



Indexed in NepJOL
JPPS Star-Rated Journal

Journal of NELTA Gandaki (JoNG)
(A Peer Reviewed Open Access Research Journal)
ISSN: 2676-1041 [Print] E-ISSN 2822-1559 [Online]
Vol. VI Issue (1-2) November, 2023, pp. 98-108
eJournal site: www.nelta.org.np/page/gandaki

Teacher Training as a Strategy of Professional Development: Perceptions and Challenges

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Abstract

This article aimed to explore the beliefs and opinions of in-service secondary-level teachers towards teacher training for professional development. Moreover, it intended to identify major issues that existed in the field of teacher training in Nepal. It is a qualitative research study in which the teachers' stories and experiences have been documented. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select the sample from the target population. Unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data. The data were further analysed thematically. The study found teachers perceived teacher training as a strategy of professional development that equipped them with both the content and the pedagogical knowledge and skills. The study has highlighted various issues and challenges such as geographical difficulty, inaccessibility to the resources, centrality in training practices in the federal system, nepotism, favouritism, and political relations while selecting the trainees. The study implies that the training courses, provisions, policies, and programs are to be developed and launched based on the teachers' needs. Furthermore, teacher training should be decentralised.

Article History:

Submitted: 30 June 2023

Reviewed: 25 August 2023

Accepted: 10 September 2023

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Article DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.3126/jong.v6i1-2.59716>

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Publisher

Nepal English Language Teachers'

Association Gandaki Province,

Pokhara, Nepal

Email: neltagandaki2018@gmail.com

URL: www.nelta.org.np/page/gandaki

Keywords: Teacher professional development, in-service teachers, perspectives, teacher training

Introduction

A profession is a type of job that requires special training, a high level of knowledge, and skills. It is an occupation that assumes responsibility for some tasks too complex to be guided by rules. Hence, professional development refers to the skills and knowledge attained for personal and career development and is concerned with knowledge, skills, and expertise attained by different activities and strategies.

Teaching is a noble profession that requires continuous updating of knowledge and skills for self-satisfaction, satisfying students' enthusiasm, and producing the noble citizens required for the nation, whereas teachers are taken as professionals. Traditionally, teaching was used to be taken as a form of occupation, and it used to be perceived as a semi or quasi-profession in terms of devotion, income, prestige, and the nature of knowledge that the teachers were believed to have. (Holmes, 1986) stated that after a nation at risk (National Commissions on Excellence in Education, US 1983) ascribed the economic downfall of the country to the mediocrity of schooling and teacher incompetence, there were

calls for educational reform (as cited in Joshi, 2012). Then, professionalizing teaching had become a major concern among the proponents of American Education reform in the early 1980s.

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is concerned with the growth and development of professional roles so that teachers can perform their best. TPD is the "sum of total of formal and informal learning perused and experienced by the teachers in a compelling and dynamic change" (Fullan, 1995; as cited in Bharati & Chalise, 2017). The notion of TPD to be consisting of three independent concepts: learning, engagement, and involvement. In this regard, it is defined as 'learning opportunities that engage educators' creative and reflexive capacity in ways that strengthen their practice (Bredeson, 2002; as cited in Joshi, 2012).

Professional development signifies "any professional development activities engaged in by teachers which enhance their knowledge and skills, and enables them to consider their attitude and approaches to the education of children, to improve the quality of the teaching and learning process" (Bolam, 1993). Thus, TPD is a continuous process throughout one's professional life where one has to master new skills, widen knowledge, and develop or innovate insights in their pedagogy, practice, and understanding of their own needs. To attain all these skills, teacher training is a must.

A glance at the existing provisions and the research studies conducted on teacher training reveals that there has been a great emphasis on teacher training, but the issues and the challenges existing in the field have slightly been studied, concerned, and explored. Although teacher training is considered one of the widely used techniques for TPD, teachers in different contexts may have different perceptions and challenges to develop their professional skills. Thus, this study aims to explore Secondary Level English teachers' perceptions of teacher training and the challenges they have encountered in their professional development. Hence, the study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- a) How is teachers' perception of training for their professional development?
- b) What are the issues and challenges that the teachers faced in teacher training?

Training for Professional Competence

Training is a strategy of teacher development which aims to develop one's capacity, productivity and performance. It is related to the development of skills and knowledge which are inevitable for professional competence. It involves both understanding and application of learning. Hence, training is defined as "the ability to demonstrate principles and practices in the classroom" (Richards & Farrel, 2005). It has different forms and modules such as pre-service training, in-service training, or sometimes post-training supportive programs have been conducted. It has also been taken as a form of teacher education, which is significant for both the teachers and the educational institutions to ensure quality education. Teachers play key roles in the implementation of educational programs. They update and equip with knowledge of technology and pedagogy, according to recent developments in the fields.

A doctor needs to be familiar with emerging diseases, viruses, therapies, treatment strategies, and tools. A teacher needs to be versant with the pedagogical movements, new teaching approaches, child psychology, philosophy, culture, methodological ideologies and practices, and ICT tools. Thus, teacher training is important to produce a competent teacher with the knowledge of pedagogy, content, child psychology and technology. Now, the course for training packages would rather develop for ecology; accessibility, affordability, availability, and usability of the materials and resources.

Major Provisions for Teacher Training in Nepal

Teacher education in Nepal can be traced back to the establishment of the Basic Education Training Centre in 1948 to give training to the primary level teachers who were untrained at the time (Awasthi, 2003). After the recommendation of the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) -1954 for establishing the College of Education, the Centre for Teacher Education

discontinued its functions. College of Education started giving pre-service training courses for two and four years. Later, it was merged into the Institute of Education (IOE). In 2016 B.S., Tribhuvan University (TU) was established, and it started to train teachers by offering I. Ed and B. Ed courses in the form of pre-service training. The IOE conducted various types of teacher training in the 70s and 80s, such as women teacher training, 'A' level program, and Remote Area Teacher Training (Awasthi, 2003). National Educational System Plan (NESP) - (1971-1976) brought a new impetus to teacher education, making it mandatory to obtain tenure in schools (Awasthi, 2003). Now, faculties of education of different universities such as Kathmandu University, Far-western University, Pokhara University, Madhyapashchimanchal University, and Purbaanchal University provide pre-service teacher training in the form of B. Ed/M.Ed. degrees (Gautam, 2016).

Pre-service teacher training at the primary level was conducted via the privately established teacher training centres, and secondary-level pre-service training was offered through the University Campus, Faculty of Education (FOE) (MOE, 2009). The National Centre for Education Development (NCED) conducts certification and recurrent training for primary and Secondary Level courses through the Education Training Centre (ETC). Completing teacher training courses has been made mandatory to enter the teaching profession. It is also found that the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) has provisioned leadership training for head teachers, monitoring of training implementation, and 7-10 days of job induction training (MOE, 2009). Moreover, SSRP has planned to ensure the access of all in-service teachers to the TPD training of 30 days within five years. It further categorized the teachers into beginners, experienced, master, and expert. It has also proposed TPD training along with qualification, performance, and seniority as the determinate to the promotion of the teachers.

School Sector Development Plan (SSDP - 2016-2023) provisioned that NCED would develop the course and professional development modalities outlining the strategies of teacher professional development (MOE, 2016). It also has provisioned to launch demand-based and need-based mid-term training programs for teachers. Moreover, it has raised the voice for mandatory teacher training and aimed to develop centrally validated in-service training through ETC and lead resource centres with the provisions of one-month refresher training and head teachers training, and Early Grade Reading Program (EGRP) training for the teachers of Grades 1 to 4.

NCED conducts two different types of training: pre-service and in-service Teacher Training. The policy has provisioned that the private primary teacher training centre (PPTTC) affiliated with NCED would provide pre-service primary teacher training. This training would be divided into two semesters of five months. Similarly, In-service teacher training would have been divided into modules, i.e., first, second, and third phases for 330 hours, 660 hours, and 330 hours, respectively.

Regarding teacher training and the teacher's professional development, many empirical studies were conducted. In this regard, Khadka (2017) surveyed the secondary and lower secondary level English language teachers of Dailekh district who participated in the TPD training to explore their perceptions towards the training they had. The findings of the study showed that the participants had a positive attitude towards the 10-day TPD training, as the participants argued that the TPD helped them to update with emerging techniques and methods for their professional development.

Similarly, Budhathoki, (2017) studied teachers' perceptions towards teacher training for professional development to find out the role of teacher training in professional development. He surveyed the opinions of purposively selected secondary-level English teachers from private and public schools in the Salyan district. He found that the teacher viewed teacher training as the most essential, inevitable, and important way and strategy of professional development as it develops knowledge, skills, and competence both in content and pedagogy. Likewise, Gyawali (2007) compared the roles of training

among trained and untrained English teachers to find out the role of training in teaching the English language. He interviewed thirteen purposively selected teachers. He found that trained teachers were more competent than untrained teachers in content knowledge and evaluation skills and motivated students better than untrained teachers.

In a survey in Saudi Arabia, Al Asmari (2016) reported that many teachers perceived the CPD as a challenge to their existing knowledge and classroom practice. Highlighting the need for professional development, a survey in the US found that a majority of teachers found professional development either extremely (45%) or moderately (39%) beneficial (Pearsons et al., 2019). However, in a multi-case qualitative study, Powell and Bodur (2019) examined that teachers face challenges accessing effective TPD and transferring knowledge and pedagogical skills in their classrooms. Finally, Acharya (2019) found that activity-based TPD training was effective in improving teachers' perceptions, self-efficacy and process skills in Nepal. She further suggested that teacher training based on an activity-based approach can gear up to the improvement of teachers' self-efficacy learning which transforms the belief system of teachers about teaching and learning.

The literature review revealed that teachers raised their voices for need-based, self-selected, or equitable training, unlike existing center-oriented, expert-based training. Similarly, some studies found that many teacher trainings failed to transfer pedagogical skills to classrooms due to the lack of favourable teaching learning focusing on the English language teachers in rural Nepali contexts connecting teacher training with TPD. Thus, this study bridges the gap in this issue. This study further examines the policies and practices of teacher training in the new federally restructured contexts in rural Nepal.

Methodology

I adopted narrative inquiry as a research design where the researcher describes the lives of individuals, collects and tells stories about people's lives, and writes narratives of individual experiences. Moreover, a narrative tells a short or extended story about something significant or relates to a life story from its inception (Chase, 2005). I selected three experienced teachers from three schools in Doti district using a purposive sampling strategy to select the participants whose main concern is to acquire in-depth information although it may not be representative, and its information may not be generalizable. As the tool of data collection, I used semi-structured, in-depth interviews based on different areas of teacher training. I developed the interview guidelines first. Then I went to the field, took the consent of the participants, and interviewed them individually. I recorded the stories of the participants with the help of my cell phone. The interviews were conducted in Nepali language as it was preferred by the participants. In the next phase, I transcribed their responses and translated the needed ones. After all, I coded, categorized, compared, and contrasted the data with the provisions and existing scenarios. I followed the thematic approach of data analysis proposed by Barkhuizen et al., (2014) where the researcher reads the data repeatedly, codes it, categorizes, extracts and recognizes the thematic headings.

The participants for this study were three teachers teaching at the Secondary Level in Doti district. They have been named by pseudonyms as they did not like to mention their names. Moreover, they all were from government schools and with 12, 17 and 20 years of teaching experience.

Results and Discussion

The major concern of this study was to explore the perceptions of secondary-level English teachers towards teacher training for professional development and to explore the existing challenges/issues that the teachers faced in teacher training in Nepal. The study's findings are presented into two main themes: teachers' perceptions of teacher training and challenges faced by the teachers in training.

Teachers' Perceptions on Teacher Training

As the study is concerned with exploring the experienced teachers' beliefs and opinions on teacher training for professional development, their stories and experiences have been documented, analysed and synthesised. After coding, categorizing, and processing the data, the following themes have been found as teachers' perspectives on teacher training for professional development.

Teacher Training: A Strategy of Professional Development

The pace of change has been accelerated because of modern technologies. Today's inventions become outdated for tomorrow. One of the previous innovations in the field of education is teacher training as a strategy for teacher professional development (Richard and Farrell, 2005). It encompasses content and methodology as major components. Furthermore, adequate development of content knowledge and pedagogical skills are fundamental aspects of teacher professional development.

The participants involved in this study agreed that teacher professional development is possible via teacher training. Similar to the findings of Gyawali (2007) that trained teachers are competent in subject knowledge in comparison to untrained ones, Harish Ghale (pseudonym), one of the participants, explained:

Teacher training is not sufficient for teacher professional development, but it is one of the strategies which assist them to be updated, skilful, and professional. It is a platform where one can activate his/her learning experience. Therefore, I believe that there are many strategies for teacher professional development, and teacher training is one among them all. I would not be able to be exposed in the classroom well before the training, but I became able to handle the classroom now.

Hence, the data revealed that teachers perceived training as the foremost strategy to grow professionally. It equips teachers with content and pedagogical skills that make their teaching different from untrained teachers. Similarly, another interviewee, Shishir Bantawa (pseudonym) said:

Professional development is both personal and institutional. Teacher training is a sharing of problems, experiences, and learning which assists the teachers to grow up. Thus, as I have experienced 20 years of teaching, I have been equipped with a lot of skills for my profession. So, I believe that training is a prerequisite for teacher professional development.

The data obtained from both participants revealed that teacher training is a basis for professional development. Teachers can share their learning experiences. They can learn via collaborative learning. Moreover, training is a solution to their problems. Training helped teachers get equipped with professional skills, and keep them updated. This finding is similar to Pearson et al., (2019) who reported that a majority of teachers in the US found TPD training beneficial for their professional development. Therefore, teacher training is one of the effective and inevitable strategies for teacher professional development.

Thus, both the earlier findings by scholars and the participants' responses confirmed that teacher training is one of the major professional development strategies for teachers.

Need-based Training Assures for Teachers' Competence Development

The government of Nepal has provisions for pre-service training, in-service training, TPD training, and need-based training. However, teachers were more inclined to need-based training for their professional growth. Need-based training is a training program where the trainees' needs are previously analyzed, and the sessions are developed to address the problems or challenges identified. Teacher

training in Nepal has been practised from the centre. In this regard, SSDP 2016 provisioned for need and demand-based training (MOE, 2016). However, the data I obtained from the real practitioners; 'three secondary-level experienced teachers disclosed that they hardly got need-based training until their 20 years of teaching service. This study found the gap between government policies providing need and demand-based training and the practice of teacher training in Nepal.

The participants demanded need-based training. Moreover, they believed that only need-based training can ensure their needs or problems when the policies are implemented. One of the interviewees, Harish Ghale (pseudonym), expressed:

As I attended different need-based training sessions, what I would like to say is; that in need-based training, teachers' needs are to be analysed from the ground before conducting any sort of training program. The problems which they face in the classroom are taken in the discussions for solutions.

The participants indicated that need-based training addressed teachers' needs and solved the problems. As Harish Ghale said, he attended need-based training and found it effective to grow up because it goes to the ground; digs out the reality; and attempts to address the issues.

Similarly, Shishir Bantawa (pseudonym) seemed agreed to the idea stated by Ghale. In that case, he responded:

Teachers face many problems during their classroom teaching such as problems with method, problems in content or something else. Some teachers are novices, and some are too old and are confused about methods, content, and technological skills. In such a condition, teachers need mentoring support which is possible via need-based training. So, I would like to extend my wish to better implement a need-based training policy.

The participants were intended to have need-based training to enhance their professional competence. They believed that training equipped them with new technological skills and the contents needed to be delivered in the classroom. This finding aligns with Acharya (2019) who suggested activity-based TPD based on teachers' needs to improve teachers' pedagogical skills and self-efficacy. Thus, the result of the study indicated that need-based training is the only means to address the grounded problems of the teachers. SSDP provisioned for need and demand-based training, which found somehow in practice what the secondary level teachers preferred for their professional development (MOE, 2016).

Training Equipped Teachers with New Science and Technological Skills

The modern era is the era of rapid development of science and technology. Information and communication technology (ICT) have become the essence of modern teaching. Therefore, every teacher is required to update themselves. In the interview, the participants reported that they were disarrayed by using technology in the classroom in their early teaching days. However, they were able to use those technological tools and materials when the interview was taken. They credited the training programs they attended. In this regard, one of the interviewees, Sharmila Shakya (pseudonym) said:

I am running in my 17th year of teaching in a government school. I would like to introduce myself as one of the experienced teachers here. In my school years, I did not get information about how to deal with modern technologies, but I am catering to this digital-born generation nowadays in my classroom. Moreover, she said, it is because of teacher training programs which made her acquainted with those tools and materials to be used in the classroom.

The above remarks made by the participants revealed that they updated with ICT themselves by attending different training programs to cope with the learners of the 21st century.

Similarly, another participant, Shishir Bantawa (pseudonym) shared his experience:

I learned to use cell phones in 2010 when I was running in my 12th year of teaching experience. I would not know about computers, projectors or other tools like Ms word, power point, and Excel etc. It was a bit surprising that my daughter taught me about the goggles. When my school started using ICT in the classroom, I was too much troubled, but ICT training made me familiar with those skills, nowadays, I am using ICT tools in the classroom. I would like to thank our government for launching such sort of policies.

The data showed that the training programs helped teachers to update themselves with modern technology, methodology, pedagogy, and content. All participants agreed that they benefited from teacher training programs. Previously, Khadka (2017) and Budhathoki (2017) also found that the teachers perceived training as a strategy to keep themselves updated with modern shifts in pedagogy, technology and science. Thus, TPD training is significant to update teachers with technological skills along with various pedagogical skills.

Challenges Faced by the Teachers in Teacher Training

The second research question of this study was to explore the issues and challenges faced by teachers in teacher training in Nepal. Three major subthemes have been developed from the data analysis process.

Geographical Difficulty and Unequal Development: Cause of Inaccessibility in Training

Participants involved in this study reported that they have to travel long distances to join the training as the training centre is geographically far from their home and school. Some of them were unable to attend training due to centralised training centres. In this regard, Sharmila Shakya said:

I started teaching at a public school in the Doti district. In my earlier teaching time, my school was not equipped with electricity and internet. We were deprived of so many notices of training. Even if we had been informed, we would have been at the training centre walking four hours in feet. So, that was so difficult. The geography of the place and the underdeveloped situation stood up as the hindrance to our professional growth.

The data revealed that geographical barriers limit teachers' training opportunities, especially in remote areas. The training centre at the local level lacked enough resources and infrastructure for teachers' training. Teacher training programs were not equally available. Similarly, Harish Ghale (pseudonym) shared his experience:

All the training programs are not accessible to all the teachers who are teaching across the country. I remember 10 months of primary-level in-service training; it was to be listened to via the Radio program, but it was hard to have access to the radio in some places. Moreover, it was hard to launch any training package in such a place. Still, training packages are not accessible to all the teachers because of the geographical difficulties and not enough resources, infrastructures etc.

The participants repeatedly reported that teachers who were teaching in the countryside were unable to get access to teacher training programmes due to geographical difficulties and the

inaccessibility of training centres in their place. Geographical diversity was a hindrance to the development of infrastructure and resources, so access to the training program for teachers in such a place became a genuine issue in teacher training in Nepal. However, Powell and Bodur (2019) examined that teachers face challenges accessing effective TPD and transferring knowledge and pedagogical skills in their classrooms in the US. Thus, the geographical difficulty was a cause of inaccessibility to the resources and exposures for trainees. Moreover, it stood up as a challenge in teacher training in Nepal.

Central Practices in Teacher Training: A Controversy in Federalism

The federal system is simply about power distribution and equal development. Nepal has practised federalism since 2072 B.S., however, power distribution practices have not yet been taken into real-world practice. The teacher training sector has not been decentralised in this federal system yet. For example, SSDP and NCED provide centrally validated training and centrally developed training modules (MOE, 2016).

During the interviews, the participants expressed dissatisfaction as they needed to wait for a centrally provided training programme. The participants believed in power distribution and localisation to address locality, local culture, local languages, local resources, and infrastructures. They were confused about the centrality of course development and the provision of centrally validated training. For example, Shishir Bantawa said:

Centrally validated training cannot assure teachers' needs. To dig out small problems and needs of the teachers, local agencies need to work out for instance; rural municipalities, municipalities or other local agencies. If the policies were designed in the Centre, those policies could not ensure the teachers teaching in marginal places. Still, we have centrally programmed training packages.

Hence, the above comments showed that teacher training programs were still Centre-oriented. Moreover, teachers believed that the policies designed in the centre have become unable to address their needs in the local context. For that, federal practices should be taken into practice well.

Likewise, another participant, Harish Ghale, said:

I have been teaching for 20 years, but I have not recognized the course developers. As I know, there is CDC, ETC, NCED, Shaikshik Janashakti Bikash Kendra, etc. are working in the field of teacher training. Most of the training packages seem imposing in nature. In my opinion, central practices in the teacher training program are a huge challenge in this federalism...]

Throughout the data, it was found that the policies were not in actual practice. Still, the teachers' representation was not ensured in course development. Therefore, teachers have been facing many challenges in their teaching. Similarly, Sharmila Shakya said:

... the country has been practising federalism, but training packages are still center-oriented. Course development, collaboration, and other vital things are limited in the centre.....

As she stated, I learned that power should be distributed in the local agencies in the federal system. Moreover, collaboration, cooperation, and representation are better be ensured. The responses of all the interviewees demonstrated that the policies were prepared in the centre with the collaboration of some experts and educationists, but they were launched across the country in the same way with similar expectations. Thus, the practice itself has been found challenging. However, such challenges are

contextual. In Saudi Arabia, different from this challenge, Al Asmari (2016) reported that many teachers perceived the CPD as a challenge to their existing knowledge and classroom practice.

Nepotism, Favouritism, and Political Relation in the Selection of Trainees

Nepotism is practised among people with the power or influence of favouring relatives, especially for opportunities. The participants involved in this study also reported Nepotism, favouritism, and political relations have become the norms of the trainees' training selection though such practices are unethical. For example, Harish Ghale explained:

In most of the training, trainees are selected in terms of their relation with the head teacher, trainers, or some other sort of relations. For instance, if a head teacher or other persons of the agencies are in someone's contact, one asks them about the training packages, and they select him or her for training whether the training is for him or not.

The above remarks revealed that personal relation, influence, halo effect, or power relation are the factors which affect the selection of trainees. Likewise, Shishir Bantawa expressed:

Trainings have been conducted for formality. Training is for the sake of training; they are purposed to show up to be accomplished by the end of the financial year. Moreover, relatives of the head teacher, relatives of local leaders, and people with relation to them or with the representatives of the agency get a chance to participate in training.

Hence, the above data revealed that the practice of nepotism, favouritism, and political relations in selecting trainees became a great challenge in teacher training. As a result, the teachers who needed training could not get any opportunities.

Conclusion and Implications

Teacher training is the most important strategy of TPD. Professional development is an ongoing process in which the teacher must gain new skills, methods, approaches, and attitudes, and training is a specific program to make teachers professionally competent. Several policies have been developed for teacher training and have assured varieties of training modules and packages. SSDP, SSRP, Teacher Rule, Education Act, and several other reports of commissions have talked about teacher training where the courses for different kinds of training have been designed and disseminated by experts under NCED, ETC.

The mandatory provision of teacher training is an admiring step. It would rather launch demand-based, and need-based training programs to ensure quality education by enhancing teachers' competence. The teachers' needs would better be analyzed via discussion, class observation, and the data would better be recorded by the training hubs such as NCED, ETC, and the Leading Resource Centre (LRC). As this study aimed to explore the teachers' beliefs and opinions on teacher training for professional development, in-depth interviews were conducted with three experienced teachers to explore their pertinent beliefs on teacher training for professional development. It was found that teacher training is a fundamental strategy of teachers' professional development. As the findings showed, it is presented that teacher training is a platform for teachers to grow professionally.

The study found that teachers faced various problems in training in Nepal such as diversified geopolitics, central practices in the federal system, and unethical practices of nepotism, favouritism, and political relations. Furthermore, the practice of training modules and provisions do not match. SSDP has provoked the need-based training policy, but the practice is still centre-oriented, although the country

has been practising federalism. Thus, it is very important to implement locally designed teacher training to get a competent teacher. Moreover, factors like analysis of teachers' needs, accessibility, ecology, infrastructures, and resources should be considered to cope with those issues and challenges for the successful implementation of training policies for teacher professional development.

The findings of the study indicate that teachers, trainers, course designers, and administrators need to reconsider the role of centred-based teachers' professional development programs to make them more relevant to the local context of teaching and learning. Similarly, the insights from this study can be used while designing the training program, selecting the participants, and conducting the training program. The researchers who work in teacher training can conduct further studies based on the findings of this study.

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