Status of Teacher Professional Development (TPD) at Secondary Level Schools

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Abstract

Education reform and the pursuit of quality education are common concerns among stakeholders showing their concern to educational development. In recent years, Teacher Professional Development (TPD) has emerged as a pivotal component for advancing education reform efforts and bolstering educational quality. This article attempts at describing the existing TPD status of the secondary level schools in Nepal. In the study, the headmasters of the four selected secondary level schools were the informants; and a survey checklist was used as the research tool to collect required data. The data were analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics. The study found that the secondary schools were quite poor regarding their performance of TPD related activities, most of them had weak TPD status. This finding led to conclude that the concerned authorities need to be more responsible to make improvements in the existing TPD situation at the secondary schools in Nepal.

Keywords: pedagogical skills, professional development, quality education, teaching materials

Introduction

Teacher professional development (TPD) is one of the pivotal elements in enhancing the quality of education and driving educational reform. An effective reform initiative encompasses enhancements not only in the physical infrastructure of educational institutions but also in the professional competence of their teaching staff. Indeed, teachers wield significant influence over the quality of education and play a critical role in the success or failure of the entire education system (Organization for Economic Co-operation and

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Development [OECD], 2002). They directly impact students' progress, growth, and overall development. Consequently, there is a growing emphasis, both in developed and developing countries, on bolstering the performance of highly skilled professional teachers and prioritizing their ongoing professional development.

TPD, simply, is a continuous process aimed at promoting the professionalism of teachers. It involves equipping them with the essential knowledge and skills necessary for effective teaching practices, thus advancing their teaching careers (Hoyle, 1980). Perry (1980) describes TPD as a journey of personal growth within the professional life, entailing the refinement of skills, confidence, and expertise through continual learning and updates. Similarly, according to OECD (2009), TPD encompasses activities geared towards enhancing an individual's abilities, knowledge, and attributes as a teacher. Jiang (2017) delineates TPD into three key components pertaining to the teaching profession: teacher training (focuses on improving classroom teaching skills and techniques), teacher education (aims at refining theoretical knowledge), and teachers' development (centers on enhancing practical teaching proficiency and cognitive capabilities). To be brief, TPD serves as a process to cultivate high-caliber teachers, fostering their professional growth and overall development, thus playing a pivotal role in ensuring educational quality. It constitutes an ongoing endeavor throughout teachers' professional lives, incorporating self-observation, training, feedback, practice, and follow-up support.

TPD is primarily focused on elevating teaching careers and cultivating professional educators. Being a professional teacher entails acquiring specialized training, knowledge, and skills to excel in the field of education. Professional teachers are distinguished by their expertise and dedication to ongoing learning and improvement, rather than solely engaging in teaching for economic purposes. They actively seek to expand their knowledge and skills through research, address contemporary issues in education, assume new roles and responsibilities, and engage in critical self-reflection and evaluation (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Professional teachers "not only have a good knowledge or expertise, but also organizing capacity for teaching activities, control capacity for discussing teaching, and guiding capacity for exploring teaching" (Jiang, 2017, p. 2). In this way, TPD is essential not only for enhancing teachers' professional development and raising the standard of teaching but also for ensuring the delivery of quality education and driving educational reform.

In Nepal, the concept of teachers' professional qualification was introduced in 1971 alongside the initiation of the National Educational System Plan (NESP). Following a span of 22 years, the National Center for Educational Development (NCED) was established under the Ministry of Education, focusing on enhancing teachers' professional growth, particularly through in-service teacher training programs (ITTP). With the implementation of the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) 2009-2016, the ITTP was expanded into a Teacher Professional Development (TPD) program, emphasizing the enhancement of teachers' knowledge, competencies, and capabilities (MOE, 2009). The primary goal of the TPD training was to

refresh and reinforce teachers' knowledge and skills to enhance classroom instruction and student learning outcomes.

TPD is widely recognized as a critical mechanism for enhancing classroom teaching methods and improving student outcomes. Through TPD training, teachers are more likely to enhance their subject knowledge and refine their pedagogical skills. With the conclusion of the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) 2009-2016, which included a TPD program aimed at bolstering teachers' qualifications and professional capabilities to better support student learning processes in Nepal (MOE, 2009), there is a growing focus among educators and researchers on exploring issues related to TPD and evaluating the effectiveness of TPD programs at present.

Recently, TPD has emerged as a significant concern for educational institutions worldwide. Recognizing the crucial role of teacher preparation and professional development in education reform, the government of Nepal has given them key priorities (MOE, 2009). As a result, mandatory training requirements and regular updates for teachers have been emphasized, with substantial investments made through initiative plans and programs such as NESP, SSRP, and the Secondary Education Support Programme (SESP) to enhance TPD in secondary school education in Nepal. However, there remains no adequate empirical studies evaluating the impact of such investments on TPD programs. Additionally, there is a lacking of research shedding light on the current status of TPD in secondary schools associated with TPD programs in Nepal. Pursuing investigative studies to address this research gap could yield valuable insights.

This study aims to investigate the issues related to the standard of TPD in secondary schools in Nepal. Its overarching goal is to depict the current TPD standard of the schools and assess the impact of TPD programs. The primary research question guiding this study is: What is the present status of TPD in secondary level schools in Nepal?

Review of Literature

A number of studies and research endeavors delve into various aspects of TPD. In this study, the researcher has systematically reviewed some more relevant literature, categorizing them thematically into different subtopics for analysis.

Professional Teacher and TPD Process

A profession can be defined simply as an occupation requiring specialized training, knowledge, and a high level of education and expertise in a particular field. A professional teacher possesses specialized skills and knowledge in pedagogy. Ur (2002) compares a professional with a layman, amateur, technician, and academic. In her view, a layman lacks certain skills and knowledge and is not part of any specific professional group, while an amateur engages in activities for enjoyment, regardless of skill level. Ur describes a technician as a skilled craftsman who may lack the ability to articulate, relate, and innovate skills. Conversely, an academic focuses on thinking and

research to refine ideas but may not directly influence real-world change. On the other hand, a professional actively seeks to improve real-world practices and is an immediate agent of change. Ur suggests that professional teachers are responsible, autonomous individuals committed to ongoing learning and scholarly dissemination. According to Richards and Farrell (2005, p. vii), teachers must engage in various activities for professional development such as:

(i)   engaging in self-reflection and evaluation

(ii)   developing specialized knowledge and skills about many aspects of teaching

(iii)   expanding their knowledge base about research, theory, and issues in teaching

(iv)   taking on new roles and responsibilities, such as supervisor or mentor teacher, teacher-researcher, or materials writer

(v)   developing collaborative relationships with other teachers

Thus, professional teachers are accountable individuals who consistently engage in self-assessment and teamwork for collaboration. They demonstrate a considerable level of proficiency, understanding, and abilities necessary for their teaching profession.

Professional teachers are consistently involved in the process of Teacher Professional Development (TPD), which entails continuous learning. Ackerman (2006) conducted a study titled "The Learning Never Stops: Lessons from Military Child Development Centers for Teacher Professional Development" to investigate the impact of TPD training on teachers' learning. Employing a qualitative interview approach, the study sampled 13 caregivers and 8 training and curriculum specialists from the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The findings indicated that high-quality teacher training was advantageous for enhancing learning outcomes. However, it was observed that many states had minimal educational prerequisites for teachers, and they encountered obstacles in accessing effective professional development opportunities.

Professional development activities should cater to the specific needs of teachers. Othman (2005) conducted a study titled "Managing Teacher Professional Development in Changing Times: A Study of In-Service Teacher Professional Development in Malaysian Smart Schools" to investigate the impact of in-service professional development activities on implementation. Using semi-structured interviews, experiences were gathered from teachers and school administrators (principals and senior assistants) of Malaysian Smart Schools (MSS). The study concluded that teacher professional development activities should prioritize market demands and needs over traditional values and morals of teacher professionalism, particularly in the era of world globalization.

TPD Indicators and TPD Activities

There can be a number of indicators of teacher professional development. Education Review Office (ERO), a body under the Government of Nepal's Ministry of Education, outlines seven indicators of teacher professional development in their booklet 'Work Performance Audit Tool-2020' (ERO, 2020, p.12) as:

i.   Measures implemented for TPD (Teachers' participation/involvement on TPD related activities, opportunities for further education, meetings/discussions organized, etc.)

ii.   Creative and collaborative work (workshop, seminar, project work, subject teachers meeting, etc.)

iii.   Capacity building work (capacity building training, resource class conduction)

iv.   Journal, bulletin, wall post, article publication

v.   Study visit (inter-school visit, model school visit, geographical visit)

vi.   Learning/study material management (daily/monthly, half/yearly newspaper/journal)

vii.   Teacher encouragement/reward

Richards and Farrell (2005) outline five key domains of teacher professional development, including subject matter knowledge, pedagogical expertise, self-awareness, understanding of learners, curriculum, and materials, as well as career advancement. They suggest that teachers need to engage in various activities across four categories for comprehensive professional growth (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 14):

(i)   Individual activities (self-monitoring, journal writing, critical incidents, teaching portfolios, action research)

(ii)   One-to-one activities (peer coaching, peer observation, critical friendships, action research, critical incidents, team teaching)

(iii)   Group activities (case studies, action research, journal writing, teacher support groups)

(iv)   Institutional activities (workshops, action research, teacher support groups)

In summary, Teacher Professional Development (TPD) encompasses both individual and group endeavors, including self-updating, collaborative and creative tasks, managing learning resources, study visits, and publication efforts.

TPD Plans and Projects in Nepal

Several national education plans and projects in Nepal have been developed with the objective of enhancing the quality of education, with Teacher Professional Development (TPD) being recognized as a crucial component within these initiatives. Notably, The National Education System Plan (NESP)-1971, the Teacher Education Project (TEP)-2001, the Secondary Education Support Project (SESP) -2003, and The School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) -2009 placed significant emphasis on TPD as an integral part of educational reform efforts.

The NESP-1971 aimed to revolutionize the existing disorganized education system, identifying various shortcomings such as a shortage of trained teachers, lack of standard textbooks, and inadequate physical resources in educational institutions as key barriers to modernizing education (MOE, 1971). Consequently, it prioritized enhancing the quality of education through improved teacher training programs and provisions for in-service training and teacher training scholarships to promote the professional development of educators.

TEP-2001 was introduced to address the issues of subpar teaching quality, ineffective learning outcomes, and low student achievements. Its primary objective was to enhance the infrastructure for teacher training and establish a robust and sustainable teacher education system (ADB, 2012). The project encompassed four key components: enhancing institutional capacity, creating teacher education programs and teaching materials, delivering teacher training, and educating teachers to better cater to the needs of marginalized groups, particularly girls (ADB, 2012). In essence, the project aimed to improve the professional development of teachers through training initiatives and the development of educational materials.

SESP-2003 was executed by the Department of Education under the Ministry of Education, with collaboration from significant educational bodies like the National Centre for Education Development (NCED), Curriculum Development Center (CDC), and Office of the Controller of Examinations (OCE). The project consisted of five main components: (i) enhancing teacher efficacy through refining teacher training curricula and delivering training in core subjects; (ii) developing new secondary curricula and textbooks for core subjects; (iii) enhancing the student assessment system; (iv) supplying learning materials, science equipment, and infrastructure for school laboratories and building extensions; and (v) bolstering the Ministry of Education and Sports' (MOES) capacity in planning, management, and benefit monitoring and evaluation (ADB, 2004). Notably, the project accorded higher importance to teacher training, a pivotal aspect of Teacher Professional Development (TPD).

SSRP-2009 was implemented as a continuation of existing initiative plans and projects such as Education for All (EFA), SESP, and Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA). SSRP aimed to bolster education reform efforts, emphasizing the restructuring

of school education, enhancing educational quality, and instituting performance accountability (MOE, 2009). A key component of SSRP was the professional development of teachers, which received top priority. The primary goal was to improve teachers' qualifications and professional skills to enhance the learning process for students (MOE, 2009).

We find a wide literature examining various aspects of TPD, which has contributed to the conceptual development and broadened understanding of the phenomenon. This literature review has provided insights into comprehending and analyzing different issues related to TPD. However, there is a scarcity of literature specifically focusing on TPD within the context of Nepalese school education. Furthermore, there remains a gap in research regarding a comparative assessment of TPD standards among secondary schools in Nepal based on TPD indicators. This study aims to address this research gap.

Methods and Materials

This section is the discussion about research design, research methods and tools adopted for making the study more systematic. It also includes the details of sampling procedures, and data analysis procedures used in the study.

Research Design

Guided by post-positivists' philosophical guidelines, this study aims at depicting TPD status of TPD in secondary schools in Nepal. Post-positivism is influenced by rationalistic, empiricist philosophy that represents mainly quantitative research. The main principle of quantitative research design is that it examines or studies the relationships between or among the variables using the numerical facts (Creswell, 2014). Under the framework of quantitative research design, this study makes use of numerical data, closed-ended questions, and facts for the discussion and interpretation of the results.

Study Site and Sampling

The post-positivists prefer probability sampling methods in which the members/items are selected randomly. In this sampling method, each member has a known non-zero probability of being selected as the sample (Mertens, 2010 Creswell, 2012, Kumar, 2011). Accordingly, out of the six districts of the Koshi zone, Terhathum district was selected using random probability sampling. After that, the smallest local government of Terhathum district, Menchyayem rural municipality, was selected as the study site using purposive convenient sampling methods. Menchyayem rural municipality, though the smallest, could be representative of the existing components and features of other local levels. Reason of this selection was also that the smaller one could be easier and more economical in terms of time, money and labor needed. All four secondary-level schools of Menchyayem rural municipality were chosen purposefully as the sample schools. The pseudonyms 'school-A, school-B, school-C, and school-D' were assigned to these four schools for confidentiality and research

ethics (Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015). Likewise, the headmasters of the selected secondary schools, who were believed to provide required data, were requested to be the informants in the study.

Research Methods and Tools

In quantitative research, the most common tools for data collection are tests including true-false items, matching items, multiple choice items, sentence completion, ranking items, checklist, Likert-scales, and open-ended questions (Mertens, 2010). Following the quantitative research design, a survey checklist was used in the study. More specifically, a standard 'performance audit tool (a survey checklist)' with the 'TPD indicators and the Criteria of TPD standard determination' (see appendix A) adapted from 'school performance audit tool' ascertained by The Education Review Office (ERO) (ERO, 2020), was used as the research tool to measure the TPD status in the selected schools. The survey checklist was prepared carefully well to receive required information. The checklist was used in each selected school to gather TPD-status-related information from the headmasters.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

Mertens (2010) suggests using descriptive statistics, correlational statistics, and inferential statistics for the analysis of quantitative information. Statistics are useful for giving a summary of the data.

Guided by the quantitative research design, this study adopted descriptive statistics for presentation and analysis of the data. The data collected through a survey checklist were presented in the Tables. The criteria determined in the 'performance audit tool' developed by ERO (ERO, 2020) were adapted to be used to evaluate the TPD standard of the schools; and the results were described, analyzed and interpreted. The descriptive statistics, particularly, percentages and averages were used in the analysis and interpretation. Finally, the meanings of the statistics were interpreted analyzing the relations among the variables and comparing them with the past literature. The interpretation incorporated the facts collected and personal reflections of the researcher's teaching experience.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the study obtained through the survey checklist have been discussed in this section. The analysis and interpretation of the findings regarding the issue of 'TPD status in secondary schools' have been presented in the Tables, and have been interpreted.

TPD Status in the Schools

The TPD status in the school, particularly, the position of the schools regarding the TPD activities was studied using the observation checklist adapted from ERO (ERO, 2020). In the checklist, seven TPD indicators, detail of the TPD activities, and criteria of TPD level determination were included. Table 1 presents TPD performance evaluation including the information about TPD level/score of the four schools: school A, school B, school C, and

school D. The criteria of TPD standard determination have been elaborated in the last column in the Table.

Table 1:

TPD Performance Evaluation of the Schools

S N	Indicators of TPD	Detail of TPD activities supposed to be performed in the school	TPD level/ Score achieved by the schools School				Criteria of TPD level/score determination
			A	B	C	D	
01	Measures implemented for TPD in the school	o Teachers' participation on training for PD o Conduction of training and workshop o Opportunity for further education (study leave, non-payment leave etc.) o Visit to other schools o Research in group or individual o Learning materials for PD, their regularity and study o Meeting and discussion of the subject teachers o Writing and publication related to PD	3	2	2	2	0 None of the activities of the list performed 1 At least one of the activities performed 2 Two to four of the activities performed 3 More than four of the activities performed
02	Constructive works related to TPD and Teaching-Learning	o Number of the teachers involved in constructive work o Detail of the constructive work (e.g., seminar , workshop , project work , journal , magazine , article writing , subject teacher committee)	2	2	1	2	0 If none of the teachers involved 1 If less than 25% of the teachers involved 2 If 25 to 50% of the teachers involved 3 If more than 50% of the teachers involved
03	Capacity building training and resource class organized by the school	o Number of teacher involved in Capacity building training and resource class organized by the school last year o Not organized	0	2	1	1	0 Not organized 1 Less than 25% of the teachers involved in such activities

							2 25 to 50% of the teachers involved in such activities 3 More than 50% of the teachers involved in such activities
04	Publication of memorandum, bulletin, magazine, or wall magazine	o Number of memorandum, bulletin, magazine, or wall magazine published by the school in last two years o Not published	0	0	0	0	0 If none of the items of the above list published 1 If one of the items of the above list published 2 If two of the items of the above list published 3 If more than two of the items of the above list published
05	Observation tour (Tour to other school, or to the schools of the area)	o Number of the teachers given such opportunity in last two years o No such opportunity given	2	0	0	1	0 Observation tour not conducted 1 Less than 25% of the teachers got opportunities in such activities 2 25 to 50% of the teachers got opportunities in such activities 3 More than 50% of the teachers got opportunities in such activities

06	Management and regularity of the learning materials for PD	o Number of the learning materials for regular study for the teachers (e.g., newspaper, journal, magazine) Daily magazine/newspaper, monthly, half yearly, o Not managed	0	0	0	0	0 None of such materials managed 1 Regularity of at least one of such materials 2 Regularity of at least two of such materials 3 Regularity of more than two of such materials
07	Encouragement/Reward	o Number of teachers getting prize or reward for giving excellent result in his/her subject in last two years o Criteria of their selection- Best result	2	0	0	0	0 No such management by SMC 1 Such policy has been formed but not implemented 2 Such policy has been formed and at least one teacher has been rewarded 3 Such policy has been formed and more than one teacher has been rewarded
Total-21			9	6	4	6	

Table 2:

School score and TPD standard of the schools

Aspect of School perfor- mance evalut- ion	TPD indicators, Full marks and Criteria of TPD standard determination			School score and TPD standard of the schools		
	TPD indicators	**Full marks**	**Total full marks and criteria of standard determination**	**School**	**School Score**	**TPD standard**
TPD	Measures implemented for TPD in the school	3	Total full marks: 21 - - - - - - - - Criteria: 0-7 Weak, 8-14 General, 15-17 Medium, 18-21 Excellent	School A	9 42.85%	General
	Constructive works related to TPD and Teaching-Learning	3		School B	6 28.57%	Weak
	Capacity building training and resource class organized by the school	3		School C	4 19.04%	Weak
	Publication of memorandum, bulletin, magazine, or wall magazine	3		School D	6 28.57%	Weak
	Observation tour (Tour to other school, or to the schools of the area)	3				
	Management and regularity of learning materials for PD	3				
	Encouragement/Reward	3				

It can be understood from the Table that the schools were relatively more able to perform the TPD-related activities such as participating in the training and workshops, involving in further education, and participating in meetings and discussions related to PD. It is also clear that the schools were unable to carry out the publication activities and management of learning resources such as journals and other reference materials. Table 1 shows that school "A" was relatively stronger in performing activities such as conducting constructive works, managing observational tours, and rewarding the best performing teachers, while it was weak

in the activities such as making publications, managing learning materials for PD, and organizing capacity building training. Likewise, schools "B" and "D" were relatively stronger in organizing capacity-building training, but they were weaker in performing other activities mentioned above, and also to conduct observational tours, and encouraging/rewarding the teachers. School "C" was weaker in performing all such activities above, though it seemed to be relatively stronger in organizing observational tours in comparison to schools "B" and "D".

Table 2 shows the school TPD standard of the schools based on the evaluation. It also includes the TPD indicators, their full marks, and the criteria of the standard determination. More specifically, it shows the scores of four schools. The Table indicates that school A has a relatively better TPD standard. The score of this school is 9, out of 21 full marks, the school achieved 42.85%. Schools B and D have equal standards in terms of their TPD performance. These schools' score is 6, i.e., 28.57% achievement. School C has the poorest performance among the four schools. Its score is 4, i.e., 19.04% achievement. According to the criteria established, school A has a 'general' TPD standard, and all other three schools have weak TPD standards.

The general trend is that schools in the urban area are relatively better in infrastructure development and other school activities than the schools in the rural area, and it is true in this study too. It is clear from the data that school A was relatively better in TPD activities in comparison to other schools, and one of the plausible arguments behind this result could be that the school (school A) was located in a bazaar area. However, the TPD standard of the schools was not satisfactory (even the top performer (i. e., school A) had less than 50% score). Following Ur (2002), many of the teachers in the schools were just technicians (a skillful craftsman who is not able to relate and innovate skills), not professional persons. Though they performed a few TPD activities, they had weak results regarding TPD indicators, and were backward in taking part in many of the professional activities proposed by ERO (ERO,2020) and J. C. Richard and T. S. C. Farrell (Richard & Farrell, 2005).

Conclusion

Teacher Professional Development (TPD), an ongoing process aimed at enhancing teachers' capacities, is vital for ensuring quality education. TPD effectiveness can be gauged by indicators such as teacher training, qualifications, participation in workshops and seminars, journal publications, observational tours, and student learning outcomes. Upon careful examination of these indicators, this study discovered that secondary schools in Nepal are lacking in many TPD activities. Most schools exhibit a weak TPD status, with none reaching an excellent standard and even lacking a medium standard. It is imperative for the relevant authorities to take greater responsibility and earnestly address the need for improvements in the TPD status of secondary schools in Nepal.

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Appendix-A

Performance Audit tool (TPD indicators and Criteria of TPD standard determination) (adapted from ERO, 2020)

Aspect of School perform-ance evalution	TPD indicators and Total Full marks			Criteria of TPD standard determination	
	TPD indicators	**Full marks**	**Total full marks**	**Score**	**TPD standard**
Teacher Professional Development (TPD)	Measures implemented for TPD in the school	3	21	0-7	Weak
	Constructive works related to TPD and Teaching-Learning	3		7-14	General
	Capacity building training and resource class organized by the school	3		15-18	Medium
	Publication of memorandum, bulletin, magazine, or wall magazine	3		19-21	Excellent
	Observation tour (Tour to other school, or to the schools of the area)	3			
	Management and regularity of the learning materials for PD	3			
	Encouragement/Reward	3			