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Technical Education in Community Schools (TECS) Instructors' Experience in their Retention: A Narrative Study

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Abstract

This empirical paper aims to explore the Technical Education in Community Schools (TECS) instructors' experiences in their retention. Three TECS instructors from the Kathmandu valley were purposively interviewed to extract their in-depth information. A narrative inquiry method was used to explore the research participants' lived experiences about their teaching profession along with the various aspects of their retention. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene factor theory was adopted to overview the instructors' retention at TECS. The study revealed that retention of the instructors is a matter of personal and professional concern. Due to low pay and no provision for job security, those instructors who were only involved in teaching were not satisfied. On the other hand, instructors were happy with their teaching professions as they were applying theoretical knowledge to their practical fields. A flexible working environment, a bureaucratic hurdles-free system, an updated curriculum with appropriate tools and equipment, and professional development opportunities are to be considered for the instructors' retention at TECS. In a nutshell, TECS instructors' retention is contextual and depends on working conditions, financial benefits, job security, and professional development opportunities.

Keywords: job security, professional development, retention, TECS instructors, working environment

Introduction

Technical and vocational education is an essential field of education which is directly linked to employability. Teachers are those who materialize the curriculum into practice in the classroom and workshop as well as inspiring students to attain learning objectives. That's why it can be said that teachers are the center of teaching-learning activities regardless of school setting. In technical and vocational institutions,

instructors are expected to be academically and professionally sound. Comparatively, finding technical instructors is challenging than general subject teachers. Only qualified and committed teachers or instructors can produce good students who can contribute as good human resources for the country. Thus, retaining qualified and talented teachers in school is crucial (Tehseen & Hadi, 2015). Role of teachers or instructors is vital in an educational

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institution, and they can impact the development of a country by preparing skillful human resources with competitive skills and civic values.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) instructors are to be retained and motivated in TVET institutions as there is a high challenge to recruit them. TVET instructors are expected to be qualified academically and occupationally. The poor performance of such instructors can lead to various problems in TVET schools such as students' dissatisfaction, dropout of students, and delay in learning delivery (Tehseen & Hadi, 2015). When an instructor performs poorly, it can leave a bad impact on students' learning and the whole teaching-learning activities. Therefore, qualified, talented, and experienced instructors are needed in TVET institutions. The major problems in retaining instructors in institutions are lack of standard pay scale and financial benefits, opportunities for professional development, poor work life, and heavy workload (Sultangaliyeva, 2019). It is a personal preference that some instructors emphasize financial aspects whereas some thrive for learning and growth opportunities. Likewise, some instructors view their profession through family and social aspects. Instructors' work efficiency is executed when they are satisfied.

In the context of Nepal, TECS instructors are not getting equal salary and benefits in comparison to teachers from the general schools (Ghaju, 2021). When there is discrimination, TECS instructors may not be satisfied and perform well. Likewise, they may not be retained for a long time, and their focus will be on seeking other opportunities rather than on their teaching profession. It affects the whole teaching learning activities of the TECS and it directly hampers students' learning outcome and their own professional growth. TECS instructors cannot be updated and cannot perform their jobs as per the market trend in the absence of professional development opportunities, hence it is also a major reason behind their retention issue. And frequent turnover of the instructors creates burden in human resource management; questionable in institutional trust; and disturbance in teaching

learning activities.

Technical Education in Community School (TECS), a type of TVET schools, is merged with general community schools as a cost-effective skill development scheme to utilize the locally available resources and facilitate the access of people, especially from rural areas, in TVET. To provide access to TVET in all over the country at minimum cost, TECS is a good option as affiliated private institutes charge high fee and CTEVT's constituent and partnership schools cannot address the demand of the Nepali youths from all the nooks and corners. TECS is embedded in the general secondary schools, and is designed to utilize the available human resources, administration, lab, library, and infrastructure. The purpose of this paper is to explore the TVET instructors' experience in their teaching profession and different aspects of their retention in Technical Education in Community Schools (TECS). To attain the purpose of the paper, a research question - how the instructors narrate the various aspects of their retention in TECS - was formulated. The study is needed in this regard because technical and vocational education demands high investment due to physical infrastructure, tools and equipment, and instructors with technical and instructional abilities.

Instructors of Technical Education in Community Schools (TECS)

Technical Education in Community Schools (TECS) is a category of public schools having both streams: general and technical. In the context of Nepal, TECS is a viable scheme as it addresses the economically poor and geographically underprivileged youth (Shrestha, 2013). Since public schools are affordable and available in most of the local municipalities, there is a high likelihood of access to technical education for all. TECS is conceptualized as a modality to implement technical education in general schools for the maximum utilization of physical infrastructure, resources, teaching and non-teaching staff, school management, and the social recognition of the public school (CTEVT, 2020, as cited in Ghaju & Bhattarai, 2021). Therefore, TECS is a viable program for developing countries like

Nepal to uplift the deprived community through technical education.

In a study of Zimbabwe, Ncube and Tshabalala (2014) find that teachers in rural secondary schools have positive attitude toward the TVET program, however, due to lack of practical skills, they face challenges to link students with industries. Inadequate financial resources, tools and equipment create challenges in teaching learning activities. It is also highlighted in the study by Kopsen (2014) that vocational teachers are to be equipped with own vocational experiences and competencies. As a result, Chauhan (2017) concludes that, if the faculty members and teachers are not satisfied with their institutions and their jobs, there is a high chance of leaving their job or irregularity or overstressed. Ultimately, it leads to a poor institutional result and minimal learning outcomes.

There are two types of teachers in technical schools of Nepal, general and technical, both teachers may have experienced their jobs differently. As per the study done by Ghaju (2021), even technical instructors of TECS experiences are different from one another even if they are in the same premises of the general school. His study found that TECS instructors were more satisfied with separate infrastructure because general subject students used to make noise during outdoor practical work, inferior perspectives of school administration to technical education, and discrimination in salary, benefits and professional development opportunities. It shows school administration's biasness towards technical education despite the fact that both streams are running under the same premises. Being TECS a viable program, retention of the instructors is quite challenging.

Retaining Instructors is Challenging

There are various reasons for failure to retain qualified instructors in TVET institutions, it is an individual matter and contextual. Most of the instructors choose the teaching profession themselves, however, many of them cannot cope with the issues like a heavy workload, students' disciplinary problems, and stakeholders' ambiguous expectations in the TVET system. Instructors are to be understood and motivated to retain them in their chosen

profession and make them optimistic about their teaching profession and career (Omar et al., 2018). Since instructors themselves choose the teaching profession in many cases, they are to be satisfied and retained in TVET institutions for the growth of schools, students and instructors as well.

In general, financial benefits are the main elements that satisfy instructors. Pay satisfaction includes salary add-ons and incentives which play a vital role in the retention of the instructors (Pfeffer, 1998, as cited in Sultangaliyeva, 2019). Likewise, due to heavy workload, the instructors cannot balance their personal and professional life which is another hindrance in the retention of instructors. Similarly, when instructors get opportunities to enhance personal and professional development, they are likely to remain in the institution (Horwitz et al., 2003, as cited in Sultangaliyeva, 2019). In the context of Nepal, retention of the instructors mostly depends on financial benefits followed by personal and professional development and work-life balance.

Motivation-Hygiene Theoretical Perspective

Instructors' retention is interconnected with their personal and professional motivation. Thus, Frederic Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory has been adopted as a lens for this study. As per Herzberg (1968), human satisfaction is affected by two factors - the motivator and hygiene. Where motivators are regarded as the intrinsic factors like their achievement, recognition, personal development, and promotion; on the other hand, hygiene factors are denoted as extrinsic factors such as institutional policy, management, supervision, salary and benefits, job security, and work environment. Motivators are known as the primary factor for satisfaction; however, their absence may not cause dissatisfaction, whereas hygiene factors play a key role to avoid dissatisfaction. Taking a reference from Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory, Lalwani and Lalwani (2017) state that motivators and hygiene factors affect staff's job satisfaction as well as their retention in the organization. Personal development and achievement as motivators lead to job

satisfaction, whereas the work environment and financial benefits as hygiene factors prevent staff from job dissatisfaction. In this study, technical instructors' retention depends on both motivators or intrinsic factors and hygiene or extrinsic factors. Motivators help instructors to be satisfied whereas hygiene factors prevent them from dissatisfaction that consequently retain the instructors in TVET institutions. Thus, Herzberg's two-factor or motivation-hygiene theory is suitable for this study.

Methodology

This study adopted a narrative study method to explore the instructors' experience in their retention in TECS. We purposively selected three instructors from three TECS in the Kathmandu valley as our research participants. The first participant is Mr. Ram Narayan (Pseudonym) who is a civil engineer and teaches Surveying, Soil Mechanics and Water Supply Engineering subjects in ABC Secondary School (Pseudonym) in Kathmandu. He has been teaching for more than seven years in the TECS. The second participant is Mr. Hari Shankar (Pseudonym) who is a master's degree holder in Physics and teaches Engineering Physics subject for Diploma in Civil Engineering in MNO Secondary School, Bhaktapur. He has been teaching for more than five years in the TECS. Likewise, the third instructor is Ms. Sita Maiya (Pseudonym) who teaches Highway Engineering and Water Supply Engineering subjects at XYZ Memorial Secondary School, Lalitpur. She has been teaching for about two years. We have maintained the anonymity of the research participants and the schools' names.

A narrative study was employed to elicit in-depth information from the experiences of the participants. In a narrative study, a researcher coordinates with the research participants to understand their stories thoroughly (Clandinin, 2022). We took in-depth interviews, then transcribed the information into the English language. Similarly, we coded the data based on the main ideas in the narratives of the participants. Then we interpreted the main ideas and elicited main themes through blending with literature and theory.

Findings and Discussion

The technical instructors at TECS are mostly civil engineers. They have dual roles of instructors and professionals; thus, it seems quite challenging to retain them in teaching profession for a long time. We have portrayed our research participants' narratives regarding different aspects about their teaching profession and retention in the TECS. In this section, the empirical findings from our research participants' narrations are discussed with the relevant literature and theory explicitly.

Teaching Profession at TECS

The teaching profession at TECS is found interesting and helpful for our research participants' professional growth. Theoretical knowledge that they deliver in schools strengthens their professional skills and practical experience makes them confident. Stating the notion about the teaching profession at TECS, the first participant Mr. Ram Shankar said, *"I am very happy with the teaching profession at this TECS. Since I am an engineer, the theoretical knowledge of school supports my engineering field. Likewise, my engineering experience has been a good resource for my students."* The teaching profession keeps updated to the instructors and it is more helpful when the instructor is a professional in a technical field. On the same note, Ghaju and Bhattarai (2021) also found their TECS instructors satisfied with their teaching profession as it made them studious and updated with the theoretical knowledge for their engineering field.

Regarding the teaching profession, a participant, Hari Shankar, experienced it as a challenging job to teach students of different levels theoretically and practically. In contrast, another participant, Sita Maiya, narrated a bitter experience in the teaching profession due to insufficient support for her professional development. According to the two-factor or motivation-hygiene theory by Herzberg (1968), motivation factors such as instructors' personal and professional capacity, experience, and skill can make them happy and satisfied. Whereas the work culture and institutional policy of TECS can be viewed as hygiene factors which

can prevent the instructors from dissatisfaction. Thus, the teaching profession at TECS is found interesting, challenging, and fruitful for the professional field when there is a good work culture and cooperative institutional policy for their professional development which is an essential element to retain instructors in TECS.

Instructors' Retention at TECS

Different elements affect technical instructors' retention at TECS schools. Our research participants have quite similar experiences regarding the affecting elements of their retention in their teaching jobs. In a question related to his job retention, a participant Mr. Ram Narayan narrated with joy, *"Actually, my self-satisfaction is determined by my students' achievements. Their achievement and their happiness always encourage me to stay in the teaching profession. I am satisfied with their achievement, and I reflect myself how I teach."* Mr. Ram Narayan has noble thought that the reason behind his retention is his students' happiness and their achievements. Similarly, another participant Mr. Hari Shankar also highlighted the elements which affected his retention at TECS, *"Being an instructor, I feel very valued as a professional in this community. As an instructor in this public school in a technical wing, despite some challenges from community members, I feel satisfied with the students' regularity, interaction, and happiness. The students are wonderful and hardworking and they are interested in attending my class. In many cases, I feel most of the family members and school administration are supportive, so, I enjoy teaching in this TECS."*

As per our participant, an instructor can be an example for the community, he is quite satisfied with his teaching profession due to the supportive environment and social recognition as motivators stated by Lalwani and Lalwani (2017). For Mr. Hari, working environment, students' attitudes, and recognition from the community were the major factors responsible for his retention at TECS.

Unlike Mr. Ram and Mr. Hari, Ms. Sita Maiya did not seem satisfied with her teaching profession at XYZ Memorial Secondary School because of the poor working environment.

While asking about her retention at the school, she desperately uttered, *"Retention, for me, is not just about spending a long time in the same school without satisfaction. There should be a harmonious relationship with students and administration, and they should be supportive."* On the same note, Sultangaliyeva (2019) also states that poor administrative support and lack of acknowledgements cause instructors frustrated and that leads to their dropout. Overall, the management of ABC Secondary School and MNO Secondary School had better working environments, and better rapport among students, instructors, and administration than that of XYZ Memorial Secondary School. Our research participants Mr. Ram Narayan and Mr. Hari Shankar had other jobs than teaching, thus, they did not have any issues with the salary. Whereas Ms. Sita Maiya was only an instructor in the school and as for her, there was no government scale and other financial allowances for the TECS instructors like general school teachers, so, she had another reason for dissatisfaction.

Regarding the financial facilities, Khanal and Phyak (2021) also state that salary, provident fund, bonus, gratuity, and pensions are the prime motivational factors for instructors' retention in the institution. Stating on the same notion in TECS, Ojha (2016) concludes that the major cause of instructors' turnover in TECS is to lack of salary, bonus, and allowances. From the narratives of the participants, we came to know that there is not equal pay for general school teachers and TECS instructors despite being under the same school management and premises. Technical instructors require experience in the relevant occupations as well. In this regard, they are to be encouraged through additional allowances to retain in TECS.

Overlooked Areas for Instructors' Retention

Regarding the teaching profession and various aspects of instructors' retention at TECS, those instructors are more satisfied who are engaged in other occupations including teaching than the instructors who are only involved in teaching in the TECS. While talking about the weaknesses of their teaching profession which can hamper the retention of the TECS instructors, our

research participant Mr. Ram Narayan replied, *“Though teaching is helping in my engineering practice, the curriculum of Diploma in Civil Engineering is been updated for a long. The labour market is changing rapidly, but our curriculum is not at that pace.”*

He expressed dissatisfaction with the curriculum and its implications. From the narratives of the participants, Ghaju (2021) also highlights that the curriculum of the Diploma in Civil Engineering is outdated and has no more content which is demanded in the national and international labor market. When curriculum is mismatched with the labor market that is seen in employability, thus, instructors can be dissatisfied. Regarding any dissatisfying matters, another research participant Mr. Hari Shankar narrated,

Teaching is a challenging job and quite different than our engineering works. You need to be updated and should have different levels of pedagogical knowledge and skill to motivate various levels of students. So, we expect training and professional development courses, but I got only a short training on classroom management. Due to the lack of professional development opportunities, teaching job has been monotonous. When you don't find your graduates in the labor market, you will be frustrated. So, technical instructors are to be provided professional development opportunities like training, conferences, workshops, teacher exchange programs, and incentives for article writing and further studies.

Every occupation needs updates as per time and market demand. Teaching job even needs to be more updated to align their course with the national and international labor market. There is a chance of switching jobs when one cannot get professional development opportunities for a long time. Highlighting the importance of professional development Kraft and Papay (2014) argue that providing more training opportunities to the staff leads to a higher level of retention. For instructors' retention at technical schools, their pedagogical skills are to be enhanced and updated through training and

different professional development activities.

In the matter of the weak parts of the teaching profession which can be a hindrance for instructors' retention at TECS, another research participant, Ms. Sita Maiya loudly uttered, *“Administrative workload and bureaucratic hurdles make me frustrated. There are limited resources and practical works. Due to outdated tools, equipment, and technology, I cannot provide my best instruction, so, I don't think I may remain for a long time.”* When there is a high workload, difficulty in administrative work due to bureaucratic hurdles, and outdated tools and equipment in workshops and classrooms, the instructors cannot deliver reinforcing instruction. From one of the findings of Tehseen and Hadi (2015), instructors' poor instructions lead to students' dissatisfaction, dropouts, delays in learning delivery, and hiring costs for a new instructor.

Insufficient professional development opportunities, outdated curriculum, lack of modern tools and equipment, bureaucratic hurdles, low pay scale, and unhealthy working environments were found in this study which could hamper instructors' retention at TECSs. Thus, these elements should not be overlooked while considering qualified and experienced technical instructors' satisfaction and retention.

Conclusion

Technical Education in Community Schools (TECS) is conceptualized to cater the technical education in all parts of the country at a minimal cost through cost-sharing mechanism in public general schools. Due to two models of education, general and technical, management of TECS is quite challenging. Technical instructors are supposed to be sound academically and occupationally for effective instruction. Qualified and experienced instructors with professional backgrounds can benefit from the theoretical knowledge from the teaching profession in their professional field. TECS instructors do not get equal salaries and other financial benefits like general subject teachers. Job security of the technical instructors, professional development opportunities, a good working environment through updated curriculum, relevant tools and

equipment, and recognition play a key role in retention of the instructors in technical institutions. TECS instructors are to be motivated to retain in the schools for effective and efficient teaching. Instructors seek recognition of their profession, personal development, achievement, and promotion. These intrinsic factors or motivators are known as the primary factors for their satisfaction. Likewise, instructors are also likely to expect extrinsic or hygiene factors such as good institutional policy, job security, good salary and benefits, and comfortable work environment. These hygiene factors play a key role in avoiding dissatisfaction and retaining instructors in the TECS.

The findings of this study can be a reference for the policymakers to formulate policies related to curriculum, practical works, and professional development packages for the technical instructors' retention. TVET institutions can also reflect upon their overlooked areas through this study. Likely, future researchers can conduct further research on various topics related to instructors' retention including quantitative methods, mixed methods, and case study methods. This study is expected to contribute to technical instructors' retention for effective teaching-learning activities in TVET institutions.

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