

Teacher wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal: Comparing the results across the institutions

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the economic and socio-psychological comforts of teachers in varying degrees. Depending on their job status and the types of institutions, teachers have lost their jobs and faced livelihood challenges. This paper reports the findings of an online survey and focus group discussions exploring various dimensions of teacher wellbeing from both schools and universities in Nepal. The study shows that the wellbeing, particularly economic wellbeing, of teachers from private schools and affiliated colleges is shaken most as their job security is critically affected by the pandemic. Along with the job insecurity and discontinuity of monthly salaries, their stress has elevated due to an added workload for online teaching. In comparison, teachers from community schools and constituent colleges are in a comfortable position; they are regularly paid, and their job is secure despite the school closure in the pandemic. This study raises a critical question about the privatization of schooling to ensure teachers' wellbeing during a crisis. Based on the findings from this study, we argue that the government and schools should develop the systems to prepare teachers to use ICT tools and other alternative approaches to address learning needs of students during and after crises. More importantly, we suggest that the government should develop policies to create teacher wellbeing funds to support teachers in the crisis.

Keywords: COVID-19, teacher wellbeing, workload, motivation, Nepal

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges in all the spheres of human life across the globe. The education sector remains no exception. The pandemic has caused the closure of schools globally, pushing more than 1.57 billion children (90% of the total enrolled students) out of schools (UNESCO, 2020). Higher education is equally affected due to the disruption of face-to-face classes (Marinoni, van't Land, & Jensen, 2020). Educational institutions are now

using online technology as a transitional means of teaching and learning to avoid the educational loss during this pandemic.

As COVID-19 has created an uncertain and stressful situation, the issue of mental stress has been a critical topic for discussion (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020; Torales, Higgins, Castaldelli-Maia & Ventriglio, 2020). Teachers are one of the major groups who are affected most not only due to the pandemic-borne stress, but also due to the need for preparing themselves for a new way of teaching and learning during this crisis (Cutri, Mena, & Whiting, 2020; Flores & Swennen 2020). On the one hand, teaching has been a stressful job even in a normal situation (Borg, Riding & Falzon, 1991; Clipa, 2017; Bhatia & Mohsin, 2020). Studies have shown that teachers' wellbeing is affected by individual, relational and contextual factors (Acton & Glasgow, 2015), largely determined by a larger social, institutional and economic context. Researchers are concerned with the increasing amount of workload and student-related stress that teachers face in their profession (e.g. See, Wardle, & Collie, P. (2020)). On the other hand, teachers are always concerned with their own efficiency to meet institutional expectations and have the added responsibilities to communicate with students and parents. The ongoing pandemic situation has escalated teachers' workload and professional responsibilities.

Against this background, this paper reports the findings from the survey on teacher wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nepal. Our focus is on the factors affecting teacher wellbeing across institutions. We provide a comparative analysis of how teachers working in different educational institutions, private/public and school/university, are affected by this pandemic. We draw on the previous studies to define teacher wellbeing as their sense of satisfaction, efficacy and motivation. We are particularly interested in how teacher wellbeing is affected by this ongoing pandemic. We go beyond the psychological dimension and focus on wellbeing as a social, economic and organizational phenomenon. For this purpose, we have collected data from the Nepali teachers working in both private and community schools and universities across the country. We have also looked at the gender issue in teacher wellbeing.

Teacher Wellbeing and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The notion of wellbeing is complex to define. In a general sense, it could be defined as the state of being happy, satisfied and accomplished. It is "understood as to how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole" (*New Economics Foundation, 2012*). Ryan and Deci (2011) consider wellbeing as an "open, engaged, and healthy functioning" (p.47). Similarly, Dodge, Daly, Huyton, and Sanders (2012) take it as "the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced" (p. 230). For them, wellbeing is a dynamic phenomenon that emerges with the interaction between resources and challenges that individuals face. Resources and challenges include physical, economic and psychological. The state of wellbeing is determined by the amount of resources individuals have and the challenges they face. For example, if there is a lack of balance between the availability of resources and the nature of challenges, the state of wellbeing will be negative. Diener and Suh (1997, p. 200) identify three components of wellbeing: satisfaction, pleasant affect, and unpleasant affect. For them "affect refers to pleasant and unpleasant moods and emotions, whereas life satisfaction refers to a cognitive sense of satisfaction with life."

In the teaching profession, multiple factors affect teacher wellbeing. Workload, organization pressure and lack of effective interaction with students are some of them (Collie et al., 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic has created a new condition for teachers to interact with the students and take classes. While the safety issue is important, they also have to teach students by using new technological tools that they have never been familiar with. Such a sudden shift to a new condition has increased work-related stress among teachers. Allen, Rowan and Singh (2020) argue that the sudden move to online teaching has created a considerable amount of stress among teachers across the globe. They claim that:

The rapid move to online modes of delivery in order to keep students engaged in learning – from early childhood through to the tertiary sector – has led to significantly intensified workloads for staff as they work to not only move teaching content and materials into the online space but also become sufficiently adept in navigating the requisite software.

As Collie et al. (2015) argue, teachers' sense of stress is one of the major factors affecting teacher wellbeing. Two other factors include efficacy and job satisfaction. While teaching workload itself is one major source of stress, organizational arrangements and student-related workload are two other sources of stress for teachers. The pandemic situation has also increased teachers' responsibilities to learn new tools; deliver classes online; and interact with students meaningfully. Efficacy is another dimension of teacher wellbeing. If teachers do not feel that they have sufficient skills to engage students in learning activities, particularly in the online mode, their sense of efficacy will be lower. As teachers switch to the online mode of teaching, for example, the availability of smooth internet facilities and effective pedagogical skills to use ICT tools are a must. In an under-resourced context such as Nepal, teachers hardly receive strong institutional support to upgrade their ICT skills. In this context, teachers experience an increased amount of stress and dissatisfaction, which eventually affects their wellbeing.

In their recent study, Kim and Asbury (2020, p. 15) have identified two sources of stress for teachers in the pandemic, particularly in the UK context. First, the pandemic has created a state of uncertainty among teachers. After the announcement of school closures, teachers were not sure about how to address the student and institutional needs. Second, teachers were worried about the vulnerability of their students. In addition, teachers were stressed because they were not able to have contact with their students. They are not able to see and talk to their students during the pandemic. Consequently, the core value of the teaching profession—participation in meaningful interactions with the students and colleagues—has not been experienced. Moreover, the lack of work-life balance, heavy emotional labor and a sense of inefficiency in using technology have affected teacher's wellbeing. In their recent study, MacIntyre, Gregersen and Mercer (2020, p. 2) investigate language teacher's wellbeing in COVID-19 and report the main findings in the following ways:

The worldwide response has created a number of difficulties for language teachers. The rapid conversion to online teaching, the blurred lines between work and home coupled with the omnipresent concern for the health of family and oneself, has produced high levels of stress. (p. 7)

Teacher wellbeing is a critical issue for student wellbeing and quality education. Collie and Martin (2020) have argued that teacher's wellbeing "is not only a vital outcome in itself, it is a means to other vital outcomes, such as students' learning and wellbeing." They argue that teacher wellbeing contributes to better work performance which eventually results in better student wellbeing and quality of learning. Teachers who lack a good sense of wellbeing exacerbate student stress. This usually happens if teachers are stressed due to workload and lack of efficiency to deal with the teaching demands. In the context of COVID-19, two major factors shape teacher wellbeing: social support and adaptability. In their study, Collie and Martin (2020) discuss that teachers who receive social support have a better state of wellbeing. Such supports involve establishing social connections and engaging in interactions by listening to their needs. They argue that teachers in such crises should be acknowledged for their perspectives and inputs to decision-making processes. This kind of support increases teachers' skills to adapt themselves to a new working condition. Adaptability includes the ability to adjust thinking, behavior, and emotion created by the pandemic. The teachers who have the skills and knowledge and receive social and institutional supports have a greater degree of adaptability.

There are different models of understanding teacher wellbeing. Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli (2001) propose a job-demands-resource model which provides a framework to understand teacher wellbeing in the time of ongoing uncertainty. According to this model, the psychological, physical, social, and organizational demands to teach in the new context are connected to teacher wellbeing. Teachers feel stressed to cope with the new context of teaching and to make physical arrangement to teach from home. In addition, their organizations demand to contact students and do other activities to support students to learn. Resources are also directly related to teacher wellbeing. Such resources include the costs of using technological devices and personal and institutional support. Teachers need additional resources such as funds for buying the necessary devices and regular institutional support to develop the skills to use ICT tools. In addition, they need counseling mechanisms to provide individualized supports to the teachers. Such resources will motivate teachers to work hard and maintain their wellbeing.

The study

This study is carried out among the teachers from community schools, private schools, constituent colleges, and affiliated colleges in Nepal. Community schools refer to state-funded schools. Private schools, in contrast, are founded and managed as a company or trust that charges fees to the students. Similar to community schools, the constituent colleges are funded by the government, but the affiliated colleges are established by the local community or by a group of people as a private organization. Students' fees remain the main source of income for the affiliated colleges.

We are motivated to undertake this study as teacher wellbeing has become a critical issue during the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, as reported in different news, teachers are not only unpaid but also lost their jobs, particularly in private schools. In addition, teachers have to teach online classes without the necessary infrastructures and sufficient skills. In our discussions with the teachers from different regions of the country, we are told that teachers do not have access to reliable internet connectivity and other ICT devices such as laptops and smartphones. Teachers

who work in remote village schools do not have internet, TVs and smartphones to run online classes. On the other hand, teachers feel an increased social pressure to continue teaching and contact their students amid fear and uncertainty. Teachers in private schools and colleges are affected by this pandemic more seriously than those who work in community schools and colleges. As reported in *My Republica*, a national English daily, private school teachers ‘warn of taking self-destructive action if not paid soon’ (Rauniyar, 2020). In another news report, it is reported that more than 300 teachers have lost their jobs after the lockdown (Onlinekhabar, 2020). In our discussions, some teachers have said that they ‘regret for choosing teaching as a profession’ as they are not sure about the continuity of their job.

Based on our preliminary discussions with teachers, we developed an online survey to investigate the status of Nepali teachers’ wellbeing in COVID-19. We have explored multiple dimensions such as workload, balance between home and profession, learning new technologies, job security, social and economic pressure and motivation for teaching. For this study, we developed a set of questionnaires using Microsoft Forms and circulated it throughout the country when the lockdown was imposed. We used emails, social media (Facebook/Twitter) and telephone to reach out to as many teachers as possible. Our goal was to cover the teachers from both schools and universities, both privately and publicly managed. We received the responses from 1889 teachers (74% males and 26% females) between June 23 to July 10, 2020. A majority of teachers (45%) are between 30-39 years. The other age categories are 40-49 years (28%), 20-29 years (17%), and 50 years and above (9%). A huge majority (79.5%) hold a Master's degree qualification. While the respondent teachers represent all seven provinces, a good majority (46%) were from Bagmati province, the province including the Kathmandu valley where the authors are based. Looking at the institution-wise distribution, 54.8% of teachers are from community schools, 18.6% from private schools, 15.5% from constituent colleges and 8.6% from affiliated colleges. In addition to the virtual survey, we also organized five focus group discussions with the female teachers, private school teachers, university teachers, and head teachers. The recorded discussions were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results and discussion

Workload during the covid-19 pandemic

Workload is one of the major factors affecting teacher wellbeing. Workload involves the increased amount of time to prepare for the lessons and interaction with students. This study shows that there is a significant variation among educational institutions regarding the workload that teachers have experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic. As seen in Figure 1, workload due to online teaching is higher in private schools (68%) and constituent and affiliated colleges (67%) than in community schools (25%). A similar result is found regarding the teachers’ workload to establish contact with the students for online classes; there is a heavier workload among the teachers in private schools and colleges (>60%) than in community schools (40%).

During the pandemic, teachers are also involved in making institutional and pedagogical plans and programs and this adds to the workload of teachers, greater in community schools (42%) than in other institutions (>21%). As the pandemic situation has altered the teaching approach – from the face-to-face to online or hybrid mode—, teachers are required to equip themselves with

new tools and skills. As a result, more than 50% of the teachers considered workload across all the institutions due to continuous self-learning of new ICT tools. The teachers are continually involved in online training provided by their institutions and professional organizations, and many of them feel extra workload due to this condition. This burden is lower among the teachers in constituent colleges (25%) than in other institutions (>40%), with the highest among the public-school teachers (54%).

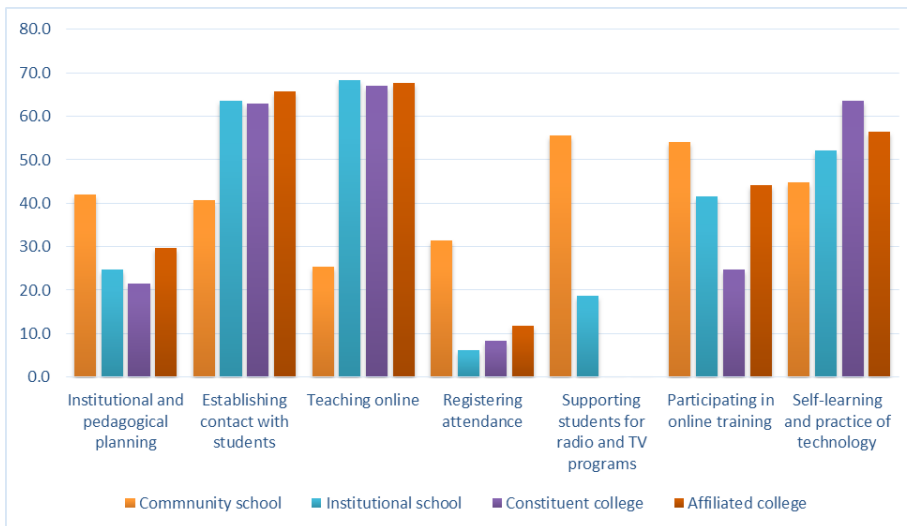


Figure 1. *Reasons for extra workload during Covid-19 pandemic*

Female teachers experience a greater workload than males due to learning new technology, facilitating students for TV and Radio programs, and establishing contact with students. Similarly, looking at the data by age, the experienced (age >40 years) teachers feel a greater workload than the younger ones (< 40 years) in learning and using ICT tools for online classes. However, the younger teachers feel a greater workload in facilitating students for the radio and TV programs than the experienced teachers.

In the focus group discussion as well, female teachers talked about their workload. For example, a young secondary level teacher said, "we are not sitting idle". She said that she is actively participating in activities for professional development; facilitating students in learning through radio and TV; and visiting communities to follow up on students learning. The study shows that the married public-school female teachers have faced a multitude of stress during the pandemic. In a focus group discussion, they said that their in-laws have viewed the school closure as a vacation. Therefore, they were expected to take care of all household works, farm work, child care, and guests. Other tasks such as facilitating learning through TV or radio programs, and following up on the students' activities were not viewed as mandated duties. In addition, the teachers in the study were also found engaged in fulfilling their community responsibilities. Particularly, the teachers from community schools and affiliated colleges reported that they were engaged in the relief distribution to the students' families and other needy people in the community, and contributed to the relief fund. They also reported that they participated in sensitizing the

community; educating the family members about dos and don'ts in COVID-19 and regularly communicating with the students through social media to keep up their spirit motivated.

The data show that private school teachers were more engaged in conducting virtual classes from home. For one private school male teacher, the break was good for to learn ICT tools and use them in teaching. He said that when his school decided to run virtual classes, his school principal asked him to make necessary arrangements to start online classes. He took this as an opportunity for learning. As he was not very well equipped in this field, he learned and worked as a technical backstop for other teachers. The school management provided the device and asked him to train and monitor other teachers.

The economic dimension of teacher wellbeing during the pandemic

The pandemic has negatively affected teachers' economic situation. The economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic among the teachers in private schools and affiliated colleges is greater than those in community schools and constituent colleges. Most private school teachers have not been paid since March when the government imposed lockdown and the schools were closed. As seen in Figure 2, more than 70% of the teachers in private schools and affiliated colleges have not received their regular salary since then, against around 27% of the teachers from community schools and constituent colleges. This is mainly because the financial situation of private schools and affiliated colleges is largely dependent on students' fees. But community schools and constituent colleges receive a large portion of the budget from the government. Around 50% of teachers from all the institutions said that their extra income (e.g. from grading answer sheets, student tutoring) has been disrupted by the pandemic. In addition, the study shows that around 30% of teachers from all institutions have to spend extra money to buy electronic devices, such as laptops and mobile and around 50% of teachers have invested in internet facilities at home (Wi-Fi and data pack). Consequently, the teachers are worried about maintaining the balance between income and expenditure. This problem is seen higher among the teachers from affiliated colleges (77%), private schools (71%), constituent colleges (69%) than among the teachers from community schools (57%). The percentage of the teachers whose economic condition remains unaffected by this pandemic is negligible (less than 5%) across all institutions.

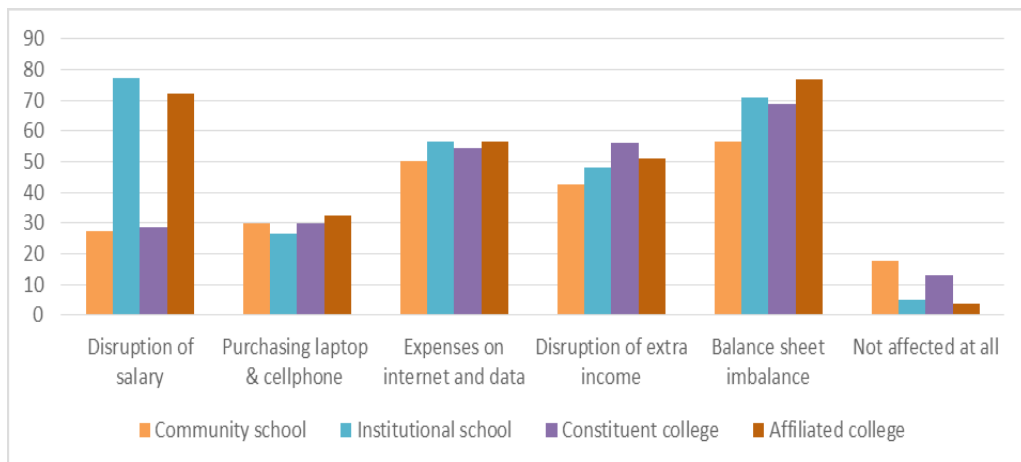


Figure 2. *Effect of Covid-19 pandemic on teachers' economy*

The teachers who participated in the FGD also confirmed the quantitative responses related to their financial situations. The issue of job insecurity was common among the private school teachers. Some teachers shared that they had not received a salary since March. A young male teacher from a private school said, "after working and enjoying so many years in a private school I now feel I should have joined a government school." He shared "I began feeling how unsecured job I am in. SMC [school management committee] doesn't respond [to our problems]. This gives mental stress." The financial issue was more severe to the family where both husband and wife teach in private schools. Some private school teachers reported that they have not been paid their salaries even for one or two months before lockdown began. One teacher from outside of Kathmandu Valley said that "one private school teacher in his district has now started selling vegetables" for the livelihood of his family. In addition, the private school teachers who were living in rented rooms were forced to limit themselves to one or two rooms to reduce the price for rent. For the teachers living in rented rooms and teaching in private schools, this was a catch-22 situation. A young female teacher said she had a problem surviving in the city. At the beginning of the lockdown, she asked for money from her family. But eventually, she left Kathmandu and went to her home town. Then the school announced to initiate an online class. She had a problem teaching online classes from home because the internet was not reliable. She could not come back to the city because there was no guarantee that the school would give her a salary. But she did not want to give up the job either. She eventually returned to the city, but the school management decided to assign online classes to some teachers only. This kind of uncertainty and financial crisis was experienced by the teachers from the community and private colleges as well. Nevertheless, in FGD, one affiliated college teacher informed that despite uncertainties about the job his college has saved enough funds to pay them for a few years. However, "drawing a salary without working is not good," he said. Another affiliated college teacher from a different district denied having such a large reserve fund on his campus. Unfortunately, the teachers from private schools did not report about this kind of fund in their respective schools.

Nevertheless, one FGD participant from a private school mentioned that his principal called a meeting on the second month of the lockdown and informed them that limited funds are available and asked if the neediest teachers could be remunerated. Some teachers who were not facing financial hardship at the moment, therefore, agreed to the proposal so most needy teachers got one month's full salary. However, "no matter how many months' salary I receive I feel that my future is not secured. Private organizations can crash anytime" he added. However, learning different technological skills was satisfying and "feel that, even school terminates my job, I can find a job in this field," he said. Another school teacher also feared that if he depends on the private school he will probably be "mentally ill" in the future. His family also suggested that he should "rather open a small shop than work in a private school."

Since community school teachers are government employees, they have regular pay despite the school closure. However, as said elsewhere, drawing a salary without teaching was not self-satisfying to the public-school teachers. One constituent campus teacher, for example, said that

“life became quite monotonous without work although a couple of hours are engaged in online teaching.”

The psychological effect of the pandemic

Teacher emotion and psychology are major dimensions of teacher wellbeing. The teachers in this study have reported a considerable effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on their emotional and psychological wellbeing, to a varying degree across institutions. Notably, as presented in Figure 3, nearly two-thirds of teachers working in private schools and affiliated colleges are anxious about their living and covering family expenses due to the halt of their regular salary. Nearly half of the teachers in these institutions are stressed because of the uncertainty of the continuation of their job. They feel that it is ‘uncertain’ whether their institutions could retain all their previous students and renew the appointment of all teachers even after the pandemic is over. This anxiety is relatively low in community schools and constituent colleges. A majority of the teachers in community schools (56%), however, are much worried about the possibility of the Covid-19 infection while going to schools for their daily attendance, compared to 19% of private-school teachers expressing the same fear. As many of the community schools have been used as quarantines, a significant number of teachers (35%) working there are worried about resuming classes in the same premises. A nearly equal number of teachers (32%) from the affiliated colleges are also worried due to the same reason and this number is low in constituent colleges (16%) and private schools (4%).

Teacher stress is linked with the burden of learning new technologies to facilitate online classes. In this study, as seen in Figure 3, around 30% of teachers from private schools and a nearly equal number of teachers from the community and affiliated colleges are stressed due to the burden of teaching students online, as compared with 14% of public-school teachers. There is also a certain level of apprehension among teachers about their self-confidence about using ICT tools for teaching. Around 22% of public-school teachers and a nearly equal number (21%) of constituent-college teachers express such fear, compared to 14% of private-school and 19% affiliated-college teachers. Similarly, nearly 50% of the constituent- and affiliated-college teachers and 41% of private school teachers feel stressed due to the increased workload to contact and communicate with students and helping them for attending the online classes. Only 26% of public-school teachers consider this as a problem because most teachers in these schools are helping students to attend the radio and TV programs conducted by the Ministry of Education. 25% of public-school teachers feel stressed due to visiting students and facilitating them for such programs, while only 9% of private-school teachers reported so. A majority of teachers from community schools also have a concern about how the public would perceive them for taking salary without doing anything significant for the school and students. Overall, a large majority of teachers (>70% in community schools and constituent and affiliated colleges and 55% in private schools) are worried about the future of the pandemic, expressing their concern about the possibility of worsening the situation at a greater level after reopening the educational institutions.

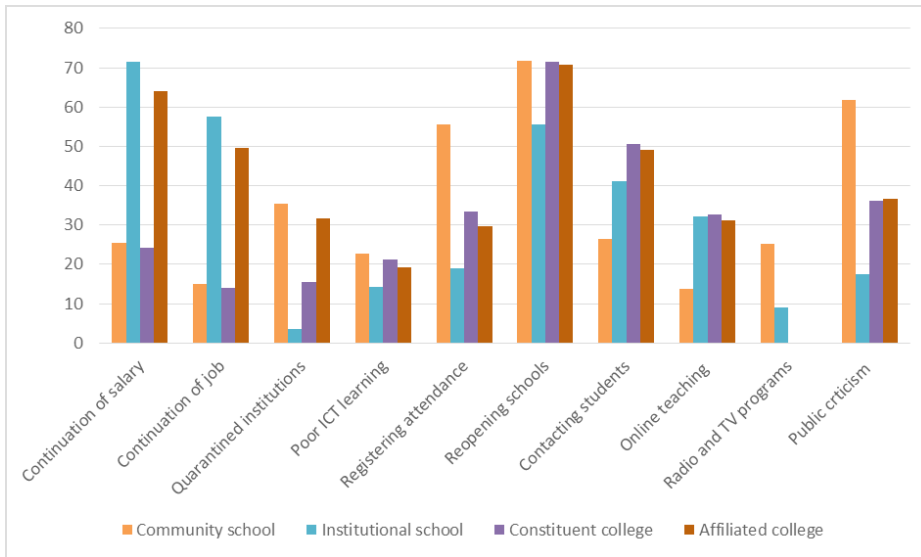


Figure 3. *Reasons for teachers' stress during the pandemic*

The psychological effect of the pandemic is greater among male teachers than female. The proportion of male teachers is higher than females who reported stress due to public criticism for receiving a full salary without doing much work such as supporting students for radio and TV programs, establishing contact with students, online teaching, quarantining the institutions, and visiting schools for daily attendance. A few reasons made female teachers anxious in a larger number than their male counterparts. For an instance, female teachers have reported that they are worried about the possible escalation of the Covid-19 crisis after the reopening of the institutions. They have also the fear of being ‘a slow learner and user of ICT’.

In focus group discussions, the teachers said that the psychological effect of the pandemic was primarily emanated from financial insecurity and fear of being infected by the coronavirus. Most of the teachers who participated in the discussions from private schools, and community and private colleges shared that they were stressed because of job uncertainty. Whereas community school female headteachers who were regularly going to school and physically meeting parents were afraid that they might bring home the infection. Female teachers are worried much because they bear more household responsibilities as well. They said that their neighbors did not like their movement. Female headteachers who participated in the FGDs also felt the stress of ‘the possible blame’ from the public if they could not do anything despite the pandemic. They were anxious about the parents and the public questioning their leadership in the crisis. One headteacher said, "if the school goes down, we will be blamed by society, so we feel more pressure and challenge". They were concerned that they might get “blamed because of being women if something goes wrong or not done.”Community school teachers whose schools were used for quarantine expressed fear to go to the schools for attendance and administrative works. One affiliated college teacher shared that due to multiple issues related to the institution, students and uncertainties there is no excitement to complete his own job, i.e. PhD work. Affiliated

college teachers themselves have to think about physical infrastructure, and educational and instructional support and infrastructure they could not just draw a salary from the available fund he said. Nevertheless, teachers were engaged in different activities and tasks to divert themselves from fear and stress. For example, supervising students' thesis and project work through email, writing journal article, completing own research projects, reading books and also engaging in exercise with family on daily basis were some of the activities that teachers were engaged in.

Institutional support during the Covid-19 pandemic

Teachers' wellbeing and work/life balance during the pandemic depend in some ways upon the support they receive from their institutions and professional organizations. To the teachers in Nepal, the institutional support during the pandemic is mediocre to low, with the proportion of the teachers, as seen in Figure 4, receiving support in various areas is below 50% across all institutions. For instance, 49% of teachers at constituent colleges received training from their institutions for doing online teaching, in comparison with 25% of affiliated college teachers. Only 13% of teachers from community schools received such training from their schools against 27% of teachers from private schools. A significant number of public-school teachers (38%), however, received such training from professional organizations, which is relatively low among the private school teachers (18%). At the higher education level, only 19% of constituent-college teachers received such training from their professional organizations in comparison with 27% of affiliated-college teachers. Providing curricular and technological resources to teachers is another way to help them work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. But only around 29% of affiliated-college teachers received such support from their institutions, compared to 10% of teachers from constituent colleges. The institutional support is low at the school level as well. Around 14% of teachers from community schools and 15% from private schools received some resources from their institutions that they required to conduct online teaching.

Communicating regularly with teachers and providing them with information and updates about the institution and the pandemic is necessary to boost their self-esteem and confidence. This degree of institutional support is almost consistent across all four institutions. For instance, around 40% of public-school teachers and a bit lower from other institutions (37% from private schools and constituent colleges, and 36% from affiliated colleges) have been regularly informed about institutional updates. Institutions are also in regular touch with their teachers to know about their health and wellbeing status. Private schools and affiliated colleges are ahead of community schools and constituent colleges concerning this support. Around 20% of teachers from private schools and affiliated colleges get a regular call from their institutions, asking their wellbeing status, against 14% and 7% of teachers from community schools and constituent colleges. Institutions have also helped some teachers by waiving their teaching and administrative workload. However, the number of teachers getting this kind of support during this pandemic is low, with 17% teachers from community schools and affiliated colleges, 13% from private schools and only 10% from constituent colleges getting the reduced workload. When teachers seek financial support from the institutions in dire need, the instance institutional response is a way to address their wellbeing during such a crisis. The percentage of teachers getting this kind of support is higher in constituent colleges (38%) and community schools (27%) than from affiliated colleges (24%) and private schools (16%).

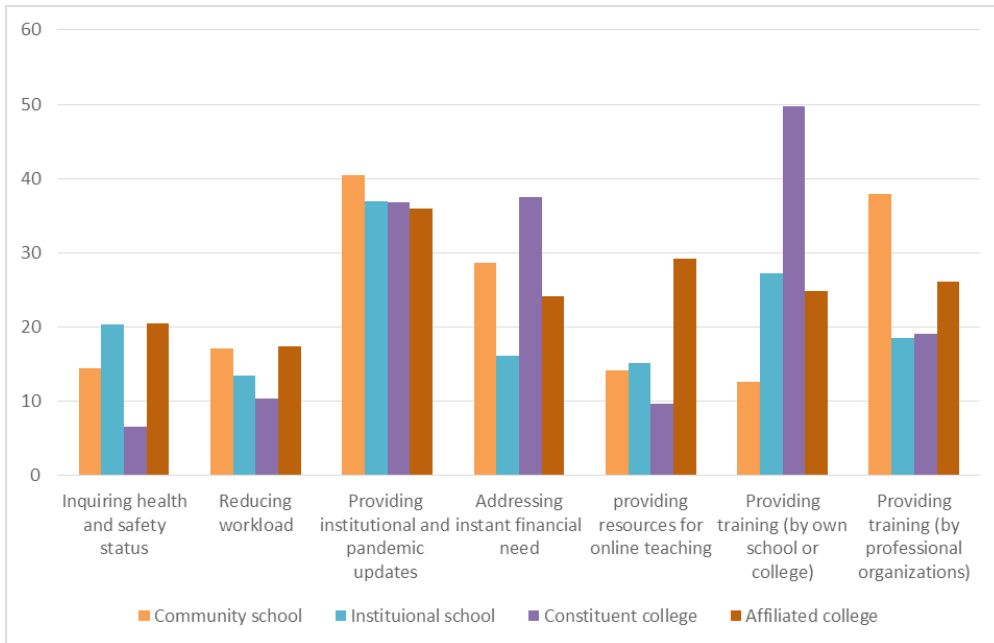


Figure 4. *Institutional support during the pandemic*

The institutional support to the teachers during this pandemic differs significantly in a few areas between the male and female groups. For instance, 32% of male teachers have got an opportunity for online training from the teachers' professional organizations in comparison with 25% females. However, this is in reverse regarding the similar training provided by their school or college, with 26% of females enjoying this opportunity against 21% males.

The FGDs with teachers from all four types of institutions revealed that a supportive, caring and active leadership and administration has positively contributed to teacher wellbeing and to their motivation to work during and after the pandemic. But in the institutions where the leadership is indifferent and/or non-committed to address the existing situation, the teachers are more worried and frustrated. One private school teacher, for example, told that private school founders or owners in his district "have not shown even a minimum level of humanity". He was referring to the teachers who were facing a severe financial crisis, particularly those who were living in rented apartments and those who were the sole breadwinner in the family. The same teacher who was quite frustrated shared that in order to avoid "close down of their shops, sorry I said shop, private school owners asked to teach online classes". He added that the schools still did not talk about giving salary, "not even 50 percent". Another private school teacher from another district; in a similar vein, said "When SMC members are not academic it is a challenge". He expressed his frustration regarding the lack of transparency in salary distribution as well. "Undeserving could receive a higher salary than the deserving ones" he succinctly summarized.

Female teachers have faced different kinds of stress in this pandemic. For example, one female private school teacher shared that at the beginning it was not easy taking a class from home but later her older daughter, husband and herself started taking a turn to entertain her small daughter so she could shut the door of her room and teach. She also shared that "students were over smart. They recorded our classes and uploaded on YouTube". Since the teachers "were not confident about teaching online, behavior gave them stress", she said. According to her, the misuse of technical knowledge by students to interfere or manipulate the recording of the online class has created anxiety among the teachers in her school. Teaching online itself is a challenging task and, on top of that, I ask myself "what if I made a mistake and became a matter of fun". A female teacher from another private school said that she did not find the private school management and leadership friendly. In her experience, they were always giving pressure to do the given tasks and never organized discussions with teachers. In her school, teachers put pressure on the management to initiate online classes. But the school provided no support about online instructions. Another private school teacher said that the online activities they are doing for students are "totally self-initiative...there is no routine/schedule, no technical support for online classes from the school." Private school leaderships should immediately refrain from "whether-you-exist-or-not-we-don't-care kind of mentality towards their teachers," said one male private school teacher.

In contrary, community school teachers who participated in FGD had a positive experience regarding their institutions' responses during the pandemic. Most of them told that school management was considerate and was inquiring about their health regularly. Constituent campus teachers also informed that their institution heads encourage them to engage in online teaching and provides feedback on their online classes. However, in an extreme case, community school management was indifferent to any of the development that was going on concerning teaching-learning let alone the teacher's wellbeing, as informed by a female teacher. Female teachers have used different kinds of networks, such as Women Teachers' Society, Teachers in Technology, and even their own school teachers' messenger or Facebook group to support each other. One female head teacher said, "We continuously consult with colleagues, share ideas and try new things. We are connected in Women Teachers' Society, so we regularly consult with each other about possible actions". At the institution level, all teachers from colleges endorsed that the universities and colleges should put in place a teacher mental health support system to ensure their psychological wellbeing.

Discussion and Conclusion

While the issue of wellbeing is crucial for effective engagement of teachers in teaching and learning, this issue is often overlooked, if not neglected, in the state's education reform agenda. Nepal's ongoing reform agenda, School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), for example, has teacher development as one of its focus areas with an objective to "maintain high morale and motivation for teaching and learning among teachers and students" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p.55). The strategies to keep the morale of the teacher focuses on occupational skill development through training and monetary benefits. SSDP and 2019 Education Policy has proposed social-psychological support to students but it is silent regarding teachers' socio-psychological health (Ministry of Education, 2019). Both documents have identified teachers' low motivation and

accountability as issues. However, both the SSDP and the Education Policy have emphasized monetary reward, occupational skill enhancement and good governance as measures to address teacher-related issues. Nevertheless, the education policy has identified socio-psychological counseling for teachers along with students to minimize the effects on them caused by the disaster. This indicates that the overall wellbeing of teachers has not been an issue at the policy level. The findings of the study show teacher wellbeing should be one of the core areas of education policies in the post-pandemic era.

Teachers are not well prepared to work in difficulties and emergencies such as COVID-19. This pandemic requires teachers to work from home, adopt alternative approaches to reaching out to students, and apply the Internet and other technological tools for delivering lessons. However, teachers have to learn technological devices and apply them in a short period of time. So, they are confused and unable to manage to learn and work simultaneously. More importantly, teachers face increased social pressure, despite lack of strong institutional support, to run classes effectively. They feel that they would be blamed for receiving salary, as per the rule, without working. On the other hand, private school teachers are worried about the uncertainty of the continuity of their job due to the financial crisis of their school. The anxiety of private teachers in this pandemic provides critical insights into educational reforms in Nepal. Their state of wellbeing, particularly financial, shows that the existing neoliberalization of school system may not necessarily address the issues concerning teacher wellbeing during and post-COVID context. Since private schools rely fully on students' fees, they cannot pay for their teachers in the crises such as Covid-19. Most private schools are run in rented buildings. During the pandemic, they could not charge tuition fees as the schools have to be closed. Consequently, private schools not only unable to pay salary to teachers but also are possibly shut down. A major implication is that private institutions may establish a crisis fund, preferably by keeping a fraction of their regular incomes into this fund, which can be used to ensure teachers' salaries and support them during pandemic or any form of unforeseen crises.

Teacher wellbeing is also gendered during such pandemic. In the pandemic situation, women employees were affected more than their male counterparts. This has been a global phenomenon (Purtill, 2020). In Nepal, women teachers are affected to a greater extent during the COVID-19 pandemic than their male counterparts. This was experienced at two frontiers. One at home and another at the workplace. Teaching-from-home is favorable to males than women because of their household obligations including childcare responsibility. In normal circumstances, their household time and work time are separated. Therefore, it is less challenging to accomplish the job-related responsibilities. But setting up an office at home is very challenging. Culturally male is in a better position because they do not have to negotiate work time and space to do job-related tasks from home. At the workplace women leaders, i.e. school headteachers feel more pressure because women are still not trusted as a competent workforce. They should work hard to make the public understand that women's leadership is no less effective than male leadership.

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