
Teacher Educator's Qualities for Successful Teaching: Students' Perspectives on Teacher's Personal Traits in Nepalese Context

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Abstract

The nature of teacher education in Nepal is being questioned by various critics because they argue that it only focuses on the formal or theoretical knowledge of the teachers rather than considering practical and behavioral aspects of teachers' professional development. On this ground, this phenomenological research primarily aims at identifying students' perspectives on personal qualities/characteristics of teacher educators and investigating how such personal qualities/characteristics contribute to successful teaching in the context of Nepal. The data has been collected through personal and structured interview taken with 10 students (who are prospective teachers as well) purposively selected from the 5 campuses of Kailali district that run B. Ed. and M. Ed. Programs. Through the interpretation and analysis of the data, the study reveals that personal characteristics of teacher educators are essential for successful teaching and learning. Such qualities should be recognized as the formal parameters of assessing teacher's qualification for improving the entire course of teacher education.

Keywords: Teacher education, teaching, personal trait, students, Nepalese context

Introduction

The quality of any education system is relative to the quality of its teachers, as it is the teachers who make or mark the destiny of a nation. It has been acknowledged universally and rightly stated "Teacher quality is an important consideration in student achievement, and although defined differently by different people, continues to be the central concern of those responsible for teacher education. Quality teachers are products of quality teacher education." (UNESCO-ILO, 2010, p. 20). However, Jabbarov (2018) argues that there is a problem of preparation of broad specialists with deep both fundamental theoretical knowledge and practical preparation. One of directions of activity of classical universities is professional- pedagogical preparation of the graduate for

Teacher Educator's Qualities for Successful Teaching

work in higher educational institutions. It explains necessity of realization for universities of new, wider approach to vocational training, education, development of masters and demands special attention to formation of personal qualities of the future teachers.

The present study concentrates on collecting and investigating, personal characteristics of teacher educators and students' attitudes to teachers and how these qualities contribute to successful teaching. The study can add new insights into the field of teacher education. It may help teachers and prospective teachers realize and rebuild their qualities, characteristics and behavior so that they can improve their teaching perspectives. The study can contribute in shaping the behaviour of teachers and their students (prospective teachers). Similarly, the study can help the teacher recruitment authorities or administrators to revisit the mechanism of teacher examination. Additionally, the study can be significant for the researchers who want to investigate further in this field.

The Problem

The nature of teacher education in Nepal is being questioned by various critics because they argue that it only focuses on the formal or theoretical knowledge of the teachers rather than considering practical and behavioral aspects of professional development. As an instance, Teacher Service Commission, a formal government body responsible for recruiting teachers, appoints teachers on the basis of their content knowledge. There is no provision for examining personal and social traits of a teacher (even there is no class observation system in teacher recruitment of Teacher Service Commission examination); however, it is important to consider those teachers' personal characteristics has a great role to play in teaching learning. It is also clear that teacher's personal traits and characteristics shape learning psychology of the students in a positive or negative way. Personal characteristics of teachers contribute to the students' understanding of a teacher and understanding of the content the teacher teaches. There are so many teachers who seem to be teaching machines. They are not or less preferred by the students not because of their academic qualification but because of their treatment to the students while teaching. Such issues have been maximally neglected by almost all stakeholders of teacher education: teacher educators, authorities, administrators and even by the teachers themselves. If teacher educators and concerned authorities don't realize the issues and the same problems persist in teacher education arena, we are likely to produce machine like teachers and there will be negative consequences on successful teaching as well as on whole education system.

The Purpose and Research Questions

On top of the problems regarding negligence of teachers' personal qualities for successful teaching and learning, the paper aims at identifying students'

Teacher Educator's Qualities for Successful Teaching

perspectives on personal qualities/characteristics of teacher educators. The paper also investigates how personal qualities/characteristics contribute to successful teaching. To achieve the aim, the paper explores the answer of some questions such as: What are the personal characteristics/qualities that students look for in the teacher educators? How do student teachers respond to the personal qualities of teacher educators? And how do personal qualities of teacher educators influence learning of student teachers?

Review of Previous Literature

This section presents a review of various theoretical and empirical research works carried out in the field of teacher education, teachers' professional and personal development, teacher identity and teacher training. This review gives theoretical basis for the discussion of the results obtained from the information collected from the research participants.

Theoretical and Empirical Viewpoints

General students and student teachers in particular have some certain perceptions on teacher's professional and personal qualities; such qualities have great influence in students' learning. Tuomainen (2019), in her research article explores the student views on teaching quality in universities have been studied primarily in English-speaking countries such as the UK, the US, Canada and Australia. In the 1970s and 1980s studies found students to appreciate particularly a professional approach and an engaging personality from teachers. In Sheffield (1974) study Canadian students viewed good teachers as masters of their subject matter and who prepared lectures well, related study materials to practical issues and were enthusiastic. In the American context, with Waters *et al.* (1988) teaching quality was connected mostly to positive personal and motivational characteristics, and with Sherman *et al.* (1987) enthusiasm, clarity, preparation, organization and stimulation were the main defining factors of teaching quality. A similar result was also seen by Jones (1989) in New Zealand where students most valued teaching competence and the teachers' personality with regard to good or effective teaching. Similarly, in most recent studies, Rowan and Townend (2017) determined five comprehensive main components of teaching quality as perceived by Australian university students: (1) Teachers' interpersonal and communication skills, i.e. approachability, respect, friendliness and knowledge of students as individuals; (2) Variety in course-delivery techniques and pedagogical creativity; (3) Excellent understanding of course content; (4) Clarity and consistency in the expectations, especially in assessment requirements; and (5) One-on-one relationships with faculty. An almost identical list of qualities was obtained by Kandiko Howson (2018) with UK university students who viewed "good" teachers as passionate about their teaching subject, knowledgeable, approachable and willing to dedicate their time to students. All in all, most studies regarding student perceptions of teaching quality can perhaps be summarized as expertise

Teacher Educator's Qualities for Successful Teaching

and enthusiasm (Crumbley *et al.*, 2001; Greimel-Fuhrmann and Geyer, 2003; Hill *et al.*, 2003; Onwuegbuzie *et al.*, 2007; Vulcano, 2007; Hill and Christian, 2012; Rowan and Townend, 2017).

Teacher educator's qualities directly influence the teacher, their teaching environment and their identities. Yazan (2018, p. 143), in his research explores that becoming a teacher of TCs (teacher candidates) requires the construction of a TE (teacher educator) identity, which is an ongoing, fluid, multi-dimensional, and context-bound process, but it does not happen automatically with the assignment of a new role (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2015; Murray, 2016). Multiple, dynamic, subjective, and relational, TE identities are formed through a continuous interplay between context-bound influences (constraining or enabling) and TEs' own meaning-making shaped by their beliefs, values, and priorities (Trent, 2013). This interplay involves the connection between the personal and the professional, which are complexly interwoven within TE identities (Dinkelman, 2011). TE identities are not only imagined and asserted by TEs but also assigned to them through their official roles and responsibilities within the institutions that define the profession (Dinkelman, 2011).

Teacher's professional and personal qualities can also be interlinked with competencies; competencies related to subject area and competencies related to personal traits. Both competencies are supposed to be essential for a teacher to successful teaching. In a research, Kadioglu Ates and Kadioglu (2018) find out the followings parallel with results: generally, competencies required from teacher are divided into two groups including personal competencies and competencies related to subject area and education. Personal competency can be defined as high personal responsibility, creativity, ability to solve problems, critical thinking, teamwork, ability to initiate change, understanding, compassion and tolerance, high social relationships and moral values. Subject area competencies refer to the requirement of the quality and quantity of professional knowledge related to the subject matter in a specific area. Educational competency is related to educational work of a teacher, particularly learning (p. 108).

In reviewing effective teacher research, there is a strong link between what students characterize as good teaching and what the researchers report as the traits of effective teachers. Awareness of these traits can help pre-service teachers and in-service teachers develop qualities that are associated with effective teachers. Research on effective teaching has typically examined two categories: (1) professional skills such as pedagogy, subject matter knowledge, policy, teaching styles and etc. and (2) personal teacher characteristics such as caring, enthusiastic, fun, humorous, friendly, supportive, respectful, and etc. (Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008). Substantial body of research has suggested that even though teachers' subject matter knowledge is important (Chabalengula, Mumba & Mbewe, 2012),

Teacher Educator's Qualities for Successful Teaching

their personal characteristics matter the most when the student achievement is at stake (Ayers, 1995; Bettencourt, Gillett, Gall & Hull, 1983; Noddings, 2003; Thompson, Greer & Greer, 2004). Therefore, the question that needs to be answered should seek the existence and/or absence of which of those personal characteristics make one teacher effective and the other ineffective respectively. Brief look at literature reveals several studies on this matter. For example, Thompson, Greer, and Greer (2004) explored the reflections of university students regarding the characteristics of their favorite teachers from whom they were able to learn. Data collected from the students indicated that there are twelve common characteristics that emerged as central to what students conceptualize as good teaching: fairness, positive attitude, preparedness, personal touch, and sense of humor, creativity, willingness to admit mistakes, forgiving, respect, high expectations, compassion, and sense of belonging. Whether one is new to the teaching profession or a seasoned professional, working to include these traits into everyday teaching routines of fine –tuning those already in use, will ensure that the students have a positive school experience as well as a successful one.

AITSL (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership) 2011 has determined seven Australian Professional standards for teachers: 1. Know students and how they learn, 2. Know the content and how to teach, 3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning, 4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environment, 5. Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning, 6. Engage in professional learning, 7. Engage professionally with colleagues (p. 20). The seven Standards identify what is expected of teachers within three domains of teaching. Teachers' demonstration of the Standards will occur within their specific teaching context at their stage of expertise and reflect the learning requirements of the students they teach. Similarly, the classic educational system of Great Britain identifies eight important professional and personal qualities of educators: trust to students; self-belief (the ability to handle a loss of confidence or crisis in professional practice despite any failures); patience (a patient attitude toward students implies the ability to wait patiently or even "fight" for student's learning success and progress); genuine compassion for students (the ability to feel empathy, compassion, create friendly relationship, not to be indifferent to students, to be eager to help and sympathize); understanding (the ability to perceive life from the other perspective); striving for professional growth; feeling proud of students' success; joyfulness (Ilaltdinova, Frolova, & Lebedeva, 2018).

Apart from the personal and professional standards of teacher quality, psychological factors also play an important role in effective learning. Good teachers are supposed to have a quality that enables them to create the learning

Teacher Educator's Qualities for Successful Teaching

environment psychologically safe. Kulikova and Maliy (2017), in their research, find out the phenomenon of psychological safety of the educational environment (PSEE) in the modern school. The authors have conducted a case study revealing integrated professional and personal qualities of the future teacher, which promotes successful designing of school PSEE. Obtained results of the study have shown that the main factors determining the successful designing psychologically safe educational environment by teachers is the level of professional and personal qualities development such as emotional stability, high-normative behavior, sensitivity, low anxiety, creative thinking, reflection and introspection. The results have shown that the higher the level of manifestation of these teacher's professional and personal qualities is, the higher the psychological security of the educational environment is.

It is equally significant to consider that how personal and professional traits of a teacher dialectically incorporate to each other. Mikhaylova, Nikitaeva & Kokodey (2020) in their research report, as the results of numerous studies show that development of professionalism is closely interconnected with personal development. Achieving professionalism implies mastering the most important personal and professional qualities, character traits, intellectual qualities, disclosing the creative potential of a person and his/her moral improvement (p. 7). Ilaltdinova, Frolova, & Lebedeva, (2018) in their research article investigate that rating of the personal and professional qualities of the teacher has allowed us to present the hierarchy of the most common, thus most universal, characteristics of educators in the world. The most demanded quality of the teacher in the world is the ability to feel empathy. The second position is occupied by such qualities as trust and the ability for cooperation. The third place in the hierarchy of the teacher's personal qualities is indicated by the ability for management and control, profound knowledge of the taught subject, creative approach to professional activity. The fourth position is given to communicability, exemplary conduct, social activeness, individual approach to students, respect and patience (p.45).

The literature reviewed related to the issue of teachers' personal and professional qualities for successful teaching shows consent on importance of building such qualities in teachers and teacher educators. Different countries around the world have their own standards that determine the personal and professional qualities for the novice teachers and experienced teachers. All the researchers agree that personal traits along with professional qualities are an integral part of teacher education. However, the researches show that developing such qualities to make highly qualified teacher is a challenging job. Even though the quality standards for teachers in all countries are somehow similar, the quality of education does not seem to be similar. This issue can be attributed to teachers' quality. Relating to this issue, Narad (2019) says that in many countries across the

Teacher Educator's Qualities for Successful Teaching

globe, rigorous procedures and practices of accreditation and assessment of teacher education programs have been adopted for the improvement in quality of teachers so as to provide society with teachers who are efficient and possess a positive attitude. Such teachers may, in turn, shape the future of a country, that is, its students, through actualization of their potential to the maximum and thereby helping them to create a niche for themselves in this competitive global society.

Methodology

Method and Design

Since this paper discusses the current phenomena of teacher education, it is based on phenomenological approach of research. It follows the principles of qualitative research in collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. Following the interpretivist research paradigm, this study collects the data related to perception of individual participants about the research topic.

Participants

The samples for data collection in this study were selected purposively. The participants of the study include 10 students (who are prospective teachers as well) purposively selected from the 5 campuses of Kailali district that run B.Ed. and M.Ed. programmes. From each campus, one participant was selected from B. Ed. and one from M. Ed. level as research samples.

Data Collection Tools and Procedures

As a data collection tool, telephonic interview was conducted. The data were collected in two stages: first, the research participants were interviewed via telephone (approximately 15 minutes for each participant) for taking their perception on the topic and after the interview, a set of structured open-ended question (see in Appendix A) was sent to them through email to collect the additional ideas about the theme of interview. The oral consent was taken from the participants before conducting the interview and collecting the data.

Data Management

The oral responses of the participants have been summarized and assembled with the responses from the structured interview questions. The responses of the participants have been divided into two major categories: 'teacher educators' personal qualities' and 'role of teacher's personal qualities in successful teaching and learning'. On the basis of these two categories, data/information have been analyzed, results have been drawn and discussed.

Results and Discussion

This section discusses the results of participants' responses collected from the interview with prospective student teachers purposively selected for the research from five different campuses of Kailali district. The interview was taken based on two broad questions: 'How do students perceive the personal quality of their teachers?' 'How do those personal qualities contribute to successful teaching

Teacher Educator's Qualities for Successful Teaching

and learning?' After the analysis of responses given by the students, the common qualities of teacher educators, perceived by the students are classified into seven categories. Each category includes students' perceptions on teacher's personal quality and discusses how that quality contributes to successful teaching and learning.

Rapport Building

All participants of the research, I interviewed, reflected that a good teacher should establish a good relationship with the students before adopting teaching profession. The rapport building activities they mentioned include basically four qualities. First, recognizing students personally by their names and calling by their names in a friendly manner. This develops intimacy between the teachers and students and intimacy helps to create easy learning environment in the class. Second, listening to the students, their problems and their feelings and responding to them. This behavior encourages the students to be more interactive and also increases the students' willingness to participate in all learning activities. Third, respecting students in an equitable way, if the teacher respects all students' opinions, feelings and diversity, it helps in establishing good relationship between the teacher and the students. And fourth is, being evenhanded in behavior inside and outside the classroom. Maintaining good relationship to the students is a significant feature of intrinsic motivation (Harmer, 2008), which contributes to creating comfortable environment for learning effectively. If a teacher keeps a gap between himself/herself and learners, there is high possibility for students getting anxiety, nervousness and hesitation. Such factors certainly discourage students to have open and comfortable interaction with the teachers. Rapport building appears to be a good way of minimizing a psychological and social gap between students and teachers.

Positive Attitude and Sense of Humor

The other personal quality each participant preferred in a favorite teacher is positive way of thinking and approach that teachers bring into the classroom. Good teachers often use meaningful verbal praise to get and keep learners actively participating in the teaching learning process (Borich, 200). Qualified teachers always have positive mind and they believe in the success of their learners and in their own ability to help students in their achievements. Effective teachers develop ways to remind themselves catch students doing things right rather than catching them doing something wrong. The impact of such attitude on students can last many years. The students often recall praise and recognition that teachers gave them. Positive attitude of a teacher helps learners develop positive learning attitude too.

Moreover, the students interviewed for this research equally emphasized that sense of humor as an essential quality of a teacher. Sense of humor is important

Teacher Educator's Qualities for Successful Teaching

for reducing the pressure of learning and converting teaching-learning into a funny game from rigorous mechanistic attempt. If a teacher has a quick wit and the ability to break the ice in difficult situations with the use of humor, this is an extremely valuable asset. Students enjoy teachers with a sense of humor and find such teachers make learning fun (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000); good teachers can occasionally enjoy a laugh with the class and they can also laugh at themselves. Students recognize the strength reflected in teachers who are not threatened by foolish or silly mistakes that they make. Since students sometimes find themselves in similarly embarrassing situations, good teachers can provide a wonderful model for how to deal with an embarrassing situation effectively.

Preparedness and Creativity

Each respondent of the interview focused preparedness and creativity as central qualities or characteristics that a good teacher should possess. Even though, creativity in teaching and learning and well preparedness for lesson can be taken as professional characteristics, such qualities are highly influenced by a teacher's personal traits. Preparation of a teacher enables him/her to handle the critical situation properly, helps making classes interesting, and even more importantly helps in achieving the goals of a lesson effectively. Teacher's preparation for lesson and teaching and learning systematically allows time for interaction which even increases the opportunities for learning. The respondents viewed that it is very frustrating for them if a teacher, who has no idea what he or she is doing, comes to class and assaults them. If teachers have not invested sufficient time in planning and preparation, they tend to be so focused on what they are doing that they miss the early signs of misbehavior. This ultimately results in frequent disruption, waste of valuable instructional time, and student frustration.

The respondent students also pointed out that in classrooms where teachers are well prepared, behavior problems are less prevalent. The well-prepared teacher is more likely to be able to take time during lessons to notice and attend to behavioral matters, and is less likely to miss the beginnings of potentially disruptive activity. Similarly, creativity is also an essential quality for a teacher for effective teaching. All of the respondent students agreed that they remember unusual things their teachers do in their teaching and the creative ways that they decorated the classroom or motivated the students. Creative teachers can teach an item in many different ways which matches the interests of diversified students in the class. They can suggest instant solution to any problem that occurs in classroom learning. Creative teachers can design the materials effectively, execute the teaching interestingly, motivate the students, and avoid the boredom of learning tasks.

Personality and Contact

The respondent students mentioned that personality of a teacher and personal contact/touch he/she keeps with the students plays crucial role in effective teaching and learning. However, they did not explain the types of personality much as describing personality of a person is not an easy job (Harmer, 2008). However, they highlighted that extrovert teachers, who share the feelings and openly and clearly with the students, are better than the introvert teachers, who are less likely to share; hence difficult to understand. Effective teacher's personality basically combines two characteristics: personal behavior and professional behavior. If a teacher has a good personal behavior, there is high possibility that the teacher can be able to expose same personality in his professional life as well. Good personality of a teacher can be a role model for students' learning and deciding future career as a good teacher.

Additionally, the respondent students mentioned that they like their favorite teachers connected with them in a personal way. Teachers who convey a personal touch with their students call their students by name, smile often, ask about students' feelings and opinions, and accept students for who they are. Teachers who bring their lives and stories into the classroom build trust with their students. Teachers who tell stories of events in their own lives which relate to subject matter currently being taught, captivate student interest and promote bonding with the students (Thompson & Greer, 2004). Additionally, teachers who remain close to their students can do so by finding out as much about their students as possible. Teachers who show interest in their students also interest the students.

Forgiving and Admitting Mistakes

During the interview, the respondent students revealed that forgiving for the mistakes that students make during learning process encourages students to develop sense of nearness respect to the teachers. It also teaches students the sense of tolerance and patience. Many teachers have bad habit of labeling others for mistakes, and those labels can have long term negative effects on students. Such habit (blaming rather than forgiving) of the teachers may create personality conflicts between teachers and students. The students have plenty of memories of teachers who "had it in for" one student or another, but their accounts of favorite teachers reflected a willingness to forgive students for misbehavior and a habit of starting each day with a clean slate (Thompson & Greer, 2004). Thus forgiving has significant influence on students not only in classroom learning but also in personality development.

Similarly, the student respondents said that the teachers who admit their mistakes easily and openly among the students are more acceptable than the teachers hiding their mistakes and threatening to the students. People have a nature to appreciate willingness to admit mistakes, and to remember it for a long

Teacher Educator's Qualities for Successful Teaching

time. Like other people, teachers make mistakes. However, some teachers think that their authority in the classroom can be undermined by these mistakes and they try to let them go unnoticed or cover over them quickly. Students quite obviously have a different opinion. They are fully aware of the times when teachers make mistakes, especially when they somehow suffer from them. Teachers who recognize their mistakes and apologize for them when they affect the students provide an excellent model to give students, and a great way to be remembered as a favorite teacher (Thompson & Greer, 2004).

Respect and Compassion

Some participants mentioned that respecting to the students is also remarkable personal quality the teacher should have. Even though the students may not explicitly expect respect from the teachers, the students can be highly motivated if the teacher respects opinions, disagreements, and arguments of the students in the classroom. It is obvious that teachers universally wish for their students to respect them. However, from discussions with the participants, it is found that those who are given the highest amount of respect are those who give respect to their students. Favorite teachers generally show respect to the students by showing sensitivity for feelings and for consistently avoiding situations that would unnecessarily embarrass students. Such behavior is obviously appreciated by students, repaid with respect and love for the teacher.

Similarly, the respondents reported that the compassion of teachers for the students is also an essential personal trait. However, the reality of most classrooms, in fact just about any gathering of students, includes a significant amount of cruelty and hurt feelings. All insensitive, uncaring, or deliberately malicious behavior cannot be eliminated from such situations, but a caring teacher can have a tremendous impact on its frequency. If the teacher compassionately resolves the students' complexities related to students' behaviors and feelings, he/she will be able to pave a better path of teaching and learning.

High Expectations

Another essential personal quality the student respondents mentioned in the interview is the expectations of teachers from the students. Good teachers always have high expectations from the students they teach. According to Irvine (2001) "students defined caring teachers as those who set limits, provided structure, held high expectations and pushed them to achieve" (p. 6-7). Teachers with positive attitudes also possess high expectations for success. Teachers' expectation levels affect the ways in which teachers teach and interact with students. In turn, these behaviors affect student learning. Generally, students either rise to their teachers' expectations or do not perform well when expectations are low or non-existent. They consistently challenged their students to do their best. Expectations are often self-fulfilling, and must therefore be expressed with care and consideration.

Teacher Educator's Qualities for Successful Teaching

Favorite teachers apparently have a talent for doing that. And teacher's expectations motivate students to achieve their goals in a comfortable way.

Conclusion and Implications

Highly qualified teachers are essential for not only improving the entire education system of a nation but also for contributing on social, economic and political status of the entire nation. For that paying attention to teacher education seems to be a subject of priority for the nations like Nepal. Teacher education in general seeks to develop both professional qualities and personal characteristics in a teacher educator. However, teacher education system in Nepal still focuses theoretical knowledge in teachers rather than considering personal characteristics of the teachers. The previous studies related to teacher's qualities reveal that teacher's personal qualities are as important as the academic qualification. In this research, the prospective teachers perceived seven personal qualities of a teacher: rapport building, positive attitude and sense of humour, preparedness and creativity, personality and contact, forgiving and admitting mistakes, respect and compassion and high expectation, as very essential for effective teaching and learning. The discussion of the participants' perception on teachers' quality suggests that personal characteristics of teachers should be recognized as the formal parameters of assessing teacher's qualification. Teacher recruitment system should adopt both academic and personal traits of a teacher for selection criteria. Teacher education curricula should also contain reasonable amount of course contents that helps teachers develop personal qualities along with theoretical knowledge. The study shows the essence of considering teachers' personal traits in teachers' professional development arena. For that, the government and concerned authorities with teacher development should adopt accreditation and assessment of teacher education programs, for the improvement in quality of teachers, so as to provide society with teachers who are efficient and possess a positive attitude. Such teachers may in turn shape the future of a country, that is, its students, through actualization of their potential to the optimum level and thereby helping them to create a niche for themselves in this competitive global society.

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