, the load may be withdrawn". Similar to these findings, a study confirms that "identity as a negotiated, open and shifting process" (Flores, 2020) in the construction of a teacher's professional identity. Therefore, questioning the departmental decision is challenging for the PTTs, which promotes a culture of silence.

Feeling Lost in the Professional Journey: The Fragmented Identity

As the productive life of PTTs continued amid the uncertainty and instability of their part-time job at PNC, they felt lost in their careers and professions. A sense of feeling lost can lead to a low self-image, particularly during the early stages of one's career, which contributes to the development of a weak identity (Hong et al., 2024). The stories of PTTs reveal that they feel like unrecognized as regular university teachers. While the PTTs spend year by year hoping that TU will respond and manage them safely, the situation remains uncertain and fragile for the PTTs. Concerning the 'feeling lost' metaphor, Prabhat described:

I joined PNC with high motivation. I dreamed of being a permanent or full-time teacher at TU. However, neither the TU service commission is regular, nor has my part-time status been promoted after working for 14 years. Instead, the working conditions gradually worsened and became uncertain, making me feel lost in my professional journey. If I had no alternate job outside, I would have gone into depression.

The settlement trend of PTTs into contract/course contract teachers in previous years has raised hope among PTTs. It is often blamed that in previous years, a special internal competition was held to settle the contracts of contract teachers who continued their earlier working period after being made permanent (Ghimire, 2021, December 3). TU has decided to discontinue this provision because such a special commission provision was heavily criticized as a backdoor entry for

unqualified individuals after the Supreme Court's verdict (Ghimire, 2025, May 24). PTTs waited for such a provision that never came. Swikrit said:

I hoped to be a contract teacher soon after my entry at PNC. I could not see that the issues related to PTTs are not addressed rationally by TU. As I invested my younger years in this job, I have become increasingly disappointed with it. I would have looked for another job had I not been at PNC, but I have been wasting years as a PTT, so I often thought that *'my productive life is gone with this job'*.

However, Bibek is not hopeful about his career at TU. He also considers himself lost on the professional journey.

I joined PNC with the dream of being a full-time teacher. After working for five years as a PTT, I have little hope for my job. As TU uses a cheap workforce, why does it take the initiative? I have no identity here, and I am afraid of being discontinued. I wish for the establishment of a regular teacher selection process. If so, I would happily leave PNC if I could not pass the service commission.

The above quotes suggest that PTTs enter TU with high self-esteem and feel privileged to be at a university. Moreover, they believed that the concerns and issues related to PTTs would be addressed by TU, and their professional careers as university teachers would be addressed by university policy. However, after working for years as a PTT, they are no longer hopeful; instead, they are frustrated and feel lost on their career path. As they are less optimistic about their future at TU, they perceive themselves as degraded and demotivated, occupying the lowest rank of the TU system with a dismal identity or 'no specific identity.' So, the system has ruined their valuable and productive life span, leading them to 'wander' with a low self-image as university teachers. Moreover, they did not see themselves as an accomplished teacher; instead, they

were uncertain about being discontinued from PNC. While the PTTs could not find their value and identities at PNC while working as part time basis, they often were confused about our 'university faculty?' and what they would do in the coming days, as professional theory suggests (Beijaard et al., 2004) More importantly, others consider them as incapable ones in their professional community, which is a critical concern that shapes professional identities as changing and shifting over time (Varghese et al., 2005; Watson, 2006). A study elaborates on this concern and argues "being negatively judged by others, especially by students but also by colleagues, can be devastating for teachers' professional self-esteem, their confidence and wellbeing. This may trigger intense emotions like discomfort, uncertainty, powerlessness, frustration, and vulnerability" (Beijaard et al., 2023, p. 6). Putting the workforce insecure and uncertain for a long time will harm TU and negatively affect its functioning and internal efficiency.

In summary, integrating the participants' stories and themes/interviews above reveals five major perspectives related to the construction of professional identities among part-time university teachers. First, the professional identities of PTTs are closely tied to their struggle to obtain higher education and fulfill their future aspirations of becoming university teachers, which suggests that the state should reconsider establishing a support mechanism for higher education aspirants, such as providing them with educational loans. Second, teachers shape their identities with strong motivation after joining the university faculty, but they gradually lose motivation due to working in an environment of marginalization, uncertainty, insecurity, and discrimination. Therefore, it is a critical concern that requires the university to address this precarious condition by revisiting its teacher hiring and management policies. The PTTs feel lost and frustrated in their university teaching career path, as they

are deprived of several university facilities and benefits, despite performing similar work to the full-time faculty. Hiring and engaging teachers without job security raises a critical concern about the teacher management system at TU, which requires revisiting. Fourth, working as a daily wage teacher is a negotiating phenomenon of PTT which shapes their professional identities negatively, as a vulnerable, powerless, and discomfort teacher. It urges TU leadership to take measures to respond that ultimately contribute to efficient university governance and internal efficiency. Finally, despite working with these odds, PTTs sometimes feel proud and present themselves as university teacher in the public forums. The intention of introducing oneself as a university faculty member in society is their strategy to gain social recognition and respect.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to explore the formation of the professional identities of PTTs working as university teachers. I have adopted the narrative inquiry methodology, using purposively selected three participants, with data collected through in-depth interview and informal communication. For the data analysis, I employed the reflexive thematic analysis method. Findings reveal that the professional identities of PTTs are shaped particularly by institutional policies and practices, as well as the working context. As the PTTs are working in an insecure situation, they feel an identity crisis as university teachers. While the professional identity construction is multifaceted and changing, they continually struggle to shape their identities as university teachers. The study identifies four major identities of PTTs: *the resilient identity, the marginal identity, the adaptive identity, and the fragmented identity.*

First, the professional identities of PTTs are evolving through (re)interpretation of experiences of financial hardship of the family and academic growth. Living with the financial challenge, PTTS reinterpret their lived experiences, which embody their reconstructed self and ongoing struggles to balance survival, study, and professional growth. Their resilient identity is shaped through ongoing negotiation between their present struggles and future aspirations, demonstrating it as a dynamic and lifelong process. Second, being in the lowest rung of teacher management in university PTTs relies on the tension between teachers' personal values and institutional structures that marginalize them. The disjunction between their aspirations and institutional policies often leads to the devaluation of their role, failing to acknowledge or reward the values they hold. Consequently, their self-perception becomes weaker between professional pride and institutional invisibility, which leads to a sense of themselves as marginalized, with a low self-image as "just a part-time teacher."

Third, as the participants' story (Prabhat and Swikrit) reveals, teaching was not initially their preferred choice. However, due to their family's financial situation, they are compelled to negotiate with the circumstances they encounter during their higher education and exercise agency by pursuing a career in university teaching. PTTs are working under precarious conditions, experiencing fear and uncertainty regarding payment, sense of belonging, and professional growth opportunities. They are obliged to negotiate between their personal values and future aspirations, and the institutional policies that serve as their survival strategy for working as a university teacher.

Finally, as PTTs join university teaching with high motivation and enthusiasm, their motivation and enthusiasm gradually decrease after working in precarious conditions for years with insecurity. Disjunctions between their aspirations for professional upliftment in university

teaching and the uncertain work environment characterized by lower recognition, instability, and insecurity lead PTTs to feel a fractured sense of self. As such, the professional identities of PTTs shape and reshape them as university teachers with lower self-esteem and those with unheard voices.

As there is minimal discussion on the professional identities of part-time teacher educators, often referred to as 'adjunct teachers', this study significantly contributes to the field by examining how their identities are shaped within the institutional working context. This study is limited by its small sample size, which could be addressed by using a larger sample to provide a more comprehensive picture. While this study focuses on the construction of professional identities of PTTs, particularly on the institutional dimension, further research could explore how the personal, professional, and social dimensions influence their professional identities. As there is an inconsistency in policy provision concerning the PTT at TU, this study could help formulate more coherent policy provisions for teacher management, including PTT, to resolve the teacher hiring issues at TU.

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