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Research Management Cell (RMC)  
Dhankuta Multiple Campus, Dhankuta  
Tribhuvan University, Nepal

## Role of Teachers' Union in Professional Development of Teachers in the Public Universities of Nepal

Basudeb Khanal<sup>1</sup>

*Email: bashudev.khanal@mrc.tu.edu.np*

### Abstract

*This paper focuses on the role of teachers' union in the professional development of teacher in the public universities of Nepal. To date no worth mentioning impression about the activities of teachers' union in the professional development of teachers has been observed. Hence, this paper explores the affirmative role of the union in the professional development of its members. In the course of this study, in-depth interview was carried out for the collection of the data and thematic analysis was done for analysis and interpretation. The participants in this research were five leaders from different teachers' unions and two members as beneficiaries from the union. It has been found that the teachers' union works as a platform for sharing knowledge and skills among the teachers, and it also makes the existing teachers as well as the newly appointed teachers aware of the recent development in the field of teaching and learning in the global education ambiance. Moreover, the use of different available networks facilitates in encouraging the academic actions that eventually supports in the professional enhancement of the teachers.*

**Keywords:** *teacher union, professional development, university, workshop, seminar*

### Introduction

In the clear and delightful morning of December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, I reached a constituent campus of one of the renowned universities of Nepal as an Assistant Professor. I was so excited to have got a permanent job in the academic field. When I entered the premises of the campus, I heard that the part time and the temporary full-time teachers have staged in a strike against my appointment. They had an opinion that my appointment

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1. Mr Khanal is a Lecturer of Economics Education at Tribhuvan University Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal, Kathmandu.

was against their job security. This was an irony in my professional life. I had already lost my valuable six months because of the delay in receiving the appointment letter as the post of the Vice Chancellor was lying vacant in the university. The strike did not last longer than one day since the members of the teachers' union of this campus jointly took the initiation to solve the problem. They organized a valuable meeting with the campus administration and the agitating teachers and convinced them that my appointment was not against their job security. Finally, the strike came to an end.

The teachers' union of this campus was quite active in a sense. During my working period in this campus, the union frequently organized different research-based workshops and seminars to enhance the teachers' professional efficiency. Those programs were really fruitful. Different new knowledge and ideas were shared by the experts to enhance the research skills and knowledge of the participating teachers. The activities carried out by the members of the teachers' union in this campus make me feel that the teacher unions are one of the most crucial stakeholders of university for the professional development of teachers in the Nepali public universities.

Organized in union for common purpose is unitarism (Cullinane & Dundon, 2014). So, teachers are organized in union in the university to fulfil the common purpose of their professional development. Unitarism assumes that everyone in a union is a member of a team with a common purpose (Provis, 1996). So, teachers' union is always committed to assist their members for professional development. Similarly, teachers are organized in the union for the social network which helps to formulate the social capital of the teachers. Unions endeavor to build social capital among their members (Coleman, 1988). However, building social capital is challenging but possibly worthwhile since dense social networks are correlated with union knowledge which in turn is correlated with increased union contribution in the building of social capital on their members (Johnson & Jarley, 2005). Moreover, social capital is the useful resource which is formulated with social relationship through network developed by the teachers' union among their members. (Field, 2008). In this context, teachers' union can play the crucial role for the professional development of their members through the social capital formation.

This paper analyzes the activities and the role of the teachers' union in the professional development of teachers in Nepalese public universities from the unitarism (Cradden, 2011) and social capital perspective (Nissen, & Jarley, 2005). It makes the clear connection of unitarism, social capital and professional development of teachers who involve in the union practice in the universities.

There are numbers of teachers' unions in public universities of Nepal. Tribhuvan University, Purbanchal University and Pokhara University among others have teachers'

unions. These unions are major stakeholders of these universities. They can interfere in the daily activities of these universities as well as in policy formulation. Nepal University Teacher Association (NUTA) was established in 2019 B.S. with the main objectives of professional development of teacher in TU (NUTA, 2069). There are eighteen teacher unions in Nepal in the school sectors and five in the university level (Kathmandu Post, 22 December, 2014 p. 8). Tribhuvan University Teacher Association (TUTA) was established in 2058. Likewise, Nepal National Professor Association (NNPA) was established in 2064. Similarly, Democratic Professor Association (DPA) and Nepal University Progressive Teacher Association (NUPTA) were established in 2063. The teacher union's code of conduct reveals that their main goal is to assist their members for the professional and academic development in respective universities.

Most of the academicians, policy makers, administrative personals and even the general people do not have any positive notion about role of teacher's union (Toch, 2010). However, I hold a different opinion on this matter. Of course, there are some weaknesses but teachers' union are integral agency of universities for the professional development of teachers. Besides, they play a crucial role in the smooth operation of the university and in their development. Being important stake holders, the unions are playing positive role for the quality enhancement of the university. Furthermore, they also perform the role of vital protagonists when it comes to correct the wrong decision taken by the university authority. Hence, this paper tries to explore the affirmative role of teachers' unions in professional development of the teachers. I do hope that this paper of mine will be supportive to change the negative notion developed in the mind of different agencies and people about the teachers' union into the positive impression. In this context, the major purpose of this paper is to explore the role of teachers' union in the professional development of the teachers in the public universities of Nepal.

To explore the role of teachers' union in the professional development of their members, the answers to the following research questions have been searched and analyzed: How do teachers explicate the role of teachers' union for professional development of the teachers? How are the practices adopted by the unions for teachers' professional development?

### **Teachers' Union and the Professional Development of the Teachers**

Teachers' unions are formed to protect and advance the collective interest of teachers as well to assist in the professional development of their members. The process of improving and increasing capabilities of working personal through access to education and training opportunities in the workplace is professional development (Zepeda, 2013). Similarly, the union helps to build and maintain the efficiency in the working field. Moreover, it enhances the competency of employees in their

professional life. Professional development is deemed necessary for university teachers at all levels, as it helps to enhance teaching quality (Wichadee, 2012). It shows that the professional development programs organized by the union is more helpful to enhance the professional capacity of the workers in teaching and in research and publication.

The needs of the university teacher for professional development are different according to their stages of working periods. The newly appointed teachers need subject content and instructional strategies consistent with their assignments, mentoring, and skills in mapping the curriculum; mid-career teachers need training on inclusive classrooms, opportunities for cooperative work, and career counseling; and the experienced teachers need challenges for renewal, mentoring in communications technology and student assessment, and opportunities for promotions (Hinds, 2007). It reflects that there is variability of needs for professional development among the university teachers according to their stages of working periods.

Teacher's professional development produces teachers at the outset; they are then forced to become efficient teachers so that they can survive with their profession. They are compelled to form their union (association), which can keep, promote and disseminate recent knowledge of their profession from time to time (Holcombe, 2006). The emergence of teachers' unions in Nepal is related to raising their voice to protect their profession and bring the political change in the country. Besides, they are united to guarantee the professional security and professional development of the teachers.

Professional development of teacher is correlated to the teacher's own interest and the institution where s/he works. Teachers want to upgrade their position in the institution as well as enhance their working efficiency. It is possible only through research and different research-based programs like workshop, seminar, orientation programs for new knowledge and ideas for development in the academic field. Moreover, they are interested in adding to their professional knowledge and keeping up to date with relevant theory and practice in the working field. Richard, (2005) argues that "professional development of teacher is directed toward institution's goal and the teacher's own personal goals" (p. 75). Normally, institutional goals are directed to quality enhancement of educational institutions. Personal goals of teacher are to upgrade the academic status, enhance the knowledge and update on the current affairs to increase the teaching efficiency and the research capacity.

Effective professional development of teachers is an on-going process that includes training, practice and feedback, and provides adequate time and follow-up support. Furthermore, successful programs involve teachers in learning activities with their students, and encourage them to learn new knowledge and ideas that can be used

in the class room and in the field of research and publication. In this regard teachers' unions can play a key role for professional development of teachers by cooperation and coordination with institutions where they work.

Moreover, leaders of teachers' union have a great opportunity for their professional development. They are directly associated with the different academic activities and programs of educational institutions through which they can enhance their working efficiency in their working field. Besides, they advocate such programs which are integrally associated with the professional development of their members to the authoritative agency of educational institution (Rosen, 2014). Different programs related to the professional development of teachers are designed and implemented. These programs are highly influenced by the educational policy of the educational institutions. So, policy provision of universities is also associated with the professional development of teachers.

Educational policy is also related to the professional development of teacher in the universities. So, the teachers' unions are also involved in the educational policy making process. They try to address the professional development desire of teachers through policy interference in the educational institutions. Moreover, teachers' unions are engaged in both unitarism and professionalism. So, the roles of teacher unions are not confined to the traditional functions of improved working and living conditions, but expand to include participation in education policy (Barber, 1996 as cited by Kuduko, 2011). It is because of these two interrelated functions that trade union leaders can play the crucial role for the professional development of their members.

Similarly, the teachers' unions play a key role in efficiency enhancement of the teachers in their working field through different academic works such as publications, assistance on academic degree and creating academic environment for the members. This has been primarily through their effect on the professionalization of the teaching profession. Through different publications, courses, and leadership opportunities, the unions have positively contributed to instruction and teachers' sense of purpose. (Ginding & Finger, 2014). These activities assist in the professional development of teachers. The efficiency enhancement of teachers is inherently connected with the quality of teachers.

The quality of teacher is integrally connected with their various academic activities such as publication, training, workshop for their efficacy heightening. Furthermore, high quality is inevitable for the professional development. Hence, the teachers' unions examine the teacher quality issue that the union seeks to address. The union's responsibility is to improve teaching quality, come up with the policies or programs to improve teaching, provide assistance to new or floundering teachers,

the effect of peer review programs, entry-level standards for teachers, and the role of tenure laws in ensuring teacher quality (Tabata, & Griek, 1999). Similarly, research-informed practice, responsibility for educational quality and professional ethics of teacher is also integrated with the professional development of teachers.

The teachers' union is adopting an increasingly more active approach, thereby challenging the idea that the teacher union is less interested in developing and taking responsibility for the quality of education (Mausethagen, & Granlund, 2012). Quality of education is also associated with the job satisfaction of the teachers (Crawford, 2017). Job satisfaction is linked with the professional development. So, the protection of job is the responsibility of the teachers' union that also assist in the professional development.

Specifically, members of unions believe about the union's role in job protection. If the unions are able to protect the job of their members in the educational institutions, the path of the professional development will open (Popiel, 2013). Hence, from the safety of job in the educational institutions to updating the teachers with the recent development, the road of the professional development is prepared for teachers.

However, all studies have not revealed the positive role of teachers' union in the educational institutions as well as in the professional development of their members. Some studies explore the non-productive and non-academic role of the teachers' union as well. By concentrating on political activities and job security, seniority, and pay, teachers unions have lost the goodwill of many new teachers, as well as the general public. Hence, teacher unions need to change their positions on teacher appraisal, staffing, and tenure if they are to survive (Toch, 2010). It sightsees that teacher unions are more interested on increasing the salary and allowances as well as recruitment rather than academic activities to enhance the professional development of their members. But, in my experience, as well as the previous studies have explored the crucial role of the teacher unions in the professional development of teachers.

The programs and activities conducted by teachers' union for the professional development of teachers are not explored specifically in the previous studies reviewed here. Moreover, the studies did not focus on the specific practices adapted by the teachers' unions for the professional development of university teachers. Similarly, I did not find any study concerned on the role of teachers' union in the Nepali universities for professional development of teachers. So, this paper bridges such gap by exploring the specific practices adapted by the teachers' union in the professional development of teachers in Nepali public universities.



## **Methods and Materials**

This paper follows the qualitative research approach. In depth interview was used to collect the data from participants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Interviewees were leaders of different unions existing in Nepali public universities. I have selected five participants from each major teachers' union. They have been the leaders of their respective unions. Two were presidents, one was secretary and the remaining were members of the central committee. In order to collect the information regarding meaningfulness of different roles of the teachers' union in the professional development of their members, in depth interview of two participants who are associated in the union as general members was taken. One of the participants was from Kathmandu valley and the other from outside the valley.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Purpose and Resources of Teacher's Union**

The purpose of establishing any union is to channel its activities in the professional development of its members. So, this paper has explored the objectives and how much resources are being utilized for the professional development activities. The central committee member of TUTA said that "the main objectives of association is to upgrade the academic status of teacher and to assist for professional development." Similarly, TUTA also helps teachers in the university (TU) to solve the problems faced by teachers in their professional life. It is the union of the teachers who are not guided by any particular political thought. That's why it does not discriminate in the course of assisting the teachers.

The central committee member of NNPA said, "The main objectives of association are to coordinate with authority to enhance the professional status of members and to contest for professional right of teachers." He further stated that the association aims to assist its members for research and publication. The President of DPA stated that the association has two main objectives for professional development of teacher. One is related to professional right of teachers and another is academic progress. Both of these are highly connected to professional development. Professional development of teacher can be enhanced by the strengthening the teacher's rights and academic progress which is possible through unitarism (Cullinate and Dundon, 2014). Academic progress augments the teacher's knowledge, skill and efficiency in their work. Another objective of the union is to play the supportive role for quality education in university. Academic progress is most essential for professional development. The President of NUTA cited that the association's main objective is to protect and promote the professional right of teachers and to endeavor for academic progress. Correspondingly,

the secretary of NUPTA quoted that the union's objective is to support for promotion, professional security and protect and promote the academic promotion of professor community.

Every union's main objective is to assist the teachers for their academic progress and professional development. In this regard Barber (1996) also argued that teacher unions are engaged in both unitarism and professionalism. It means teacher unions do many activities for professional development over unitarism. Hence, through the unitarism teacher unions can play crucial role for the professional development of their members.

Resources are most essential things to operate union and conduct different supportive programs for professional development of teacher. That's why, this paper has shown how much resources the unions spend for different programs that support the professional development of teacher in the universities. For this, I asked every participant about the budget allocation of union in different programs.

Four unions noted that they have no fixed allocated budget for any particular program. They said that the main source of resources is the registration fee received from the members, donation received from different government and non-government organizations and some individuals. The budget is determined on the basis of the nature and the size of the program. Most of the unions do not have an actual size of annual budget, but NUTA has a huge resource compared to others. Its annual income is almost 3.5 million. It has constant source of income. The main source of income is the rent from the guest house owned by the organization and the membership fee. However, it does not allocate specific amount of budget for any programs that support professional development of teachers. From the scenario of resources of the unions most of them are not sound. However, they were conducting different programs and activities that are guided towards the professional development of the teachers.

This shows that the objective of every union is to support its members in their professional development and academic progress. To achieve this objective, every union uses the resources accrued to conduct different programs that enhance the academic and professional status of its members.

### **Practices for Professional Development**

I have explored the type of program the unions are practicing for professional development of teachers in the universities. Training, seminar and workshop are the major programs for professional development of teachers in the universities (Richard, 2005). In this context, the central committee member of TUTA stated that the union has some programs to support in professional development of teachers like journal publication in each unit committee of constitutes campuses. Likewise, the central



committee member of NNPA pointed out that the union has some programs like research article publication, interaction and discussion with experts on new issue and related to professional development. He further added that the union tries to solve the problems that arise in different campuses in coordination with the university. Currently the union is going to publish a journal on which most of the articles will be from members of the union. These types of works are really fruitful for the teacher's professional development because it increases the knowledge level of the teachers and support at the time of getting promotion. Moreover, professional goal is directly connected to institutional goals and teachers own individual goal. The teachers own personal goal is to get promotion in his/her profession (Richard, 2005). In this regard, publishing research article in journal is very crucial because the teacher get some marks in the course of evaluation for promotion. Hence, publishing research article in journal is the most contributing factor to get promotion. The publication of the articles helps to formulate social capital by connecting the teachers with other scholars in the academic world (Field, 2008).

The President of DPA pointed out that the union functions as a pressure group for quality enhancement of university and professional development for teachers. The union does sometime, interfere in the policy making process of university. Such interference is also essential for professional development of teachers. The involvement of the teachers in making the educational policy really increases the professional status of the teachers. The programs of DPA are also directed towards educational development through which the teachers can uplift their professional status (Gindin & Finger, 2014). Hence, the teacher union plays a supportive role in the professional development of its members by formulation of the proper educational policy for the universities.

The President of NUTA stated that the union has many programs such as seminar, workshop and journal publication. Similarly, policy interference in universities, pressure on authority for autonomy of university and teachers and pressure for regular vacancy announcement for promotion and new appointment are the major programs that conducted by unions. Further he stated that of late the union has completed its discussion about federalism and education in different campuses of various universities. Moreover, the union conducted a seminar on the current affair for educational development of country. The NUTA has been raising its voice for many years for the determination of the decorum ordo (maryadakram) of university teachers.

The secretary of NUPTA stated that the union is working for regular promotion of teachers, arrangement of security of profession and journal publication with coordination of university. He also stated that union has some special programs for

professional development of teachers such as seminar, journal publication etc. It was also stated that the union has recently conducted a disseminating program and an orientation of semester system in the Master's level in all the provinces. These types of program will be really fruitful for augmentation of knowledge level and skills to enhance teaching efficiency and performance in research fields as well as to make the network for academic work which increase the social connection of teachers (Coleman, 1988). Likewise, the union also support different unit committees of campuses to conduct different research programs and seminar.

### **Meaningfulness of the Union Activities**

After the analysis of different programs and activities conducted by the teacher unions, further task is to analyze the effectiveness of these programs on the professional development of teachers. I explored the effectiveness of these programs on the basis of the use of different journals published by different unions, and their efforts to assist the teachers to solve their problems.

The central committee member of TUTA said journal publication in every unit committee of campuses is very helpful because the research articles published in the journals help the members get some marks in their promotion and in making their job permanent. Further, he stressed that the union is playing a very supporting role in job placement and transfer. Likewise, the orientation program conducted by the union was also helpful as it provided guidance to many members on how to conduct research and to write research article. Hence, different programs and activities accompanied by the union were really supportive for the professional development of the teachers.

The central committee member of NNPA pointed out that the effectiveness of those programs for professional development is not so enthusiastic. However, the assistance extended by the union in placement and transfer on the basis of need and rationality has been very effective. I think the on-time placement and regular transfer from the remote to convenient area of the teachers give teachers more opportunity for study and research.

The president of DPA and the secretary of NUPTA pointed out similar impact of their accomplishments on professional development of teachers. They said that many our members are getting benefitted from group work in different campuses, and they can share ideas to each which are very helpful to enhance the skill and efficiency in the field of research and teaching. They further added that the union has conducted different interaction program through which our members are getting new knowledge and ideas in their working field. This develop the network among

our members which build social capital (Field, 2008). Besides, interaction and idea sharing are possible from side to side among our members. They are interlinked with each other because of our union throughout the country. The different interactive programs and other activities conducted by teachers' union are crucially insightful for teacher's professional development. Hence, different interactive programs, seminars and orientation programs are really helpful for the social capital earning which assist in professional development of teachers.

The president of NUTA claimed that the union has been successful in determining the decorum ordo of university teacher. Now our members identify their position in decorum ordo (hierarchy) in the 22<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> position, and this is a great achievement for us. Further he mentioned that we were struggling for this for many years, but now the teachers feel prestigious. Such feeling is one of the greatest achievements in the professional development.

A member of a union stated that he got some marks in the procedure of being permanent in the university from the peer reviewed article published in a journal issued by his union. That was so crucial for his profession. Furthermore, he established good relationship with the members of his union. Many of them are good scholars, and he can get easy help when he comes across any difficulty in the subject matter of his discipline. Similarly, another member of the other union revealed that he got a crucial help in his placement in his career. He further added that he is getting different administrative and academic support for his career development in his university. This reflects that different activities are really supportive for the professional development of the members in the university teaching career. The different practices of unions build up the social capital among members through network establishing (Soleman, 1988) around the nation that support in the professional development.

## **Conclusion**

There exists a misconception that the teacher unions in Nepali university work only for advocacy of their rights by undoing their professional works. Instead, the professional ties formed from among the teachers via teacher unions support them to enhance their professional competency or proficiency through their engagement in academic works. The unions serve as platforms for sharing knowledge and skills among the teachers. The unions are the means for making the teachers aware of newer ideas that has erupted and expanded in global education milieu. The use of networks facilitates to promote academic activities ultimately helps in the professional development of the teachers.

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