

# Exploring Continuous Professional Development of Woman English Language Teachers

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## Abstract

This study explored woman English as a Foreign Language teachers' perceptions and practice of professional development. In this research, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection from purposefully selected participants. The participants were three secondary level woman English language teachers of Rupandehi district, state no. 5, Nepal. These teachers had a proper understanding of professional development and were found to put significant personal effort into their professionalism including the training given by the Ministry of Education. In this study, I used the theory of Liberal Feminism. Jagger (1983) advocates that society as whole benefits from the public contributions of woman in general and educated woman in particular. The study contributes to all concerned stake holders including, teachers, students, teaching institutions, training centers and associations, and trainers to understand the value of professional development for woman EFL teachers, plan and provide more opportunities, and take it into the main stream of ELT discourse to improve the status of woman English language teachers in academia in Nepal.

**Keywords:** *continuous professional development, woman EFL teachers, training*

## My Experience as a Woman English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teacher

English as a foreign language teacher in general and a woman EFL teacher in particular, I start the write-up sharing my journey of teaching and professional development. In 2005, I entered Tribhuvan University as a part time lecturer. A young girl aged 22, I was assigned classes in bachelor's and master's degrees. It was comfortable to take classes in the bachelor's level as most of the students were younger to me but I felt quite odd to take classes in master's degree as many of the students were head teachers of the locality. The most obvious reason for this oddness was that I was quite young and a woman EFL teacher. Despite the hard work in content, I often felt less confident in presentation. However, I put every effort to pretend my full confidence in the class. Thereafter, I started to observe the classes of man counterparts to see the level of their confidence secretly. They seemed more confident in presentation to me. At that time, I took that as my inferior complexity and put much effort into my teaching. But at this level of my career, I realize that there was nothing wrong with me and my teaching then. I had been the victim of the socio-cultural context of my country where boys are trained to be confident and leaders since childhood whereas girls are expected to be quiet and inferior to man members in the family. I guess, I was representing the stereotypical role of a woman unconsciously in my class. Apart from this, I was a novice teacher in the campus without any practice of induction and mentoring which are very important to support and guide novice teachers in the early stages of their career. Mohan (2011) argues that "induction, plays a key role in clarifying expectations and values, attending to risk management issues, assisting adjustment to the new

work climate and providing necessary technical and professional information in order that the new staff member can become a productive and committed part of the university community” (p.85). After two years of teaching experience in campus, I became the life member of NELTA, and also an executive member of NELTA, Rupandehi. Conferences, seminars and work-shops helped me build up my confidence. I further developed reading habit of ELT journals and articles. This reading habit encouraged and enhanced my writing skill as I started writing articles and publish them in journals. Along with that I realized teaching job is challenging if one is not updated academically. Therefore, in 2019 I thought to continue for further studies. The journey of further studies kept me involved in reading, writing, researching and publishing. These activities have been very vital to grow myself professionally as an EFL teacher. Thus, my own experience of professional development led me to study the status of other woman EFL teachers and their understanding and practice on CPD.

Traditionally teaching was considered as the profession of men in Nepal. Woman in teaching were hardly found in the past. But the situation has been different now. Many woman have chosen teaching as a career although the number is still very low in comparison to men teachers. The lack of woman EFL teachers, and hence the absence of woman role models in schools, is one of the demotivating factors to lower participation of girls, and gender-based discrimination in education (Bista, 2006) in context of Nepal. Professional development of woman EFL teachers is very important to encourage more female students to get well educated and come into teaching. For this, woman EFL teachers need to be educated, mentored, and involved in different trainings for their professional enhancement.

Teaching is a continuous learning process; a teacher struggles hard to continue their professional development throughout their careers. An EFL teacher always wants to be linguistically and pedagogically better at teaching. For that she goes through additional training, seminars, workshops, conferences, publications etc. to update her knowledge and skills required in the 21st century for professional development. She is educated in three different phases: pre-service education, induction, and in-service training. However, continuing professional development is crucial in teaching because pre-service education and induction training are not sufficient for teachers (Padwad, 2011, p. 8). In fact, the field of language teaching undergoes rapid changes, what teachers know about language learning and teaching changes over time. Therefore, teachers engage in a variety of professional development activities to expand their knowledge base, reflect on their practice, and adapt or change their practice or prepare for new responsibilities (Murray & Christison, 2011, p. 195). Therefore, teachers need to expand their knowledge and update themselves every now and then if they are to continue to find language teaching rewarding. Though some teachers upgrade their skills on their own, many need to be trained. Therefore, it is the responsibility of schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions to provide opportunities for teachers to develop longer-term career goals and opportunities over time. According to Richards & Farrell (2005), “Opportunities for in-service training are crucial to the long-term development of teachers as well as for the long-term success of the programs in which they work” (p.12).

In the context of Nepal, NCED (National Center for Educational Development) conducts various training and programs for teachers in order to improve the quality of education in Nepal. The main aim of such trainings is to strengthen and update knowledge, qualification, proficiency, and ability of the teachers. School Sector Reform Program (SSRP) has the provision of Teachers’ Professional Development (TPD) ensuring the access of all in-service teachers to the TPD training of 30 days within 5 years (MC, 2018). This training only cannot be sufficient for EFL teachers’ professional development. Therefore, they have to make lots of efforts individually for their professional growth. There are many other organizations such as British Council, American Embassy, Nepal English Language Teachers’ Association (NELTA), Teacher Educators’ Society, and Nepal English Scholars’ Association that conduct workshops, seminars,

and conferences for English teachers face to face and virtually. Despite many opportunities, woman EFL teachers are found to update themselves less frequently than man teachers in our context due to house-hold responsibilities. Therefore, woman teachers of the present generation should put much efforts to bring change not only in ideology of equality but in practice at home and at work place.

If we observe the status of woman EFL teachers regarding professional development in Nepal, it is not satisfactory. My personal experience and available anecdotal evidence suggest that the main hindering factors for this are ‘time poverty’ and ‘family-work balance’ as woman are supposed to perform the processes of social reproductions from bearing and rearing children to house-hold activities although men have always done some of it too (Fraser, 2016). “Woman teachers’ participation in the in-service training courses is very nominal” (Bista, 2006, p. 161). However, teachers can create many opportunities of CPD themselves to develop their career and get professionally sound, very few woman teachers take up these opportunities and manage professionalism. In this study, I desire to explore how EFL teachers enhance their professional development in general and woman EFL teachers in particular, as woman teachers’ perceptions and experiences on CPD are found to be less explored.

The main objective of this study was to explore the perception and practice of woman EFL teachers on professional development with opportunities and the challenges that come their way. The main research question of this study is: How do woman EFL teachers at secondary level in community schools develop themselves professionally? To seek the answer of the main question, I set the following additional questions:

1. How do woman EFL teachers perceive continuing professional development (CPD)?
2. How do they narrate their experiences about opportunities and challenges of CPD in their career?

## Theory of Liberal Feminism

Liberal Feminism emerged in the eighteenth century, with a strong focus on political and legal reforms aiming to give woman equal rights and opportunities. Liberal feminists (Mary Wollstonecraft, Judith Sargent Murray, and Frances Wright in the late eighteenth century) argued that society holds the false belief that woman are, by nature, less capable intellectually than men. Such perception discriminates woman teachers in academia. The mainstream liberal feminism places great emphasis on the public world and typically supports laws and regulations that promote gender equality and ban practices that are discriminatory towards woman. Further, liberal feminists argue that society as a whole would benefit from the public contributions of woman in general and educated woman in particular. Though the area of woman teachers’ professional development is less explored I found few studies that are discussed below:

In context of Nepal, Gurung (2018) studied “Female EFL teachers and professional development: The inside stories” in M Phil dissertation. In the study, she found her participants perceiving PD very positively. They preferred informal ways of PD far better for their professional upliftment. However, they stated that higher academic degrees and formal trainings of course boost up their self-esteem and confidence. Home responsibility and gender biased social construct were the main challenges for them. However, extrinsic and intrinsic motivations played vital role to help them grow professionally. Similarly, Bista (2006) examined ‘Status of female teachers in Nepal’ in relation to teaching profession of female teachers and status of different aspects i.e., demographic, household dynamics, working environment, gender environment. Regarding the professional development of woman teachers, the study concluded that most woman teachers were either untrained or partially trained, which does not appear to be the case with

man teachers. Many professional, institutional and family reasons prevented woman from participating in training courses.

Kagoda (2014) studied “Determinants of Career Professional Development of Female Teachers in Uganda”. Data indicated that woman were still regarded as second/third class citizens in some parts of Uganda. Woman teachers in rural areas were dominated by men and traditional culture. This gender inequality had roots in the community where schools were located, explaining why even men had no respect for woman teachers. The men dominated education structures discourage woman teachers to aspire for more education and promotion. Moreover, poor remuneration which was often delayed, poor unmotivated students in large classes and poor learning environment combined with heavy domestic work were factors which regarded by most respondents as hindering factors for women teachers’ professional development in schools. Similarly, Hassen, (2016) carried out a study on “Female Teachers’ Professional Development through Action Research Practice”. The participants of the study were 23 women English language teachers of schools and colleges. The methods of data collection were teacher reflection, and in-depth interview. The EFL teachers reported that the Action Research (AR) involvement helped them develop their professionalism.

In this way, the above studies show that woman EFL teachers in South Asia do not enjoy the equal status as men teachers do. The main reason behind this is the socio-political construct of the societies that see women as inferiors and more responsible for house-hold things. However, woman EFL teachers can be encouraged to be involved in CPD through action research, reflective writing and many others types of formal and informal practices of professional development.

## Method

The purpose of this study was to explore professional development of woman EFL teachers of secondary level in community schools in Rupandehi district. This study employed qualitative approach. I took in-depth interview with my participants as interpretive researcher relies upon the research work on qualitative data gathered from open ended interviews. I used interpretive paradigm in this study which demands the researcher to be one of the participants herself and understand the social phenomena “through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 21).

## Participants

The participants of this study were three secondary level woman EFL teachers of three different community schools in Rupandehi, in mid-western Nepal. All three participants had more than half a decade experience in teaching as secondary level English teachers in community schools. They have entered in community schools from open competition of Teacher Service Commission. One of the participants was the head teacher in her school. Another participant was about to complete M Phil in ELE from a university. The third participant lived away from home as she had been transferred to a remote place. I collected data through semi-structured interviews. There were 15 questions altogether but I was flexible enough to ask many probing questions as it was research about professional development, a big area of discourse in ELT. All the participants were made sure about confidentiality before they were interviewed. The interviews were recorded digitally taking permission of the participants and then were transcribed.

## Results

Analyses of the data revealed three different themes: perceptions of woman EFL teachers on professional development, their professional practice, and challenges that come their way.

### *EFL Teachers' Perception on Professional Development*

Before entering into the main issue of the study, I wanted to get some ideas of woman EFL teachers regarding professional development. It is because, I believe that if teachers have some basic concepts and understanding about the issue then only, they can further talk about their perception, practice, opportunities and challenges. Therefore, in the interview, I began with the first question of the study to get their perceptions and understanding about professional development. In the response to the first question about the perception of professional development, one of the participants said:

*“Teaching is a continuous process; one has to learn throughout the life. It is rewarding as it helps us grow professionally. We are given TPD training for 30 days after we are enrolled in teaching in community schools for five years’ time but this is not enough for a teacher to get updated professionally. So, one has to keep involving oneself in learning process every now and then’.”*

Similarly, another participant stated:

*“Professional development for me is developing myself professionally to meet the interest and expectations of my students. Until and unless I am professionally sound, I am unable to find their interest and expectations. Though, we are trained by TPD or CPD formally twice by the government every five year but this formal training may not work for long time run therefore, we teachers have to find many ways to update ourselves personally for sound teaching career.”*

According to their views, teaching is a continuous process. Teachers keep learning directly or indirectly throughout their lives to meet the interest and expectations of the students. Training conducted by the government such as TPD or CPD were not sufficient for them. Therefore, teachers did many things on their own to sustain in this profession. Teachers can learn through Self-directed learning (SDL). SDL is “a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes” (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). Apart from the formal trainings of the government, they need to go through several practices themselves i.e., read different scholarly journals that inform about innovative teaching pedagogies and new information in the field of ELT. Moreover, they can learn from their past experiences, peer-share, collaborate with colleagues to solve the practical problems in the institutions. Furthermore, they should be involved in research works, paper writing and publications. Further, they can also enhance themselves professionally attending many trainings like seminars, conferences, workshops conducted by many other non-profit forums i.e., NELTA, British Council, American Embassy and many more scholarly associations face to face or virtually in context of Nepal.

## ***Professional Journey as an EFL Teacher***

The main focus of this study was to explore how these woman EFL teachers are developing themselves professionally. When asked about their beginning journey as a secondary level English teacher in community schools, they replied that they did not get any induction and mentoring programs at schools. Regarding this, one participant said:

*“Though there is the provision of the government giving induction program to the newly appointed teachers by the schools, I didn’t get any type of induction and mentoring from my school.”*

Another participant stated,

*“No, I didn’t get any opportunity of induction and mentoring though it was a model school of the district but I am now planning to manage induction and mentoring program for newly appointed teachers in this school where I am working as a head teacher.”*

From the above responses, it is clear that though induction and mentoring programs are mandatory for new teachers, these have not been properly adopted by many community schools in Nepal. However, these teachers did not face many problems as they had long teaching experience in private institutions before they were appointed as secondary level English teachers in community schools. But it becomes challenging for the new inexperienced teachers to adopt themselves in the school environment and teaching without induction and mentoring in the beginning journey of their career. According to Miao (2009), “The urgent problem that we are facing is that many new teachers are either not inducted at all or not appropriately inducted to meet the challenges they encounter in their early career, which can lead to other problems” (p.1). Therefore, induction and mentoring play significant role to adjust in the school environment for the new teachers.

Regarding in-service teacher training programs, they shared their own experiences. In the response to the question ‘What sort of practices did they go through for professional development after they got enrolled in teaching in community schools professionally and personally?’ They revealed multiplicity of ideas which are further thematized in the following sub-topics:

### ***Opportunities for Continuous Professional Development (CPD)***

Participants agreed that they got opportunity to get TPD training from the Ministry of Education after they were appointed in community schools as English teachers and it particularly helped them carry-out action research, plan lessons and design project work.

#### ***Regarding this one participant stated,***

*‘I got TPD training from the government twice. After getting two modules, it got over. This training particularly helped me carry out action research prepare project work, and reports. We continuously carry out action research each year, this is the system in our school’.*

Similarly, another participant said, *‘There is TPD or CPD training for teachers in the TPD centers. I got this training twice in five years’ time for 30 days. We got trained in action research and lesson*

*plan. We need to conduct action research, prepare report, and submit it to municipality per-year. It also helps us in our promotion’.*

These responses of the participants revealed the fact that TPD training of the government is the first formal in-service training of their professional journey. However, it is conducted for a short period of time. It particularly makes teachers trained in carrying out action research so that they can solve everyday problems in their classroom as well as for their promotion. Action research is highly recommended for teachers since it enables them to reflect on their classroom activities (Babcock, 2001, as cited in Hassen, 2016). Although these trainings certainly groom new teachers in teaching in the initial phase, they need to go through other activities for their professionalism continuously.

### ***Self-directed learning (SDL) for Professional Development***

Participants stated that short formal trainings were not sufficient for the long-term teaching career as many things in education go changing. Particularly, they stressed on practicing several other things individually for professional development. When I asked them what other things they carried out themselves for professional development apart from formal trainings of TPD, they came up various things as presented below:

### ***Trainings organizations in relation to Professional Development***

These participants revealed that many trainings conducted by other teacher training centers were very fruitful to them in their professional development apart from TPD. In this context one participant said, *‘I attend many trainings conducted by British Council, NELTA, The Research and Innovation Center, KU etc., time to time and these have helped me a lot’*. Similarly, another participant stated, *‘I take part in other trainings occasionally. I attend NELTA conferences and trainings. I have experience of a trainer for primary level English teachers in NELTA at Palpa and Gulmi. I also participate in some webinars conducted at national and international level’*.

This indicates that these woman EFL teachers were managing their time and were involved in other training organizations to enhance their professionalism. These organizations helped them not only to be trained but have also developed them as trainers. “The teacher associations are making their efforts in their respective countries by organizing seminars, conferences and other events” (Khanna, 2011, as cited in Gnawali, 2013, p.37). This indicates that teacher training organizations in Nepal play important role in CPD of EFL teachers.

### ***Reading, Writing and publishing***

A good teacher always manages time for reading, writing and publishing if s/he has to exist in teaching profession competing with others in present time. When I asked my participants on this aspect of professionalism they came with these ideas.

One participant said:

*“As an individual I am interested in reading, writing and publishing. I keep reading journals to update myself with recent publications. I have been writing articles these days and I am seeking the ways where and how I can publish them.”*



In this regard, another participant said,

*“Reading is very important. I manage time to read at least half an hour every day. In this lockdown period, I worked elaborately with my husband in writing a book for secondary and lower secondary level. I was asked to write some chapters. I worked as a co-author. Apart from this I write articles and have published some of them.”*

From these responses, it is found that they were involved in reading, writing and publishing to keep them informed and updated to the new explorations in the field of ELT. Furthermore, reading and writing are very important for overall development of their cognitive, emotional, economic and professional development. It is also believed that the more teachers lack these, the more hindrances appear in the classroom teaching. In this regard Suh, Wang, and Arterberry (2015) argue that “SDL is the tool to facilitate...lifelong learning” and acts as a driving force in enhancing knowledge and acquiring skills in adult education beyond the classroom context (p. 688).

### ***Challenges of woman EFL teachers in CPD***

There were many challenges that female teachers encountered. When I asked my participants about the challenges, they face they came up with the following challenges:

#### ***Responsibility at home and at work-place***

If we see the social construct of our country, women are found to be more responsible for the children than men as both the participants stressed that although they get support of their family in rearing the children, they are more responsible for them. They said these are not only the case of their family but our society wants women to perform like this. It was a great challenge of the woman EFL teachers to manage personally and professionally at home and workplace, respectively. Due to this, they had to miss many professional activities. Regarding this one participant shared her experience, *‘Once there was a webinar organized by STFT, it started at 7 pm when I had to prepare food for the family. Though the webinar was very important for me as it was on ICT, I had to miss it’*. Regarding this one of the participants who stayed away from home for her job stated, *‘I stay away from home. I do not have home responsibility, but I feel lonely here and always think about my family members and seek chances to get to them on holidays.’*

#### ***Believed to be less productive and less potential at work place***

When these participants were asked how they get treated at their work-place. They shared that they are treated as inferior, less productive, and cannot have good leadership.

Regarding this, one participant stated, *‘People think woman teacher cannot give time, she cannot perform well because she is not bold. Such circumstances force me to think that I am really inferior to them. My leadership gets questioned as a head teacher. They think that with woman teachers, they cannot work together. We are just taken as representors. ‘In this prospect, socialization theorists argue that women can perform as well as men can in schools if they are not treated unfairly or socialized into thinking that they cannot do well (Thompson, 2003). This concept of society about the woman teachers needs to be changed. Woman EFL teachers are as potential and productive as men teachers are.’*



## ***Problem of Time management***

Time management was one of the challenging factors for woman EFL teachers to balance their professionalism. Participants expressed that they always run short of time as they were equally responsible at home and workplace. It was very difficult for them to manage time to take trainings, read and prepare for classes. Regarding this one participant shared how she manages her time, *'Sometimes I wake up at 4 in the morning, prepare meal and leave for school at 6 a.m. for tuition class. So, I hardly can manage time to read'*.

Similarly, another participant said, *'I manage time to read or prepare myself after I finish my household things in the evening time. Even I have to cut off my sleeping hours for my professional life'*. The main hindering factors for this are 'time poverty and 'family-work balance' as women are supposed to perform the processes of social reproductions from bearing and rearing children to house-hold activities although men have always done some of it too (Fraser, 2016). Despite all these challenges, woman EFL teachers were making efforts to enhance their professionalism.

Though one of the participants seemed to have much time for PD as she stayed away from home for the job purpose, she seemed to perform less PD activities. The hindering factor behind this was her transfer to remote place for the job. She was staying alone for five years and was worried most of the time when she was transferred to a local school. In her vacations she preferred to meet her family instead of taking part in PD related activities. Geographical barrier was another reason that hindered her from PD. The internet service was very poor in her area.

## **Discussion**

Woman EFL teachers seemed to have good understanding of CPD and put much effort into it. Ministry of Education and other training associations played an important role in their professional enhancement. However, they reported that they have double loads as they had equal responsibility at their home and workplace. They could hardly manage time to update themselves professionally and compete with men counterparts. The situation now has been changed in comparison to past. Although, family seems a bit supportive to them in present time, the household responsibility and children again were major responsibilities. Transfer to remote place was another barrier for PD.

The society needs to be changed in the roles women and men are given in the family. The major change agent for this is education. We can bring the change in the thoughts of people and the social construct if gender issues are seriously kept in education since the elementary levels in the schools. A gender-neutral education needs to be provided to students from the basic level because gender images and roles are essential parts of any culture, hence, the manner in which the genders are depicted in the textbooks play a part in building the image of male and females in a learner's mind. As a result, schools can ensure fairness in gender which, in turn, benefits society. According to Mkuchu (2004) textbooks shape attitudes by transmitting a society's culture. Therefore, our present curriculum should come out of it and represent gender issues, female participations and their constructive roles as one of its major agendas of education to change the rooted social construct of gender discrimination. Both men and women should be taught about cooking, cleaning, making household repairs, doing laundry, washing the car, and taking care of children. Then only there won't be any type of work that is gender specific and thus women get opportunity to enhance themselves professionally. Liberal feminists struggle to remove barriers that prevent females from reaching their goals, whether in education or in the work force. Furthermore, woman

teachers need to be trained to be trainers so that they get opportunities to develop leadership in them and can also empower other woman teachers uplifting them professionally.

## Conclusion

The main aim of the study was to explore the professional development of EFL teachers. Therefore, the participants were asked about their perception and practice of their professional growth. The findings revealed that they had proper understanding about professional development and were found to put considerable efforts individually for their professionalism in addition to the trainings given by the Ministry of Education. However, they are found to be more responsible for house-hold activities. The other major challenge they faced was patriarchal society which often doubts their intellect and leadership capabilities. Another great challenge in PD was their transfer to remote places. Despite the challenges, woman EFL teachers at present were smart, career oriented and dedicated enough to compete with men counterparts. The study has some limitations about the selection of participants, and limited number of participants selected purposively. Similarly, the findings do not represent all of the teachers' perception and practice on professional development in the country. Despite having some limitations, it contributes to all concerned stake holders like, teachers, teaching institutions, training associations, and trainers to understand the value of professional development of woman EFL teachers and take it in the mainstream of ELT discourse to improve the status of woman teachers in academia.

## The Author

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