

# Teachers' Knowledge-Sharing Practices Among Their Colleagues in Community Schools in Nepal: A Phenomenological Case Study

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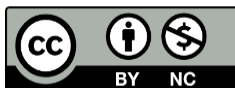
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## Abstract

This study explores teachers' knowledge-sharing practices among their colleagues in two community schools in Nepal and the hindrances of a knowledge-sharing culture in school. Utilizing and employing the phenomenological case study design, the information was collected using purposive sampling from two permanent school teachers, one female and one male. In-depth interview and observation were used for collecting data, whereas thematic analysis was followed to analyze the information by transcribing, coding, comparing, and grouping the data. The findings show that the participants' academic qualification and training increase collaborative knowledge sharing culture. However, cultural biases, workload burdens, and lack of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and weak practices of developing, searching, and sharing knowledge among the colleagues in the school were identified as the pitfalls. The study suggests that an institutional and leadership proactive role is needed to control and enable the environment to develop a knowledge-sharing mechanism and collaborative community.

**Keywords:** *collaborative community, cultural-bias, knowledge-sharing, school, teacher*

## Introduction

My decade's engagement in the present profession as a teacher educator and close interaction with teachers leads me to reflect that the teacher not only delivers the content of curriculum but also provides the adequate input to strengthen an educational culture in a school. Classroom teaching-learning is an effect of the entire educational culture. School culture is considered to be a system of meanings that influences school effectiveness (Ismail et al., 2022). The school's academic culture influences its academic environment as well as classroom

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teaching-learning. The totality of beliefs and expectations shared by the organization's members and the norms that govern the behavior of groups and people inside the organization is referred to as organizational culture (Schwartz and Davis, 1981). Therefore, school culture fosters the sharing of individual ideas, experiences, and other educational aspects which are profitable for teaching and learning.

School as a social agency affects society by large and, conversely, school culture and practices are affected by social practices. Considering the social dimension of schooling practices, teachers are members of school society but they are influenced by both organizational culture and social culture. The processes of teamwork, collaboration, and partnership are effective elements to be considered in school and society. Society infuses specific cultures into schools as miniature societies (Lawton, 1987) in sharing knowledge and exchanging information. It is also perceived as a method of expressing expertise, understanding, beliefs, and preconceptions, institutionally or individually, and knowledge sharing is critical to the survival of an educational institution (Kidwell et al., 2000). In addition, knowledge-sharing practices provide guidance to individuals; help create broad knowledge and guidance support from peers, superiors, and experts within the organization. Similarly, it usually begins with sharing among individuals, groups and organizations (Wenger, 2000; Ipe, 2003; Reid, 2003). It provides important support for individual and collective professional development by developing knowledge-sharing culture.

Knowledge-sharing is a key component of teachers' professional development where teaching as a profession is an essential component of educational change. This is an aspect of the educational process that helps promote not only individuals but also the professional development of the group (Runhaar & Sanders, 2015). When the sharing practices is coordinated among the participants, it facilitates the management of changing situations. Therefore, knowledge sharing and resource coordination have reciprocal effects on successful change management (Sullanmaa et al., 2021). Managing the dimensions of professional development and coordinating the changing situation and sharing the knowledge is useful for teachers to adjust to the development.

On the other, digital technology is a growing interest for sharing information and widening as well as expanding knowledge. Information communication technology facilitates the discovery, testing, and extension of knowledge. Moreover, digital technology enhances knowledge sharing and coordination. Increasing organizational development in technology, coordination, and communication has a significant impact on knowledge sharing within organizations (Deng et al. 2023).

Creating an environment conducive for interoperability and behavior within organizations is essential to facilitate knowledge sharing.

An organization's structure, behavior, trust culture, and values have a significant impact on knowledge sharing. Mutual benefits and reputation in organizational structures encourage knowledge sharing (Chung & Anh, 2022). Fundamental knowledge can be difficult to define and it is a context-dependent phenomenon. Individual, organizational and structural factors as well as knowledge management approaches affect its diffusion. Individual organizational structure and knowledge strategy characteristics are found in the study of organizations to indicate implicit knowledge sharing (Alves & Pinheiro 2022). Knowledge sharing is related to organizational behavior and trust. Behavior within the organization informs the position of trust. Trust refers to the state of organizational citizenship behavior that has a significant positive effect on knowledge sharing (Upadhyay, 2023; Mutahar et al., 2022). Institutional internal trust and academic climate influence knowledge sharing. Intrinsic motivation, networking, and trust influence the attitudes of academics and researchers to share in higher education institutions (Chedid et al., 2020). Institutional culture influences the structure of the organization and naturally influences the culture of knowledge creation.

Knowledge is “a process that can come about as direct transfers from one individual to another” (Savolainen, 2017) which gradually refines the intellectual process of a person. It is influenced by personal ability, institutional environment, culture, beliefs, technology, institutional sharing process, reward, and acceptance environment. However, there seems to be limited studies about the experience of teachers in sharing knowledge in the institutional environment of schools in Nepal.

This discussion advocates school as a reflection of society where school members interact with their ideas, beliefs, experiences, practices, and other knowledge. It emphasizes that a qualified teacher without commitment, a school without a healthy school culture, and a school without motivation for learning is artificial (Melesse & Molla, 2018; Hoy and Miskel, 2012). In the teaching profession, sharing is important to develop professional competencies and to effectively implement pedagogy. Teachers may have faced different professional and knowledge-based issues and challenges at the school level. This study focused on how the knowledge-sharing practices of teachers among their colleagues takes place in Nepal's public schools.

This article explores how teachers engage themselves in knowledge creation and sharing within schools and the hindrances to knowledge-sharing culture in schools. It also focuses on reducing gaps related to teacher engagement and hindrances to knowledge sharing in schools, and addresses the research question:

In what ways are schools becoming professional learning communities through the practice of sharing knowledge among teachers with their colleagues?

### Methodology

This study is based on the phenomenological case study design (Bailey & Cross, 1997) which assumes that “humans live their lives and experience of significant phenomena” (Husserl, 1970). Phenomenology is a field that aims to understand and describe human experiences, providing a profound comprehension of the nature and essence of the phenomena studied (Patton, 2014, p. 844). Furthermore, it is a way of analyzing the human mind that involves observing and recognizing informants about social reality within an educational setting (Umanilo, 2019) for knowledge sharing.

I selected the two respondents by applying purposive sampling. They are the teachers in two community schools at Gulmi. One of the respondents is a long-experienced teacher in school, a first-class-level teacher of a rural municipality and former principal of the selected school. Also, he is an extra-support resource person for the teacher training program in Satyawati Rural Municipality. The other respondent is a female teacher. She has been involved in teaching for over a decade. The first respondent has a knowledge sharing role, whereas the other respondent is the team leader of social science teachers within the rural municipality. They have experience of knowledge sharing among the teachers in the community schools within the municipality.

I took verbal consent from the respondents and explained the research objective and the use of the study while assuring the confidentiality of the information, and the use of the information without any harm. I collected the data through interview on several occasions about their practice and experiences on knowledge sharing. Using unstructured questions including a few probing questions (Hoffding and Martiny, 2015), in-depth understanding and experiences were focused in the interview. In this process, formal and informal interactions were carried out. In-depth and unstructured interviews were carried out, while especially noting the respondents' body language, facial expressions and tone of voice. The main interviews were recorded in the setting of their school. In the research, the pseudo names Teacher A and Teacher B have been maintained to keep the identity of the informants confidential without prejudice to the ethical side of the researcher. The collected information was transcribed, coded, categorized, compared, grouped under themes using a thematic analytical process (Brawn & Clark, 2006). Using the information, the findings of the study were extracted and conclusions were drawn based on the information.

## Findings

This study reveals that institutional culture and support significantly influence teacher knowledge sharing. Academic excellence, collaboration and peer support environments in educational institutions are the major key components that promote teacher knowledge sharing. The study found that social cultural discrimination, teachers' inability to access technology for searching and sharing knowledge, and passive activities reinforce low participation in knowledge sharing. The findings were analyzed under two major these: participation in constructing and disseminating knowledge and obstacles to fostering the culture of knowledge sharing.

### **Participation in Constructing and Disseminating Knowledge**

Based on the finding of this study, collaborative community, academic qualification and training are the components of institutional culture development. This suggests that positive institutional culture enhances teachers' collaborative participation that helps to generate new ideas, and constructing and sharing knowledge. Furthermore, academic qualification and teacher training are the strengthening factors which assist to develop their ideas and serve as a platform for disseminating their knowledge and ideas.

### ***Collaborative Community***

Collective participation leads to knowledge sharing. It was found that the teachers discussed and shared experiences about their collective work. This increases knowledge sharing among the support groups in school which helped in the exchange of knowledge and experience. Teacher A viewed that "knowledge and experience are constantly exchanged in school and problems are solved by discussing among colleagues. This allows gaining new experiences and transferring them to other teachers." Likewise, Teacher B reflected that "subject-wise and teaching-related problems in the school are discussed and shared between teachers." This means that the teachers collectively participate in experience-based knowledge sharing to solve professional and educational problems.

Continuity findings in the development and dissemination of knowledge sharing. The proactivity and dedication of teachers within the school create a supportive environment conducive for knowledge sharing. Teacher A opined that that "one-time learning is not forever, that is, it is necessary to change individually according to the context of time, and it is necessary to search, share, and follow the knowledge gained from the experience of others." In this context, Teacher B was of the opinion that "being interested in change is a continuation of learning, which always looks for what is new and what experiences are related to it". Thus, the sharing of knowledge and experience must be continuous to learn from others and

to learn new knowledge because teaching is continuous. It needs to be updated where teachers constantly adapt to the new knowledge and experience through the collaborative process. Continuity of learning and sharing of experience is the process of development and dissemination of knowledge.

Planning and group discussions create an environment of knowledge sharing in school. Group discussions to organize and implement plans to organize the school's educational activities create an environment for the knowledge-sharing process. Regarding school participation and knowledge sharing, Teacher B noted that:

Educational programs are planned in collaboration with the school principal and experienced teachers. The plan is discussed with the teachers and put into the implementation process. In the implementation of the plan, meetings and seminars are organized to share the experiences of the teachers. It is implemented through the exchange of experiences. It has become easier to share knowledge and experience and work together.

Likewise, Teacher A shared,

After the plan is made, discussions take place among the teachers before the work is done, the planning topics are discussed and responsibilities are given. The subject-wise discussion takes place in the meeting and most of the teachers present their experience on the related subject and the educational program is implemented.

He further elaborated that “the teachers naturally have more experience with their seniority based on their professional experience but there is no difference in subject knowledge so there is equal cooperation.” Teacher B, senior to Teacher A, expressed that, “Earlier, seniors used to be juniors based on experience, but not now.” As Teacher B reported, an environment has developed at school so that the plan is discussed equally among the teachers.

### ***Academic Qualification and Training as a Promoter***

Having necessary academic qualifications can motivate teachers in the sharing of knowledge. The teacher's competence and ability to perform the task inspires this process. Educational qualifications make it easier to exchange ideas. Regarding this, Teacher A said, “Teachers with high professional qualifications share their knowledge and experience.” Teacher B said, “There is an exchange within the school. I am also a roster trainer of the local body. In school, friends ask about their problems, and we discuss and solve them.” According to this result, higher qualifications of teachers have a positive effect on knowledge sharing within schools. Professionally qualified teachers participate in educational knowledge

sharing and problem-solving and are encouraged to share their experiences and knowledge.

As this study found, teachers' academic qualification enables and creates a favourable environment for sharing knowledge. Academic competence provides a way of analyzing and sharing content. Further, higher competence is the basis for recognizing the reality of knowledge. Therefore, academic qualification and experience help to test knowledge and develop new skills.

On the other, teacher training reinforces continuous learning and makes teachers aware of their work. Concerning this, Teacher B remarked:

The local authority conducts the training. The school decides to send the teachers on training. There is a rule of the school that all the teachers have to share their experiences after the training. We do it according to the rules of school.

Thus, the knowledge and skills gained through teacher training, discussion and exchange of ideas among teachers in schools help all teachers develop knowledge and skills.

According to the participants, teachers have adopted a new way of sharing experiences. Over time, the way knowledge is shared among teachers is different. Based on the information collected, the teachers exchange during school holidays or free time. They build knowledge by exchanging experiences from training and discussions. Furthermore, teachers also use time outside-of-school hours to share information, skills and experiences. Similarly, according to them, trained and highly qualified teachers are engaged by the local level government in short-term inter-school teaching, and exchange of inter-school teaching experience, both formally and informally. Therefore, it can be said that the teachers exchange experience, knowledge, subject knowledge, and knowledge related to teaching methods through interaction and experience in school time or vacation.

### **Obstacles to Fostering a Culture of Knowledge-Sharing**

As per the finding of this study, knowledge-sharing culture is influenced by sociocultural factors, institutional culture, teachers' awareness, and access to resources. Cultural discrimination and work burden are the factors for negative reinforcement in knowledge construction and management in teams. Limitation of skills to use information communication technology that fosters obstacles to the development of a knowledge-sharing culture.

#### ***Cultural Discrimination***

The traditional behavior supports caste discrimination. Some teachers in the school embrace different traditions and behaviors that influence the school

environment. In this regard, Teacher A said, "School is a social institution; we understand and follow the rules of the school." In addition, he said "The culture within the school is somehow affected by the behavior of the society." Similarly, Teacher B said, "Society's culture influences schools and school culture influences society. Differences depend on social behavior but are not directly visible in schools." Caste discrimination develops as a socio-cultural influence, and discrimination in schools is determined by the traditional social behavior and thinking that develops in individuals.

Gender differences affect the sharing of personal knowledge and experience. Discrimination and thinking based on social structure differentiate the abilities of individuals. Teacher B said, "School is a social institution, so there is more functional than visible discrimination, such as considering men to be more knowledgeable than women." Teacher A suspiciously talked about gender discrimination, thus, "It may happen outside, but not inside the school." When asked if there is no discrimination really, he gave a vague answer and indicated that he did not want to talk about gender discrimination. This is further indicative of the existence of gender discrimination in the exchange of experience and knowledge indirectly rather than directly within the organization.

To conclude, school is a social institution which it is influenced by the culture of the society to which it belongs. There is cultural and gender discrimination in schools. As in our social behavior, discrimination is also rooted in the structure of schools.

### ***Work Burdens***

As this study found, work burden increases the complexity of developing new knowledge, skills, and values. The workload within the school affects the value of mutual learning, collaboration, discovery, and sharing. In this respect, teacher B said:

Due to the workload of the teachers, it is difficult to build a culture of knowledge sharing in the school. Because of the shortage of teachers, we have taken excessive classes and taught other subjects than our own. Being busy with work, the partnership between teachers has become ineffective.

Teacher A said that "the institutional structure of teachers has created a situation where teachers have to bear additional burdens. There is also a lack of administrative awareness." As the workload cannot be properly managed institutionally, teachers are distant from the opportunity to work in groups, which seems to weaken the exchange of knowledge.



Institutional action is influenced by incentives. If the workload exceeds the regular work and there is no reward, negative thinking develops when there is reluctance towards work. In this regard, both of the informants seem to have the same opinion. Teacher A said, "There is a difference in the sense of responsibility to support the situation of constantly having to work but not being encouraged". Teacher B said, "There is no environment to share knowledge in school because there is no system of encouragement. A tired mentality cannot share knowledge. The motivation of teachers has not been awakened." It indicates that due to the lack of rewards, the teachers are only weakly motivated in performance and sharing of experience and knowledge.

Because of the increase in organizational workload, cooperation, partnership and collective work have been affected. In the absence of encouragement, teachers seem passive in knowledge sharing.

### ***Limited ICT Access and Skills***

The use of ICT has a prominent role in sharing and expansion of knowledge and development of ideas. This study also shows that the limited skills of using ICT among teachers has a direct impact on the access and sharing of knowledge. Teacher A said, "Not everyone in school has an access to ICT. Technical support is needed to make it possible to find knowledge using ICT. However, there is no situation to organize training in schools to make everyone skilled." In this regard, Teacher B said, "The situation in the school is complex and teachers have to learn on their own. However, the teachers want the school to conduct training." The current context of ICT is minimal as compared to its expectation due to the lack of skill, access and use.

It has been found in this study that the less user-friendly nature of ICT has affected the process of knowledge-sharing. The new methods of learning and the expansion of sharing are affected by the lack of ICT. Teacher A said, "Lack of technology limits knowledge sharing". Teacher B said that "the knowledge of technology is essential for teachers to keep up with the time, which affects all aspects of the educational process." Therefore, as the teachers are busy, they both have the same perception that there is a problem with learning technology and become a user-friendly challenge for the teacher. The limited use of ICT has an impact on the access to resources and utilizing ICT based skills needed for knowledge sharing, thereby reducing the access to knowledge. The findings shows that the access to ICT is low due to the lack of structure in schools. So, many of the teachers are not able to use it.

In brief, institutional culture and support system enhance and reinforce teacher knowledge sharing among other teachers. Teachers' teamwork and collaboration,

and academic excellency foster knowledge construction and sharing. However, sociocultural discrimination in institution, burden of work and insufficient ICT knowledge, skills and access are obstacles to the knowledge sharing process.

### **Discussion**

The selected schools were found to have an atmosphere of sharing knowledge based on participation and cooperation. The result reveal that collective participation in schools, practice of knowledge sharing and positive institutional environment develop cooperative communities of knowledge sharing among teachers. From this, we can infer that teachers share knowledge by focusing on group work, problem-solving, experience sharing, meeting and presentation, and subject-wise knowledge, to which the availability of and skills in ICT is central. Following this study, there is no hierarchical influence within the school whereas trust and positive environment do exist. This type of situation enhances the collaborative community within the schools under this study. Similarly, trust and organizational culture support a positive environment in creation of knowledge. Furthermore, there is a reciprocal relation between benefit and reputation enhancements in knowledge sharing behavior. Therefore, the findings of the study are both similar and different due to multiple associated factors (Chung and Anh, 2022) explainable in line with the theoretical assumption that supportive communities develop because of the organizational balance of power.

Collaboration helps to promote a culture of knowledge sharing with a supportive environment among teachers within and in relation to schools. These ideas could be further related to the concept of social constructivism where learning occurs as a result of interaction, discussion, and collaboration with others (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, this study suggests that teachers construct and share knowledge through teamwork, sharing, and active participation. This community of practice is based on a cooperative community founded on the sharing of teachers' knowledge.

The process of knowledge sharing is refined through an individual's educational qualifications and training. Developing academic knowledge and communication skills motivates individuals to share knowledge. The development of knowledge and skills gained through educational qualifications and training of teachers encourage the sharing of experiences among teachers. The knowledge obtained becomes refined by the activity of the individual. Teachers' being active and involved in creating and sharing knowledge is a natural process for knowledge improvement. So, what can be said is that educational qualification has a positive effect on knowledge sharing among colleagues.

There is caste and gender discrimination in schools. These differences occur in schools as a result of socio-cultural influences. The findings reflect that school is a social institution; influenced by the culture of society. Discrimination is embedded in our social behavior. It is also rooted in the structure of schools. It can be accepted that personal learning and institutional learning have a similar background. According to social constructivism, learning is influenced by the individual's sociocultural backgrounds (Schunk, 2012). Looking at the theoretical belief, the behavior of an individual or an organization is determined by its social background. Institutional learning and behavior are relative to sociocultural behavior. The study infers that discrimination between different castes and genders still prevails that affects knowledge-sharing practices. Therefore, sociocultural discriminations prevailing in schools is the effect of the given society hindering the sharing of knowledge among teachers.

The other challenges include additional workload and lack of incentives which lead to teachers' carelessness in knowledge sharing. Following this study, the absence of necessary human resources and incentives in schools hinders teachers' knowledge sharing practices. When there is overload in the working hours for the teachers, there arises lack of encouragement and then increases frustration towards teaching. Therefore, collaboration, partnership, and group work can bring ease to overcome the overload issue. In the absence of incentives, teachers seem passive in knowledge sharing. In harmony with social constructionism, which views learning as the product of active participation (Vygotsky, 1978), teachers' passiveness affects the exchange in an undesirable way. Similarly, teachers' overload somehow harmonizes with the view that the inadequacy of the reward system, management support, openness, and trust negatively influence the knowledge-sharing performance of employees (Nezafati et al., 2023). Briefly, overload and lack of incentives hinder knowledge-sharing practices among teachers.

Poor infrastructure and inadequate use of ICT hinder an access to new knowledge. Nowadays, the discovery, development, and transmission of knowledge highly rely on ICT. A large body of discovery and knowledge can be acquired digitally. Advances in technology, coordination, and communication have a significant impact on increased knowledge sharing in organizations (Deng et al., 2023). The study shows that most of the teachers are unable to use ICT and the lack of ICT infrastructure in schools shows weakness in the use of ICT. Due to the lack of institutional support and ICT use in the modern environment knowledge sharing seems to be weak.

### **Conclusion**

As a phenomenological case study, this study focused on a community school's teachers' knowledge-sharing practices among their colleagues. The findings chiefly

related mainly to the teachers' participation in constructing and disseminating knowledge and obstacles to fostering a culture of knowledge-sharing. Collaborative community and motivational calibers are positively highlighted in teacher knowledge sharing with cooperative involvement, academic qualification, and training. This study also finds hindrances to knowledge sharing; cultural discrimination, namely, discrimination of caste and gender in meaningful participation in the knowledge-sharing process. In addition, the over-burden of work and the lack of proper incentives demotivates the teachers to be involved in sharing knowledge. The limited skills and use of ICT among teachers is another barrier to finding and sharing new knowledge.

Reflecting and knowledge sharing processes are a crucial component to consider in depth. To this end, developing mechanisms in school-level institutions is equally necessary. Likewise, maintaining an equitable environment by addressing cultural biases, burdens, and the infrastructure for the use of ICT would be another consideration.

Overall, the research findings reveal that participants' academic qualifications and training increase collaborative participation in creating and sharing knowledge determines a sharing culture. However, cultural biases, work burdens, and the lack of ICT infrastructure and its use decrease the development, searching, and sharing of knowledge. The findings suggest that knowledge sharing is a complex phenomenon in professional development. Institutions need to develop their secureness promoting the knowledge developing and sharing process. Therefore, it is important to create a conducive environment by developing collaborative communities and effective sharing mechanisms among teachers.

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