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Teaching Profession in Technical Education in Community Schools

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Abstract

Technical Education in Community School (TECS) is considered pertinent for the socio-economic transformation, particularly in a developing country like Nepal. Instructors of these schools are the key persons who transform curriculum into practice, however, their profession in their perspectives was hardly studied. With this consideration, this study was carried out to understand the experience of TECS instructors on their teaching profession. To attain this research objective, four instructors from the Diploma in Civil Engineering program of two TECSs were purposively selected, and a narrative inquiry approach was utilized to study the cases in-depth. The result showed that the instructors were interested in teaching in TECS; however, they were not ready to go to TECSs of remote villages. For them, the village settings lacked source for extra earning opportunities and career growth prospects. They were motivated to teach in Diploma in Civil Engineering as they could apply their prior knowledge and skills. At the same time, theoretical knowledge gained from their teaching in TECSs had been helpful for their engineering profession as well.

Keywords: Instructors' Perception, Teaching Profession, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TEVT), Technical Education in Community School (TECS), Diploma in Civil Engineering

Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) provides an opportunity for skills-based learning that aims for improving youth employment. Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) runs its constitutional schools and also collaborates with affiliated public and private institutes. The TECSs are community-based general schools that also run Pre-diploma and Diploma level programs of the technical stream. TECS, previously known as annex division, was conceptualized to provide technical education and vocational training to the youth in the premises of general secondary schools through maximum utilization of physical facilities, human resources, and administrative structure of the general secondary schools (CTEVT, 2020). Sharma (2012) stated that it is a collaborative program of the Department of Education (DoE), now known as Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD), and CTEVT on

the cost-sharing mechanism of the government and the local community.

TECS is a worthwhile program in the context of Nepal as it provides youth opportunities to enhance professional skills regardless of socio-economic and geographical phenomena (Shrestha, 2013). To implement the program successfully, instructors are supposed to be equipped with an academic degree, practical experience, and pedagogical competency. However, instructors are often engaged in classroom instruction without having work experience and instructional competencies (Bhattarai, 2021).

A study related to perception of instructors on effective teaching-learning at vocational education in eight vocational schools in Turkey by Sarikaya and Yildirim (2019) revealed that teaching and learning at vocational schools are affected by instructors' prior learning, practical experience, teaching skills, personal traits, and their professional development. Whereas, the study conducted by Koirala and Dhungana (2015) in Nepal found that salary and benefits were key factors in motivating technical instructors. The study also stated that the part-time technical instructors were demotivated basically with a feeling of professional insecurity, consequently, such schools had high turnover of the instructors. Many instructors did not prefer to instruct in technical school in the rural areas as compared to the schools in the urban area because there were fewer extra opportunities and access for further study. It denotes instructors are satisfied with their jobs in terms of their profession, but they have to be motivated through financial security and professional support as well. Emphasizing the teaching profession of technical instructors of Nepal, Kafle (2007) indicated the lack of availability and retention of well-qualified and trained instructors, relevant curriculum, and instructional materials had been the most striking problems for technical and vocational schools. It can be perceived that in developing countries like Nepal, financial facilities are the prime motivating factors for the technical instructors following their career prospects and pedagogical assistance.

The instructors feel insecure in terms of their permanency of the job; hence, their retention has been also a major challenge. The outdated curriculum and lack of instructional materials in technical and vocational schools are additional challenges for the instructors. In similar context, Tshabalala and Ncube (2014) stated that the secondary level technical instructors in the rural area of Zimbabwe felt difficulty to apply technical and vocational education and training policy in schools although they had a positive attitude toward the TVET program. Nevertheless, the students and the parents had a negative attitude toward it, hence, many students were enrolled in the academic stream over the technical stream. These findings illustrated the necessity of technically experienced instructors in TVET institutions, and the motivated instructors are to be retained. An instructor in a TVET institution is the key person in teaching-learning. He or she is an active entity who is supposed to be technically and pedagogically competent enough to articulate curriculum in practice, motivate students, and keep a good rapport with the administration as well. However, the area of technical instructors' profession has been neglected, hence such research is needed. This study on instructors' perception of their teaching profession would be beneficial to the TVET policymakers in policy formulation regarding instructors' facilities, criteria on affiliation, curriculum development, and the overall teaching-learning environment. Likewise, this study also contributes as a good source of knowledge for the researchers and TVET institutions.

Literature Review

TECS program has wide outreach to spread technical and vocational education in all parts of Nepal that is a skill development scheme integrated into the general high schools. Shrestha (2013) added that TECS is a viable scheme in Nepal to address poor, deprived, and geographically underprivileged areas because the community schools are in every local government. TECS schools play a vital role in accessible technical and vocational education in

every corner of the country.

Instructors are the key actors of the teaching-learning process, so, their pedagogical skills are to be enhanced. In this context, Kopsen (2014) argued that instructors are to be equipped with their own work experience and competence. It is also perceived that vocational instructors are supposed to portray practical skills; however, the multidimensional aspects of teaching-learning —interpersonal conditions and the challenges of nurturing youngsters with different social practices is important. Students' lack of attention and poor engagement in teaching-learning are the major challenging aspects in technical and vocational teaching. So, the instructors tend to agree more with constructivist beliefs than with direct transmission of belief. The vocational instructors' competency in practical skills and their vocational experience as mentors support teenagers with different personality traits.

Talking about different aspects of instructors' motivation, Chauhan (2017) argued that most of the technical instructors had a lack of decision-making and leadership opportunities. If the instructors are dissatisfied with their job and career; they are likely to quit their job, or become overstressed. Ultimately, it leads to poor institutional results. From the above discussion, it can be asserted that technical and vocational instructors perceive the importance of their professional development to enhance their teaching profession. The challenges result in skill mismatch, instructors' turnover and their dissatisfaction, and poor performance. Consequently, these challenges ultimately lead to poor academic and organizational results. That's why, professional development such as leadership opportunity and participatory approach are other motivational ways for the instructors' retention, empowerment, and effective performance.

In the context of Nepal, the National Education Policy (2019) addressed the requirement of a teaching license system for TVET instructors. It is a notable policy in the TVET system because teaching license for TVET instructors adds value to their teaching profession that will ultimately foster their profession as well as helps to establish a harmonious teaching-learning environment. The teaching license system pays justice to the teaching profession of TVET instructors as it exemplifies TVET instruction as a distinct occupation from general teaching.

Theoretical Referent

The study on the TECS instructors' perception of their teaching profession is concerned with structural and constructive knowledge, skills, and attitude; hence Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism theory was adopted to explain how a human construct their own perception, knowledge, and skills in social setting. TVET instructors can construct in a dual setting of theory and practice, pedagogical approach, and instructional skills through social interaction in the course of teaching-learning at TVET institutions and workshops. In the premises of the teaching profession, Vygotsky (1978) articulated through the theoretical lens that instructors can construct knowledge, skills, and attitude through social interaction within schools, project works, and professional developmental activities. Likewise, faculty visiting, supporting graduates, and collaborative teaching construct knowledge and instructional skill from their newly constructed beliefs about teaching and learning. Social constructivism theory explicates construction of the instructors' perception of their teaching profession.

Instructors also construct their own perception and develop their capacity with an assistance of a senior instructors. Regarding mentorship and rapport with seniors, Vygotsky's model of learning Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) was also adopted in this study. ZPD refers to a certain developmental zone that can be achieved only with the considerable assistance of experienced persons. Learners have a certain ability to learn or perform at the beginning, and they cannot reach beyond ZPD in a period (Wass & Golding, 2014). Similarly, instructors also achieve the zone through professional development activities and the assistance of experienced senior staffs. The

teaching profession of TECS can be made effective through participatory interaction among the instructors, mentoring mechanisms as addressed in ZPD, and professional development strategies. TVET instructors can also construct new knowledge and experience in the course of teaching, work-based learning and interaction with the students and society. In this way, with the assistance of seniors and colleagues, TECS instructors also develop their profession.

Methods

Narrative inquiry is not only the chronological sequence of unfolded events by the storyteller but also a non-chronological dimension (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Since the purpose of the study is to explore the instructors' experience in their teaching profession, narrative inquiry best fits as a method in this study. Narrative inquiry is a method that starts with the experiences expressed by the individuals. It is a process of reporting personal experiences chronologically ordering the meaning of experiences (Creswell, 2007). A narrative inquiry was adopted as it best served the purpose of our study which is to reflect the stories of our participants through a semi-structured interview. Their personal stories were transcribed and meaning were drawn in form of a story. Among the four selected participants, Participant A and Participant B both were civil engineers and male instructors from the same school. Whereas Participant C was a male instructor and Participant D was a female instructor from another school.

A narrative analysis consists of collecting personal experiences using interviews or through conversations; reciting their experiences based on narrative elements; and rewriting their experiences in a chronological sequence and integrating the participants' settings (Creswell, 2007). To meet the purpose of our study, interview and field notes were adopted as information generating techniques. The instructors' interview was taken in their settings and their personal sharing was transcribed into a meaningful story.

In this study, a semi-structured interview technique was applied as the information and knowledge-generating technique. To frame the instructors' perception of their teaching profession into a meaningful story, the semi-structured interview technique was relevant. "One of the most common ways of generating qualitative data is an interview" (Dwyer & Emerald, 2017, p. 12). Interview guidelines were prepared especially focusing on the research question. The interviews took place at participants' comfortable and convenient times. Mobile phones were used to record the conversation during the interview with their consent. Field note was also used while generating information. It was helpful to note down some of the information from the conversation during the interview.

The audio recordings of the participants were transcribed. Similarly, the themes were generated to illuminate their meaning based on the research question and literature review. The narration was interpreted in non-chronological aspects of the events to portray coherence and meaning to the narrative. Since the subject matter of the purpose did not demand chronological events of the instructors, nor information was of a particular event, hence, their stories had been narrated in a non-chronological way.

"A narrative researcher is in a dual role —an intimate relationship with the participant and a professionally responsible role in the scholarly community" (Josselson, 2007, p. 538). At first, consent from the TECS and the instructors were sought. Secondly, enough information regarding our study purpose had been provided in advance so that they could decide whether to participate or not in the research. Since the narrative inquiry is concerned with human emotions, we were concerned and emotionally responsible to espouse the principle of no harm and no risk. Pseudo names were used to consider the sensitivity of disclosing personal, sensitive, and implicit information affecting the personal identity, schools' prestige, and instructors' professional career.

Interpretation

Talking about the teaching profession in TECS, Participant A enjoyed teaching. He had been a student of Diploma in Civil Engineering under CTEVT in 2000. The teaching profession is an avenue of knowledge for him because teaching provides a theoretical base to his practical works in the engineering field. According to Participant A, engineers focus on practical works, they lack theoretical knowledge. Being an instructor for civil engineering, he was able to update the content as he had to be prepared before going to the class. So, Participant A added that teaching profession benefitted him academically and technically.

Teaching made Participant A laborious and updated. Since the school was near his home, he could utilize his morning time there. It means he was happy because he could earn extra in the morning by teaching part time in some other organization. Technical education stream in his school was in a separate building apart from the general stream. So, the participant felt that the teaching job in the school was secure and interesting. Because of a separate building for a technical stream, there is no issue related to differences between general subject instructors and technical instructors. The school is perceived as a technical school; so, being a technical instructor, the participant expressed his happiness and excitement. As Participant A expressed, if a school has a separate infrastructure for technical stream, the instructor feels comfortable. He argued that people compare the teachers from general and technical streams if both of them are run together in a premises. In the course of teaching technical subjects like Diploma in Civil Engineering, he got a theoretical base for his engineering career. He also provided examples from his practical works during the classroom and workshop instruction. Since he could update his knowledge and achieve a high level of satisfaction, he took the teaching profession as a prominent profession.

The other instructor, Participant B was also very happy with his teaching profession. He was also a student of Diploma in Civil Engineering. He was a part-time instructor. Regarding the benefits from teaching engineering courses, as a civil engineering practitioner, he stated that he was only doing a part-time job. He recalled lots of content as teaching for civil engineering course made it easy to apply theoretical knowledge in the profession and vice versa. He preferred teaching as a good source of knowledge and experience. He shared that he was also offered a job to teach engineering course in another technical school. So, he seemed very happy with the teaching profession at TECS. However, he did not take the teaching profession as a secured job. Given the scenario of remote villages, he said that experienced engineers would not go there because there would not be other opportunities except teaching. He was happy with his teaching profession at the TECS in the contemporary condition. For him, teaching in the TECS was interesting because his school had a separate infrastructure for the technical education stream, From Participant B's point of view, the teaching profession in TECS was good in city areas, however, he did not perceive it as a secured job in the context of rural area. He perceived it was not good in remote areas due to lack of other financial and academic opportunities.

Nevertheless, the third instructor Participant C did not perceive the teaching profession as a good profession. Since the technical education classes also ran in the same general school building, he expressed inconvenience because the school administration had paid very little attention to the technical program and the technical instructors. He showed dissatisfaction with the behavior and response of the school management. He uttered aggressively that they were not getting the same salary, grades, and facilities as the general stream teachers. Moreover, most of the demands of the technical education stream were also overlooked by the school management. He argued that the school management, the parents, and even the students were treating instructors teaching in technical education stream as low-graded. Participant C also expressed that they felt inferior due to this. He complained that a large

number of local people do not know about the technical education. He argued that the school did not have any strategy to motivate the technical instructors neither did they receive equal salary and grades as general subject teachers nor professional development programs. Overall, he was not satisfied with his teaching profession

The last instructor Participant D had quite a different perception of her teaching than that of Participant C. Without any plan she entered the teaching profession. According to her, the teaching profession is better than other professions. She explained the reason that she could apply her prior learning in teaching. Similarly, she also learned teaching techniques as per the different traits of the students; and she got some opportunities to participate in trainings and seminars for her professional development. She also perceived the teaching profession as a milestone of knowledge creation as other participants expressed. As per her statement, a technical instructor needs to have both academic qualifications and work experience. However, she also complained about the different behaviour from the school management between general subject teachers and technical instructors. She expressed her dissatisfaction that she was not getting equal salary as the general stream teachers, nor was there any grading scheme for the technical instructors. Taking reference from the other instructors' statements, she also uttered that the school management regarded the technical part of the school inferior than the academic one. She also was reluctant to teach in villages because there were neither good instructors nor sufficient tools and equipment in technical schools. Nevertheless, she praised the support from the coordinator and colleagues.

Mentoring plays a vital role in professional development and career growth. She started teaching collaboratively with an experienced instructor where she was supported and mentored well. She said she was able to become a good instructor with the support of the coordinator, senior instructors, and colleagues. A collaborative effort can help solve the problems and keep people retained in the profession.

In a nutshell, teaching profession in TECS provides theoretical knowledge for Participant A's engineering profession. He uses his morning time for teaching as the school is near, and he has built a good relationship. From the perception of participant B, the teaching profession is an emerging profession that keeps them updated. However, he does not take the teaching profession as a secured job. Participant C's school is also near his home. Though teaching is his primary profession, he expresses his dissatisfaction and uttered that he neither gets the government salary scale nor grades. He also doesn't feel respected in the job. On a different note, Participant D finds the teaching profession better than other jobs since she can use her prior knowledge and she is learning teaching techniques in different phenomena. Being a mother, local resident, and having good rapport among TECS staff, she is happy in the school.

Unlike general school, TECS needs to look like technical schools as expressed by the participants. When technical program is in the same premises of the general school, instructors feel inferior to the general stream teachers. Participant instructors took teaching as an exploration of their prior learning; however, they were happy to teach near their homes as they could make the teaching profession as a secondary profession. They were happy to teach in urban areas as they were doing extra earning works and getting instructional facilities which were difficult to attain in remote villages. Likewise, professional development, good rapport and acknowledgement also help create positive perception of the teaching profession. On one hand, the participant instructors were found to be satisfied in teaching in TECS as they had been teaching for a long time; on the other hand, they were reluctant to perceive teaching profession as a primary profession due to lack of financial security and social perception towards TVET education and TECS instructors.

Discussion

As highlighted by the participants, TECS instructors perceived their teaching profession in different aspects. Instructors' perceived teaching profession as an avenue of knowledge, however, they were reluctant to teach in remote villages. On the same note, Koirala and Dhungana (2015) portrayed that most of the trained instructors do not want to teach in rural schools due to remoteness and lack of opportunities. They are not provided necessary teaching materials as well. The instructors in this study were also found earning extra income as they are inside the Kathmandu valley and the TECSs are nearby their homes.

Regarding facilities and grievance handling, Participant A and Participant B seemed motivated as they uttered that the school fulfilled whatever they had demanded. They also revealed that other technical instructors were also happy with the cooperative and supportive behaviour of their colleagues. There was a separate building for the TECS program in the first school. That was another reason for Participant A and Participant B to be happy and there was no issue related to general education teachers and technical instructors. On the other hand, the technical education is conducted inside the same general school in the second school. Participant C and Participant D were not paid equal salary and facilities as compared to the general subject teachers. Koirala and Dhungana (2015) also stated that the instructors felt their salary and benefits were not adequate to support their families. Likewise, Gemeda and Tynjala (2015) also revealed their participant instructors' perception that they were discriminated against remuneration. The instructors were not only receiving less salary than the general subject instructors but also less in comparison to other professions.

In the context of Participant D, being a mother and having her job near her home, she perceived the teaching profession in the TECS better than other jobs. Though she was not happy with the school management, she was satisfied in the school because there was a harmonious relationship among TECS instructors and staff. She was not only applying her prior knowledge in her teaching but also constructed a skill for teaching effectively despite the different levels of students. It was possible due to collaborative effort. With reference to Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, learning is enhanced through social interaction. According to Vygotsky (1978), the practical intelligence of humans and animals is different in such an aspect that humans are capable of reconstructing their perception. Humans can master their attention through an indicative function of words and are able of creating new structural centers in the perceived situation. In Vygotsky's opinion, social interaction through participation in collaborative activities provides learners with the intellectual development of the attitude and the world, when they get a more skilled person (Bozkurt, 2017 as cited in Rogoff, 1999). In a similar way, Participant D constructed teaching skills and knowledge with the assistance of the senior instructor and the coordinator. Similarly, Participant D's experience can be exemplified through Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept that is a certain developmental zone that can be achieved with the considerable assistance of the experienced person. Persons have a certain capacity of learning at the beginning, and they cannot reach beyond ZPD in a period (Wass & Golding, 2014). Mentoring is necessary for professional growth and for good rapport as Participant D expressed. As pointed out the challenges by Kafle (2007) there is a lack of retention of well-qualified and trained instructors in TVET institutions. Senior instructors have to train or mentor junior instructors to reach the zone of proximal development. Likewise, as the instructors narrated, well-qualified instructors are to be retained through justifiable salary and benefits as well as good rapport.

On the same note, though Participant C was also in the same TECS, he was found unsatisfied. His voice was not heard. Technical instructors were treated inferior than the general school teachers in terms of salary and benefits. Participant C also had a complaint

that the school management did not respond to their demands. As he informed, they had not managed an in-charge and office helper for the TECS. Likewise, he did not get any chance for professional development or refreshment activities which are a major component to reinforce the staff towards teaching and learning. Shah et al. (2012) also concluded the similar result that instructors' participation in the decision-making process and performance recognition can make them more reinforced and enthusiastic towards working in the institution. Instructors can participate in the decision-making process and their performance is to be recognized to motivate them toward teaching-learning. And they will take the teaching profession as a prime job and feel proud of being a technical instructor in the TECS.

Instructors' perception is affected by the infrastructure and behavior of school management. The technical instructors were happier when a separate infrastructure was there for TECS apart from the general school. They perceived positively among all the staff and the school management and did not feel discriminated. On the other hand, technical instructors of those TECSs were not satisfied where the TECS program was in the same building as the general school. TECS instructors were found to be happy when they could apply their prior knowledge in teaching.

Conclusion

Diploma in Civil Engineering aims to prepare middle-level workforce in the engineering field. Competent instructors implement knowledge and skill actively. Their positive perception of the teaching profession motivates students and maintains a healthy teaching-learning environment. Teaching in TECS is avenue of knowledge production and dissemination. Instructors can implement their prior knowledge and skill; gain theoretical foundations for their profession and learn to deal with different levels of students and colleagues. Instructors' retention produces positive outcomes regarding students' result and their motivation.

TECS can have a separate infrastructure apart from the general school to have a technical school influence. Technical instructors of TECS are motivated when they are paid equal remunerations and get recognition like general school teachers; when there is a technical teaching-learning environment; good rapport among management and colleagues; extra income opportunities; and ample opportunities for professional development.

Instructors' positive view toward their teaching profession contributes to the classrooms and in the workshops. As the instructors are key stakeholders of education system, they are to be motivated as expressed by the participant instructors. This study contributes knowledge to the TECS to maintain equality in salaries and facilities to both technical and general subject teachers and keep a good rapport. It also provides insights into promoting the program and creating a technical impact of the school in the community.

This study could be beneficial to the future researchers to explore different aspects of TECS instructors. This study only attempted to narrate the participant instructors' perception on their teaching profession in Diploma in Civil Engineering program in TECS using the semi-structured interview. Their experience in curriculum, pedagogy, teaching-learning environment, and work-based learning are the new areas of the study for the future researchers.

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