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Beyond Presence: Teachers' Classroom Time and Professional Accountability

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Abstract

This study examines teachers' classroom time utilization and professional accountability in Nepalese public schools, especially in the remote part of Terai region. The purpose behind this study is to investigate the widespread concern of teachers failing to utilize the full 45-minute class period for instructional purposes. Through questionnaires administered to 20 teachers and head teachers, supplemented by public discourse analysis and literature review, the research explores factors affecting professional commitment and time investment. Findings reveal teachers possess a sophisticated understanding of professionalism and recognize devotion's importance, yet systemic conditions-including inadequate compensation, political interference, weak institutional leadership, and social devaluation-constrain actualization of professional ideals. The pattern of inadequate time utilization reportedly intensified following democracy's restoration in 1990, when political affiliations began compromising professional

commitments. The study concludes that meaningful improvement requires comprehensive systemic reform addressing both individual accountability and institutional support, recognizing the complex interplay of economic, social, political, and institutional factors shaping teacher performance and educational outcomes.

Keywords: time-utilization, teacher-accountability, commitment, motivation

Introduction

The teaching profession holds a distinctive place in the landscape of human endeavor, offering educators an immediacy of impact rarely found in other vocations. Teachers witness firsthand the consequences of their work as students transform before their eyes-cognitive abilities expand, character develops, and potential unfolds in real time. This direct observation of cause and effect creates both extraordinary opportunity and profound responsibility. Unlike professionals whose contributions remain abstract or whose outcomes manifest only after considerable delay, teachers

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experience the living reality of their influence daily, watching as their guidance, instruction, and mentorship shape the trajectories of young lives. Bagley (2025) writes-

You inspire young minds and instill essential values and skills that extend beyond your classroom and into real life. You help children gain confidence as they grow. Your students know how to collaborate, communicate, problem-solve, and get along. You teach them that they each matter, are needed, and add value. (p.2)

Yet this unique position demands far more than simple presence or routine instruction. Effective teaching requires a complex integration of professional qualities that extend well beyond the conventional six-hour school day and transcend the mechanical delivery of curriculum content. Lave & Wenger (1991) opine that negotiating skills turn out to be of key importance for teaching, together with collaborative, reflective, interpersonal skills for learning in professional and school communities (p.9). The profession calls for exceptional empathy capable of recognizing and responding to diverse student needs; unwavering persistence in addressing learning challenges that may resist easy solution; meticulous diligence in preparation, instruction, and assessment; steadfast sincerity in professional conduct that models integrity for impressionable observers; fundamental honesty in all interactions that builds trust and credibility; and remarkable flexibility to adapt pedagogical approaches to ever-changing classroom dynamics and individual student requirements.

Teachers simultaneously embody multiple roles—they function as educators transmitting knowledge and skills, as inspirers awakening curiosity and ambition, as learners continuously expanding their own understanding, and as agents of positive social change working to improve both individual lives and collective futures. Rosenblatt (2001) writes:

To mobilize change and at the same time advance their own careers, teachers need to assume roles other than teaching, both pedagogical and administrative. Extra teaching roles require technological, administrative, and social skills in addition to those needed for routine teaching roles. (p.685)

Within the bounded space of the classroom, teachers serve as living exemplars of the values, behaviors, and dispositions they seek to cultivate in their students. They provide not merely information but direction, guidance through uncertainty, motivation when energy flags, and inspiration that ignites imagination and effort. Through these multifaceted contributions, teachers fundamentally shape students' academic trajectories and personal development, influencing not only what students know but who they become.

This study examines a critical dimension of teaching effectiveness that has

generated considerable public discourse and substantial concern throughout Nepal: the relationship between teachers' actual time investment in classroom instruction and student achievement outcomes. Specifically, the research investigates the widespread perception, supported by considerable anecdotal evidence and informal observation that many public school teachers systematically fail to utilize the full allocated instructional time of 45 minutes per class period. Reports from multiple sources suggest patterns of late classroom entry, early departure, and inadequate engagement with instructional responsibilities during the nominal class period. These patterns, if substantiated, represent not merely individual lapses in professional conduct but systematic dysfunction that undermines educational quality and compromises student opportunity on a massive scale.

The phenomenon under investigation reportedly intensified following the restoration of democracy in 1990, suggesting that political transformation introduced new dynamics into educational institutions that disrupted previously established professional norms. Teachers' increasing involvement in political organizations and activities, while representing a legitimate exercise of civic rights, appears to have created competing loyalties that sometimes compromise institutional commitments. Public discourse increasingly characterizes teachers' organizations as extensions of political parties rather than professional associations, and portrays individual teachers as political cadres whose primary allegiance lies with the party rather than the school. Whether accurate or exaggerated, these perceptions reflect a genuine crisis in professional identity and public confidence.

Statements of the problem

Teachers are criticized a lot in Nepal for their negligence in duty. They are blamed for not devoting their stipulated time to classroom purposes. Sincerity, punctuality, and diligence are all questioned. Teachers' organizations are labeled as vested interests of different political parties. They are assumed to be merely cadres of political parties. Rarely are any positive attributes used for the teachers working in public school. There has been an identity crisis for them. In many instances, they have been found more loyal to the political parties than their schools. In many more cases, it is merely for the sake of the security of the job that teachers are seen in the school. If they are seen in the school, they are not seen in the classroom. If they are seen in the classroom, they are not found to be consuming the whole 45 minutes for instructional purposes. Late entry in the classroom and early departure has been a common phenomenon for three decades, that is, since the restoration of democracy in 1990 A.D. The political undue influence in the school has affected 45 minutes of students' concerns. The utilization of 45 minutes per period has been a main concern here, especially in remote areas of Terai region.

Research Objectives

This study is guided by three main purposes. The first one is to examine the relationship between teachers' classroom time utilization and student academic achievement in Nepalese public schools, particularly in remote Terai regions. The second one is to investigate the systemic and individual factors-including political interference, inadequate compensation, weak institutional leadership, and social devaluation-that contribute to teachers' failure to utilize the full 45-minute instructional period. And the last one is to explore strategies for enhancing teacher professional accountability and work motivation within the context of post-1990 democratic Nepal's educational system.

Theoretical Background

Theoretical concept of this study is based different scholars, like Rivikin et al. (2005), Sahito et al. (2016), Boniwell and Oswin (2015) and few others.

The Critical Role of Teachers in Educational Success

The centrality of teachers to educational effectiveness cannot be overstated. Substantial research across diverse contexts consistently demonstrates that teacher quality represents the single most important school-based factor influencing student achievement. Teachers' roles transcend narrow technical functions of content delivery to encompass the holistic development of students as thinking, feeling individuals and as future citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to a democratic society. Through their daily interactions, pedagogical choices, relationship-building efforts, and professional commitments, teachers create the conditions within which learning either flourishes or languishes. Rivkin, S. G., Hanushek, E. A., & Kain, J. F. (2005) focus on a critical policy dilemma: while teacher quality is the most important school-based factor in student achievement, current hiring and compensation practices based on credentials and experience fail to identify or reward the most effective teachers, suggesting the need for fundamental reforms in teacher evaluation, personnel management, and accountability systems.

Time Utilization and Professional Accountability

The relationship between time investment and professional outcomes constitutes a critical dimension of work effectiveness, particularly in human service professions like teaching. Sahito et al. (2016) emphasize that "time is precious and important, which never waits for anyone" and argue that nations achieving developmental success have distinguished themselves through strategic attention to temporal resource management (p. 42). This perspective positions time not merely as a chronological measure but as a form of capital that, when strategically invested, generates multiplied returns in organizational and individual outcomes. This reality places immense significance on every dimension of teacher performance, including aspects that might initially appear mundane or peripheral. How teachers utilize their allocated instructional time, for instance, carries profound implications for student learning accumulation and eventual achievement. In the Nepalese educational

context, as in many others, the standard class period spans 45 minutes—a temporal allocation designed to balance sufficient instructional time against attention span limitations and scheduling requirements. Yet the mere existence of this temporal structure guarantees nothing; its educational effectiveness depends entirely on how teachers use these carefully apportioned minutes.

Significance Beyond Time Management

Boniwell and Osin (2015) examine time use, performance, and well-being beyond traditional time management approaches in their work *-Beyond time management: time use, performance, well-being*. The authors argue that good time use satisfies basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness) and pursues intrinsic goals rather than merely maximizing productivity. They review evidence showing that subjective satisfaction with time use predicts well-being more strongly than objective time allocation. The authors emphasize supporting autonomy and meaningful engagement over efficiency-focused behavioral changes. However, the significance of inadequate instructional time utilization extends far beyond simple time management or organizational efficiency. This issue touches upon fundamental questions of professional ethics—what obligations do teachers owe to their students and society? It raises crucial concerns about work motivation—what factors sustain or undermine professional commitment in challenging circumstances? It highlights problems of systemic accountability—how can educational systems ensure that professionals fulfill their responsibilities while supporting them adequately? And it also illuminates tensions in the social contract between educators and the communities they serve—what reciprocal obligations bind teachers and society, and what happens when either party perceives the other as failing to fulfill its commitments?

Professional Accountability and Systemic Context

Teacher accountability cannot be divorced from the systemic conditions within which educators operate. Research from similar developing contexts, such as Zombwe's (2008) work in Tanzania identifies multiple interconnected factors affecting teacher responsibility and performance: inadequate salaries and benefits, poor security and living environments, weak leadership and institutional administration, insufficient training and professional development opportunities, limited teacher participation in decision-making processes, and inadequate societal valuation and cooperation with teachers. These factors illustrate that teacher performance emerges from a complex ecology of professional, institutional, social, and economic conditions rather than from individual motivation alone.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report (2015) reinforces this systemic perspective, asserting that "investing in teachers can transform education" but emphasizing that such transformation requires that "teachers have adequate subject

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and pedagogic content knowledge, are effectively trained, and are sensitive to the diverse needs of learners." The report explicitly calls for governments to "ensure teachers are appropriately prepared and supported," recognizing that professional accountability functions within a reciprocal framework where institutional support enables individual responsibility.

Methodology

This qualitative study employed a mixed-method approach to investigate teachers' classroom time utilization and professional accountability in Nepalese public schools. The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire administered to 20 participants, including both teachers and head teachers from various public schools. The research methodology incorporated three distinct but complementary data sources: formal questionnaire responses from educational practitioners, unrecorded public discourse, and general societal opinions about teachers and the teaching profession, and an extensive literature review examining scholarly work on time investment, time management, work motivation, and teacher effectiveness. The researcher utilized what might be termed a reflective analytical approach, engaging in preliminary informal discussions with colleagues to refine the research focus before formal data collection commenced. These initial consultations helped establish rapport with potential participants and clarified the scope of inquiry. Upon collecting questionnaire responses, the researcher conducted thematic analysis, categorizing participant responses under predetermined sub-topics aligned with the research objectives: maintaining professionalism, importance of devotion in teaching, teachers' concern for student achievement, factors affecting student performance, time investment in classroom instruction, and the significance of the 45-minute class period.

The analytical process involved careful examination of response patterns, identification of common themes and divergent perspectives, and interpretation of findings in relation to existing theoretical frameworks on teacher motivation and professional effectiveness. This methodological approach enabled triangulation of data from multiple sources—practitioner perspectives, public sentiment, and scholarly literature—thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex phenomenon of classroom time utilization in the Nepalese educational context.

Results, Discussion, and Interpretation

This study investigated teachers' classroom time utilization and professional accountability in Nepalese public schools, especially in remote schools in Terai region of Madhesh province through systematic analysis of questionnaire responses from 20 educational practitioners, supplemented by public discourse analysis and literature review. The findings reveal a complex interplay of factors affecting teacher performance, professional commitment, and instructional time management. The

results are organized thematically according to the key dimensions identified during data analysis: professional maintenance practices, the significance of devotion in teaching, teachers' concern or student achievement, factors influencing student performance, time investment patterns, and perspectives on the 45- minute class period structure.

Maintaining Professionalism: Strategies and Commitments

The investigation into how teachers maintain professionalism revealed encouraging commitment to professional development and ethical practice among the study participants. Respondents articulated diverse but complementary approaches to sustaining professional standards in their daily practice. A head teacher from Kalaiya identified a comprehensive range of activities, including "studying, teaching, training, seminar, conference, meeting, doing research, doing online courses, discussing with my colleagues, doing audio and video conferencing," demonstrating an understanding that professionalism requires continuous engagement across multiple domains of learning and collaboration. Similarly, another head teacher from Bara district emphasized the importance of perpetual learning and collegial networking, stating his commitment to studying new developments and maintaining contact with colleagues to exchange ideas. This emphasis on collaborative learning reflects contemporary understanding of teaching as a profession that benefits significantly from communities of practice and peer support networks. A college teacher working in Janakpurdham gave his focus on honest duty fulfillment and subject matter currency, which underscores the dual nature of professionalism-encompassing both ethical conduct and content expertise.

A high school teacher from a public school in Janakpurdham provided perhaps the most theoretically sophisticated response, articulating professionalism as maintaining currency to build confidence, seeking collegial support for challenges, respecting diverse opinions, and encouraging student voice. His explicit reference to "professional demeanour" suggests conscious attention to the performative and relational dimensions of teaching professionalism. An English faculty from Rajarshi Janak University held a different opinion. To him, professionalism requires preparation, regularity, positive affect, and a friendly classroom climate highlights the affective and organizational dimensions of professional practice. Other respondents had similar opinions.

These findings suggest that teachers in the study possess robust conceptual understanding of professionalism that extends beyond mere rule compliance to encompass continuous learning, ethical practice, collegial collaboration, pedagogical innovation, and relational competence. The study reveals that maintaining professionalism, as articulated by participants, involves "studying more and more, attending seminars and conferences, discussing the burning issues with

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colleagues, doing online courses, incorporating others' opinions." Resume Professional Writers Editorial Team (2025) writes:

Professionalism in the workplace refers to the attitudes, behaviors, and skills that speak of your competence and respect for your job, colleagues, and the organization as a whole. It involves maintaining a high level of work ethic, effective business communication, and overall office etiquette. (p.2)

This multidimensional approach aligns with contemporary scholarship on teacher professional development, which emphasizes the importance of both formal and informal learning opportunities, reflective practice, and collaborative inquiry. However, the articulation of professional ideals by study participants stands in notable contrast to the public discourse regarding teacher performance in Nepalese public schools. This discrepancy raises important questions about the gap between espoused values and enacted practice, suggesting that structural or systemic factors may prevent teachers from fully realizing their professional commitments in daily practice.

The Centrality of Devotion in the Teaching Profession

Zombwe (2008) writes that teaching isn't merely about standing at the front of a classroom and lecturing; it's about a dynamic and evolving set of responsibilities that form the backbone of the entire education system. He focuses on the devotion of teachers for the overall achievement of an educational institute. The concept of devotion emerged as a central theme in participant responses, with near-unanimous agreement regarding its critical importance for both teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Respondents characterized devotion as essential not merely for student outcomes but for teachers' own professional survival, career advancement, and leadership development. One of the participants observed that "devotion makes a person perfect, confident, qualified, complete, and result-oriented," articulating devotion as a transformative force that develops teacher capacity across multiple dimensions. The other participant elaborated on the developmental trajectory that devotion enables. Devotion in the profession leads the teacher to a progressive path. He/she will be able to find the problems of students and different issues regarding teaching. He is always updated with new methods and techniques. Thus, devotion to a profession is important for career, profession, and professional leadership. This response positions devotion as the foundation for diagnostic capability, pedagogical innovation, and professional advancement, suggesting that committed engagement creates conditions for continuous improvement and expertise development. In the same way, one of the participants equated devotion with "passion and honesty for any profession one is involved in," and linked professional legitimacy to devotional commitment: "If we're to justify ourselves in the profession, we must be professionally honest to it."

The study's findings suggest that teachers themselves recognize devotion as indispensable, yet public discourse indicates widespread concern about declining devotional commitment in contemporary practice. This paradox, teachers articulate the importance of devotion while being publicly criticized for its absence suggests either a disconnect between teacher beliefs and behaviors, or alternatively, that systemic conditions prevent devoted teachers from demonstrating their commitment in ways that are visible and valued by external observers.

Teachers' Concern for Student Achievement

The relationship between teacher commitment and student achievement constitutes a central problematic in this study. While the theoretical importance of this relationship is well-established, as articulated in Nyerere's (1968) definition of teachers as those "capable of imparting knowledge and shaping the youths to the wider scope of knowledge" and whose "power is paramount as they determine the fate of the society," the practical reality appears more complex and troubling.

The study acknowledges that "many teachers in public school remain passive and uncaring for the students," a phenomenon not unique to Nepal but evident in similar developing contexts. The research conducted by Gervas Zombwe in Tanzania identified six critical factors undermining teacher responsibility and accountability: inadequate salaries and benefits, poor security and living environments, weak leadership and institutional administration, insufficient training and professional development opportunities, limited teacher participation in decision-making processes, and inadequate societal valuation and cooperation with teachers.

These findings illuminate the systemic nature of teacher disengagement, suggesting that lack of concern for student achievement may reflect rational adaptation to adverse working conditions rather than inherent unprofessionalism or lack of caring. When teachers face economic insecurity, professional isolation, administrative dysfunction, and social devaluation, their capacity to maintain student-centered focus inevitably erodes. This interpretation finds support in the EFA Global Monitoring Report (2015), which emphasizes that teacher effectiveness requires that "teachers have adequate subject and pedagogic content knowledge, are effectively trained, and are sensitive to the diverse needs of learners," and explicitly calls for governments to "ensure teachers are appropriately prepared and supported."

The study's findings suggest a critical tension between individual teacher responsibility and systemic accountability. While public discourse tends to locate blame for poor student outcomes primarily with individual teacher deficiencies, the evidence points toward institutional factors as equally or more significant determinants of teacher performance. This suggests the need for interventions that address both individual professional development and systemic reform.

Factors Contributing to Student Achievement

Respondents identified a comprehensive array of factors influencing student achievement, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of education as a complex, multi-determined process. The factors identified included: discipline, good academic environment at home and school, teachers' devotion, guardians' devotion, suitable teaching-learning materials, students' strong devotion, extracurricular activities, good family environment, better learning environment, interesting classes, curious students, regularity and punctuality of students, sense of responsibility toward duty, dedication toward work, care and love toward students, and positive attitudes toward teachers and institutions.

This extensive list reveals several important insights. First, respondents recognize that student achievement emerges from an ecological system encompassing home, school, and community factors rather than from teacher quality alone. Second, the list includes both material conditions (teaching-learning materials, physical environment) and psychological factors (attitudes, motivation, devotion), acknowledging that learning requires both adequate resources and positive dispositions. Third, respondents identify reciprocal responsibilities, recognizing that student success requires commitment from multiple stakeholders—teachers, students, parents, and institutions.

The emphasis on devotion appears repeatedly in relation to teachers, students, and guardians, suggesting that participants view committed engagement as the foundational condition for educational success. The inclusion of affective dimensions—care, love, positive attitudes—alongside cognitive and organizational factors reflects contemporary understanding that learning is fundamentally a relational and emotional process, not merely a technical-rational one.

Notably, several factors identified by respondents relate directly to time utilization: regularity and punctuality of students, sense of responsibility toward duty, and dedication toward work. This connection reinforces the study's central concern with temporal investment as a critical determinant of educational quality. The findings suggest that teachers themselves recognize punctuality, regularity, and sustained engagement as crucial, yet public discourse indicates widespread concern about teachers' failure to demonstrate these very qualities.

Time Investment in Classroom Instruction

The question of teachers' time investment produced near-unanimous agreement among respondents, with 19 of 20 affirming the necessity and importance of adequate temporal commitment to student learning. Only one respondent, a high school teacher from Dhanusha, offered a divergent perspective, arguing that "what matters in the classroom is what activities are conducted for what purposes," suggesting that pedagogical quality rather than mere time quantity should be the primary concern.

This minority position merits serious consideration, as it highlights an important distinction between time as duration and time as opportunity for meaningful learning. Educational research consistently demonstrates that instructional time is necessary but insufficient for learning; what matters is how that time is utilized. A teacher who spends 45 minutes on low-quality instruction produces worse outcomes than one who spends 30 minutes on high-quality, engaging pedagogy. Nevertheless, the overwhelming consensus among respondents affirms the importance of adequate time allocation, suggesting that while quality matters more than quantity, sufficient quantity remains essential.

The emphasis on time investment connects to broader concerns about teacher work motivation and professional commitment. As discussed in the theoretical framework, contemporary life imposes severe temporal pressures on all professionals. Garhammer's (2002) observation that modern individuals "have to work more, sleep less, and enjoy life a bit only" and that "the pace of life is becoming so fast that's why people are trying to do things faster to contract time expenditure" applies acutely to teachers who often maintain multiple income sources due to inadequate salaries. The challenge for teachers becomes how to invest adequate time in their primary professional role when economic survival requires diversification of effort.

The 45-Minute Class Period in the Nepalese Context: Structure and Utilization

The study found unanimous agreement that the 45-minute class period, when fully utilized for instructional purposes, significantly affects student achievement. However, respondents emphasized that mere presence during the allocated time proves insufficient; the time "must be fully utilized for the sake of the intent of the curriculum." This finding highlights the distinction between physical presence, temporal allocation, and pedagogical engagement.

The 45-minute structure represents a temporal architecture designed to optimize learning by providing sufficient time for lesson introduction, content development, student engagement, and consolidation while maintaining attention and preventing fatigue. However, the effectiveness of this structure depends entirely on how teachers utilize the allocated time. The public concern documented in this study—that teachers frequently enter classrooms late and depart early, failing to utilize the full instructional period—suggests widespread dysfunction in time utilization that directly undermines educational quality.

The pattern of inadequate time utilization reportedly intensified following the restoration of democracy in 1990, suggesting that political transformation introduced new dynamics into educational institutions that disrupted professional norms. The study notes that "political undue influence in the school has affected 45 minutes of

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students' concern," indicating that teachers' political affiliations and organizational activities have compromised their professional commitments. This finding suggests that understanding and addressing inadequate classroom time utilization requires attention to the political economy of education, not merely individual teacher motivation.

Conclusion

Effective teaching emerges from the convergence of multiple factors: philosophical clarity about educational purposes, adequate material conditions and professional support, robust intrinsic motivation complemented by fair extrinsic rewards, strategic time investment, and systemic accountability structures that balance professional autonomy with performance expectations. Understanding teacher behavior regarding classroom time utilization requires attention to this full constellation of influences rather than simplistic attributions to individual character or motivation. This theoretical framework provides the foundation for investigating the specific phenomenon of classroom time consumption in Nepalese public schools, acknowledging both the agency of individual teachers and the powerful shaping influence of systemic conditions.

This study illuminates a complex and concerning situation in Nepalese public education wherein teachers possess sophisticated understanding of professional requirements yet operate within systemic conditions that constrain actualization of professional ideals. The widespread concern about inadequate utilization of instructional time reflects genuine dysfunction that undermines educational quality and student opportunity. However, addressing this dysfunction requires systemic reform that enhances both individual accountability and institutional support, recognizes the reciprocal nature of professional responsibility and organizational capacity, and acknowledges the complex interplay of factors-economic, social, political, and institutional-that shape teacher performance and educational outcomes.

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