

# Teacher Development: Strategies and Perception

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## Abstract

*Aspects of teachers' professional development in general and EFL teachers in non-English speaking countries in particular are issues that warrant constant research. Although these are widely researched areas internationally, within Nepal grounded professional development studies have been sparsely carried out. A considerable section of practicing English language teachers has no clear idea of the issue although it directly concerns themselves. Against this backdrop, this article explores some EFL teachers' perception on the concept of teacher development in a relatively sophisticated centrally located town of Nepal.*

**Key terms:** *teachers' professional development (TPD), perception, strategy, induction, mentoring etc.*

## Introduction

Teachers' professional development concerns the growth and development of teachers in their professional roles so that they can perform at their best. In other words, the process of making teachers competent at applying the knowledge and skills they have acquired in the classroom practice is teacher professional development (TPD). Professional development of a teacher is an ongoing and comprehensive process which starts with the pre-service education, trainings etc. and continues until the retirement. Fullan (1995, p. 265) mentions that teachers' professional development is "the sum total of formal and informal learning pursued and experienced by the teacher in a compelling and dynamic change".

A professionally competent teacher is an outcome of different processes and factors. For example, a teacher's knowledge and practice have to be integrated for effective teaching. Besides this, a teacher also needs to have a drive for developing himself/herself professionally. Bredeson (2002) perceives the notion of professional development to be consisting of three interdependent concepts: leaning, engagement and involvement, and defines professional development as "learning opportunities that engage educators' creative and reflective capacities in ways that strengthen their practice" (p. 663).

According to Joshi (2012), teacher development includes both formal and informal means of helping teachers to master new skills, widen their knowledge, develop an innovative insight into their pedagogy, their practice and their understanding of their own needs, since a teacher's professional development is an aspect of his or her personal development as a whole.

Teachers as professionals have to continuously strive for new knowledge. Regarding this Sharma and

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Shrestha (2013, p. 17) put:

Teachers as professional continually receive knowledge on the job because their work entails engagement in a succession of cases, problems or projects and need to consult many other teacher reference books which are the sources of teachers' knowledge in his or her professional education.

Teachers accumulate knowledge from time to time from different sources. Regarding the knowledge in professional education, Wallace (1991, pp. 14-15) summarize teachers knowledge into two types. They are: received knowledge i.e. the knowledge which is gained after studying professional publications like textbooks, teacher reference books, newspaper, articles etc., and experiential knowledge i.e. the knowledge which is formed or discovered by the teachers themselves with the help of existing knowledge which enables them to modify the knowledge to fit in a particular context.

A range of activities whether they are formal or informal are carried out to develop a teacher intellectually, socially and professionally. Formal programs like teacher trainings, workshops, seminars etc. are introduced to teachers so that they can familiarize themselves with the innovations in the teaching and learning field. Similarly, teachers are encouraged to intensify their skills, knowledge required in their profession from their own perspective. Once teachers realize and understand the real spirit of teacher development, they can focus their activities on developing them professionally. Such teachers take a risk to experiment with new techniques and skills while teaching in classroom and feel free to learn from other learning opportunities. Awasthi (2011) raises a number of issues regarding ELT teacher education in Nepal. According to him, although ELT courses and training of teachers in Nepal started in 1971 with the implementation of National Education System Plan (NESP), when the Institute of Education of Tribhuvan University initiated B.Ed. programme in English Education... “ even after so many years ...there is still a dire need of trained and efficient English teachers in Nepal” (Awasthi 2011, p. 22). Similarly, he quotes studies like Davies et al (1984), Bhadra and Yadav (1988), Kerr (1994) that report that many Nepalese English teachers ( both teaching in schools and universities) lack adequate language proficiency and necessary skills and experience. This points to the need for awareness among the teachers regarding their professional development. Against this backdrop, this paper explores how TPD is perceived by English language teachers in Chitwan.

## **2. Theoretical Literature**

Theoretically, this paper is largely based on the literature on professional development strategies as discussed in Richards and Farrell (2005). They mention individual and institutional perspectives to teachers professional development. “Professional development is directed toward both the institutions' goals and the teacher's own personal goals” (p. 9). From the point of view of the teacher's personal development, they identify the following areas:

- Subject-matter knowledge
- Pedagogical expertise
- Self-awareness
- Understanding of learners

- Understanding of curriculum and materials, and
- Career advancement

Similarly, from the institutional perspective, teacher development is primarily conceived of in terms of the need of the institution. It refers to developmental activities within a school or institution, it can be also called staff development, and often takes the form of in-service training. Richard and Farrell (2005, pp.10-11) mention following goals of such a perspective:

- Institutional development
- Career development
- Enhanced levels of student learning

To realize the professional development goals, Richards suggests the following activities for teachers to participate in:

- engaging in self-reflection and evaluation
- developing specialized knowledge and skills about many aspects of teaching
- expanding their knowledge base about research, theory and issues in teaching
- taking on new roles and responsibilities such as supervisor or mentor teacher, teacher researcher, or material writer
- developing collaborative relationship with other teachers.

Richards and Farrell (ibid.) further mention eleven different strategies that facilitate English language teachers' professional development. They are workshops, self-monitoring, teacher support groups, keeping a teaching journal, peer observation, teaching portfolios, analyzing critical incidents, case analysis, peer coaching, team teaching and action research.

Summing up, professional learning involves studying and practicing the knowledge and skills required to a profession. This act is refinement of the professional role so that the individual can serve at his/her best. A teacher can adopt a number of ways and techniques prevailing in the field in order to learn new knowledge, skills, techniques etc. which we call teacher learning strategies. Indeed, these teacher learning strategies are useful means for a teacher who wishes to forward his/her teaching career. Against this theoretical backdrop, the article discusses which of the strategies are teachers aware of and approve of.

### **3. Methodology**

This article is entirely based on the data made available by Chalise (2015), which was his master degree dissertation. His research was basically a perception survey carried out among English language teachers of Chitwan district. More specifically, the in-service secondary level English teachers of Bharatpur Sub-Metropolitan City were the study population. Sample for this study were 40 English language teachers from different secondary level schools. The sampled teachers were selected using purposive non-random sampling method. A set of questionnaire with open-ended and close-ended questions was the main tool to elicit the required data.

#### 4. Data and Discussion

The selected English teachers were first asked what they understood by the term Teacher’s Professional Development (TPD), and then asked questions on their perception of the roles of training and workshop, collaboration among teachers, teacher induction programmes, visiting neighbouring schools, reflective practices, and teacher effort, in TPD. In the following section, their responses have been tabulated and described.

##### 4.1 Teachers’ Perception on TPD

Though many teachers were aware of what teacher’s professional development meant, they said they were not successful to convert the knowledge in practice. This hints that they need to know the true sense of TPD. Their responses regarding the knowledge about TPD are tabulated here:

**Table 1 Teachers’ perception of TPD**

Statement	Distracters	No. Res.	%
Teacher Development means	Helping teachers develop economically	-	-
	Improving their knowledge and performance regarding teaching	32	80
	Working for their job security	2	5
	Teaching them what to do in classroom	6	15

*Source: Chalise (2015)*

When asked about the meaning of teacher development, majority of the teachers answered correctly. Only few teachers could not define it or understand it in its true sense.

Eighty percent of the teachers chose the distracter ‘improving their knowledge and performance regarding teaching’, which is the correct answer. On the other hand, 15% teachers chose the distracter ‘teaching them what to do in classroom’ and one teacher chose the option ‘working for their job security’. No teachers chose the distracter ‘helping them to develop economically’.

Some of the representative responses from teachers when asked about the meaning of teacher professional development (by an open-ended question) are as follows.

Teacher development means:

‘... developing teachers’ teaching skills and knowledge in there subject matter so that they can serve the learners in their best way...’

‘... promoting the teachers to do their job in a professional way. It is the process in which teacher constantly increase their knowledge and teaching ideas by means of training...’

‘.... making teachers complete in their roles... making them more professional... empowering their performances... making them more skilled...’

‘...developing teachers all aspects like personal, social, academic etc.’

*Source: Chalise (2015)*

Almost 70% of teachers (28 in number) could define the term in satisfactory way. They said it was a long term process in which teachers better themselves in their professional roles. On the other hand, some teachers just took it as a kind of training program, supporting teachers in their problems and so on. This means teachers' perception of professional development ranges from narrow to broad and comprehensive.

#### 4.1.1 Teachers' Perception Regarding Training and Workshop Programs

For many teachers, teacher training program is another phrase to understand teacher development. It is the highly used strategy for teacher professional development. Interestingly, workshops are not as popular as teacher training programs. Their response regarding teacher training and workshop programs is as follows:

**Table 2 Perception on training and workshops programs**

S N	Statements	Responses			
		Yes		No	
		No.	%	No.	%
1.	Have you attended any teacher training program?	36	90	4	10
2.	Do you find the trainings useful for you?	24	60	16	40
3.	Does an experienced teacher need training?	30	75	10	25
4.	Do you apply the skills learnt in training?	20	50	20	50
5.	Have you participated in any teacher workshop?	20	50	20	50

*Source: Chalise (2015)*

The information in table 2 shows the teachers' perception on the practicality of the trainings and workshops. Majority of the teachers claim that they are trained, 90% (36 teachers), but only 60% (24 teachers) of them found the trainings useful. Similarly, only half of the trained teachers said they could apply the learnt skills, techniques etc. in their classroom. Majority of teachers (75%) have positive attitude towards the need of training and they maintained that experienced teachers also need training programs from time to time. It is interesting to note that only half of the teachers have participated in workshops as teacher learning programs. This means workshop programs are carried out in less number than the training programs.

#### 4.1.2 Teachers' Perception on Teacher Induction Program

Teacher induction program sounded to be very new concept to the majority of the teachers. Many of the teacher expressed circumlocutory answers regarding the meaning and function of teacher induction program. Their responses and views are presented as follows:

**Table 3 Perception on teacher induction program**

Statement	Distracters	Number of Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
Teacher induction program bridges the theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge	Strongly Agree	12	30
	Agree	16	40
	Disagree	-	-
	Not sure	12	30

Source: Chalise (2015)

Teachers seemed to hold different views regarding the function of teacher induction program. Majority of the teachers supported the idea of teacher induction program as the bridge for practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge. Thirty percent of the teachers strongly agreed with the statement ‘teacher induction program bridges the theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge’. Similarly, other 40% of the teachers just agreed with the statement. No teachers denied the function of induction program. The notable thing about this issue is that around 30% (12 in number) of the teachers showed their ignorance about it. They were also asked about its meaning and importance. Some of their opinions are as following:

‘It is a kind of support provided to the newly appointed teachers ...’

‘... is helping new teachers to in their profession with possible challenges’

‘... it is just like orientation program to the newly teachers so that they can sustain in their profession...’

‘... introducing teachers in their schools...’ Source: Chalise (2015)

Most of the teachers are pretty close about the meaning and importance of the teacher induction programs. They suppose this program is provided to a new teacher. Still, there are some teachers who have no clear concept of this program. To conclude, around 70% of the teachers have the good concept of teacher induction program.

#### 4.1.3 Visiting Neighboring Schools and Teachers

When asked about the idea of visiting neighboring or other schools for teacher professional development, some teachers considered it a useful strategy. But some teachers did not think it will help them. Their responses towards the idea are presented as follows:

**Table 4 Visiting neighboring schools and teachers**

Statement	Distracters	Number of Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
Visiting neighboring schools can be beneficial for teacher professional development	Strongly Agree	8	20
	Agree	24	60
	Disagree	8	20
	Strongly Disagree	-	-

Source: Chalise (2015)

When they were asked whether ‘visiting neighboring schools can be beneficial for teacher’, twenty percent

of the teachers agreed strongly and 60% just agreed with the idea. On the other hand, 20% of the teacher did not think it would be beneficial.

To sum up, majority of the teachers have positive attitude on learning by seeing others or learning from modeling.

#### 4.1.4 Teachers' Perception Regarding the Meaning and Function of Mentoring

In our context, mentoring is a new concept for many existing teachers. The researchers needed to tell something about mentoring while distributing the questionnaire. Their responses about the topic are presented as follows:

**Table 5 Perception on mentoring**

Statements	Distracters	No of respondent	Percent
Teacher mentoring is ... of teacher induction.	a. an ingredient	24	60
	b. an alternative	8	20
	c. an optional activity	4	10
	d. an unnecessary activity	4	10
A mentor provides the new teachers:	a. dos and don'ts	8	20
	b. guidance and suggestions as per the need	20	50
	c. intensive training	8	20
	d. problems and challenges	4	10

*Source: Chalise (2015)*

The data in the above tables indicates the teachers' perception in connection with the teaching learning strategies mentoring and its meaning and purposes. According to this data, more half of the teachers know the meaning and purposes of mentoring.

Regarding the meaning of the term, 60% teachers know what mentoring is. They suppose mentoring is one of the essential part of the teacher education program. But other 40% teachers do not know the exact meaning of mentoring. Twenty percent of them considered mentoring as an alternative of teacher induction program. Funnily, other 20% of the teachers opined that it is optional and unnecessary activity for teacher development.

Though many of the teachers are well aware about teacher induction program and mentoring, still some teachers do not know the function and meaning of mentoring. As mentoring may be a new practice in our teaching learning system, considerable number of teachers, i.e. 40%, show their unawareness about it.

#### 4.1.5 Teachers' Perception on Reflective Practice

The teachers were asked about the concept of 'reflective practice' for teacher development. Their responses are presented in the table as following:

**Table 6 Perception on reflective practice**

Statements	Distracters	No. of respondents	%
Reflective practice in teacher learning means	a. to learn from one's own performance	26	65
	b. to observe other's teaching	6	15
	c. to learn from experts	8	20
	d. to continue with conventional methods	-	-
Who has the major role in reflective practice?	a. Supervision	6	15
	b. Mentor	8	20
	c. teacher himself	24	60
	d. learners	2	5

*Source: Chalise (2015)*

The figures in table 6 present information regarding the teachers' knowledge about reflective practice. Majority of the teachers claimed that they knew about 'reflective practice'. When asked about its meaning, 65% of the teachers chose the distracter 'to learn from one's own performance' which is the correct answer. Unfortunately, other 20% thought it is the process of learning from experts and 15% of them consider it as observing other teacher's classroom. Regarding people's roles in reflective practice, 60% percent of teachers thought that 'teacher himself' has the major role, while 20% teachers thought that a mentor has the prime role. Similarly, 15% gave the role to supervisor and only one teacher gave it to learners .

This suggests that some teachers still do not know the concept of reflective practice as teacher's self responsibility.

#### 4.1.6 Teachers' Efforts for their Professional Development

The sampled teachers were asked about what teaching learning strategies they adopted for their professional learning along with the frequency of their use of those strategies. Their responses are summarized in the table below.

**Table 7 Teachers' efforts for professional development**

S. N.	How often do you utilize the learning strategies?	Frequency of respondents		
	Learning strategies	Usually	Sometimes	Never
1.	Workshops	4	20	16
2.	Self-monitoring	4	26	10
3.	Teacher support group	12	28	-
4.	Preparing teaching portfolio	4	16	20
5.	Action research	6	12	20
6.	Team teaching	4	20	16
7.	Keeping journal	2	10	28
8.	Case analysis	8	26	6

*Source: Chalise (2015)*

The data in table 7 indicate that many teachers adopt a variety of strategies for learning-the most popular



being the teacher support group and self monitoring, and the least popular, keeping journal.

The two teacher learning strategies, team teaching and workshop, share the similar figure. Fifty percent of the teachers adopt team teaching and workshop sometimes, 5% of the teachers very often and 40% of the teachers have not practiced them yet. Similarly, other two strategies, self-monitoring and case analysis share the similar figure. Ten percent of the teachers learn very often from self monitoring and 20% of the teachers learn very often using case analysis. Sixty-five teachers learn using the both strategies sometimes.

Teacher support group is a highly used teacher learning strategy. Thirty percent of the teachers *usually* follow this, and 70% teachers adopt this *sometimes*. The notable thing about this strategy is that there is no record of teachers who never follow this leaning strategy.

In case of preparing teaching portfolio, only half of the teachers take this for their advantages living other half untouched by it. Ten percent of the teachers are found to be regularly benefitted from it and 40% teachers use it sometimes for their learning.

Very limited teachers were found using keeping journal for their learning. Only 5% teacher follow this usually and 25% teachers sometimes. Apart from them, the large portion of the teachers, i.e. 70% teachers never bother themselves with this strategy.

Team teaching, as being another teacher learning strategy, is used regularly by 10% teachers and 50% teachers do it sometimes. It is also found that 40% of the teachers never exploit this strategy for their learning. Overall, around 60% teachers follow the above mentioned teacher learning strategies for their developments. This means rest of the teachers do not like to use those strategies or do not want to update themselves with the learning process.

## 5. Conclusion

Overall, the English language teachers are in the process of getting trained and becoming professional teachers, which is a positive sign. However, they are still not fully conscious of this issue. Training programs are conducted form different organization over a different period of time. However, teachers are reluctant to apply the skills, ideas, techniques etc learnt in training sessions in their real classroom situations. Newly appointed teachers hardly get teacher induction programs like mentoring, observation, support etc. The term teacher induction is still a new term for many schools. Some teachers are highly benefitted by teacher support group. In many schools, senior and skilled teachers support novice teachers. However, there is no any formal collaborative teacher learning activity. Very limited teachers carry out action researches in their classroom while others do not know how to conduct it and its possible advantages.

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