

Women Teacher's Barrier in Professional Development: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the experiences of women teachers in the Kailali district of one ward in Nepal, who face barriers in professional development. This study had a small sample size, with two participants from both private and public schools, each with over ten years of teaching experience. I employed a critical theory approach and conducted semi-structured interviews via the Zoom app to collect the data. The findings revealed that women teachers are not prioritised in training and workshops which creates a barrier in professional development. Additionally, the dual burden of home and work responsibilities stifled their creativity and impacted their financial situation. The study suggests that the policy for recruiting women teachers should be inclusive. Further research is needed to investigate the issue of barriers in the overall development of women teachers, both at home and in the workplace, to support their professional development and growth.

Keywords: Professional Development, inequality, women teachers, responsibilities.

Introduction

Despite Nepal's legal provisions for gender equality, Nepalese society continues to be male-dominated. Consequently, Nepalese female professionals must balance their office work with a significant burden of family responsibilities, such as housework and

childcare. The requirement to seek permission from their families before undertaking certain tasks further limits the autonomy of these women. As a result, Nepalese female professionals often experience a loss of self-confidence, ability, self-perception, and risk-taking capacity. Furthermore, only a small number of Nepalese women have been able to reach higher positions in their careers, as Nepalese society continues to deprive female people of opportunities for career development. These invisible barriers hinder the professional growth and advancement of Nepalese women.

Professional Development is a continuous process that helps teachers grow professionally. Professional development PD in the circumstances of teachers is a vital procedure to extend after they inaugurate their competent profession and till their retirement. (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Villegas-Reimer, 2003). In the context of Nepalese EFL teaching, the teachers learn approaches and procedures during the pre-service courses, however, there is a challenge in translating these skills into classroom teaching (Shah, 2015). For professional development, applying the teaching approaches in classroom teaching is challenging for women teachers. (Khadka, 2020) states that women English language teachers face multiple challenges in being mothers, engaging in household chores, and fulfilling professional obligations in formal and informal settings.

In the same way, different hurdles have been detected in the professional development of women in many countries. The unseen barriers stop women from attending senior positions in organizations (Adair, 1999 et. al., as cited in Maharjan, (2020). Being a women teacher in the Far West is also a big challenge to grow professionally as I have experience being alone at home and doing household chores; together with a teaching profession, I was stuck between both responsibilities. Furthermore, women teachers have announced more hurdles than males and significant struggles in getting professional development opportunities for them (Armstrong, 2003).

Similarly, Ruohotie-Lyhty (2013) writes that teachers construct their initial career easily or with some obstacle in the subject that has not been studied yet. In this context, Telkamp (1981) views that their narratives and cooperation contradict the generalization

resemblance of the women teachers who struggle alone. The teachers of this research are encouraged to look for collaboration correlation and follow professional development. Furthermore, Bista, (2004) also focuses on the other matter where pools of women with eligibility to become teachers exist; however, family members' unwillingness to allow women to join schools and community and school principal's preference for male teachers are guided by a belief that it is men who should run schools. These tell that women teachers are struggling to set foot in professional development in traditionally, male domain society. Dunifon and Gill (2013) say that women teachers are imprisoned with heavy responsibilities in the sensitive nature of their jobs. As teaching and homemaking, both are work of great responsibility.

Most of the researchers have focused on the issues of women teachers' responsibilities. However, the available literature has not adequately documented the women teachers' barriers in professional development. Most female teachers face the unseen obstacles of home and workplace in day-to-day life in their profession. This study explores the women teachers' barriers to professional development among secondary-level women English teachers in the Kailali district. The unseen factors that hurdle the Far West's women teachers to achieve their professional careers are still to be explored. The study will address these two questions: What difficulties do they face in the workplace to prove themselves good professionals? Are they provided the same opportunities as male colleagues in training or professional development workshops?

This study was limited to the far western part of one ward, which focused on the secondary-level women teachers. I could not include women teachers of all levels in this study as this was a small study.

The study was carried out with the help of a qualitative method, the participants were asked to share their experiences with the help of some guided questions. The critical theory is adopted as it gives a way to give a voice to marginalised people.

Research Methodology

The teachers were from the Kailali district of one ward in the Far-West part of Nepal. The teachers were selected purposefully from both the private and public sectors, who were married, living with their families, and being mothers. The teachers were asked about their experiences of working in the private and public sectors and the school environment for professional opportunities. I purposively selected the two teachers from different socio-cultural backgrounds. One teacher was from a tharu community and remote village and is currently living in the city after her marriage. Another participant was from an urban area who has a good command of the English language and is very dedicated to her work in the private sector. It was not possible to meet both of them physically as they both were busy with their working schedule and one of the participants was distant away to whom the meeting was almost impossible. So, I managed to interview both of them with the help of the guiding questions through the Zoom app.

Being a researcher, I tried to maintain confidentiality. I assured my participants that their names wouldn't be revealed in the research process and pseudonyms would be given to them to reveal the information.

Findings and Discussions

The study found that women teachers have many unseen barriers in their daily lives. Despite their barriers, they were positive towards teaching and were working hard for professional development. The themes were developed considering the women teachers' experiences in their workplace.

Women Teacher's Preference in Teaching

Working Women are always busy with their household chores and professional duties. Likewise, they always care about the family's overall responsibilities. They engage in teaching jobs as most full-time faculty members in academic positions are expected to work long hours, although these hours are generally more flexible compared to other

professions (Bailyn, 2003; Gatta and Ross; Gunter and Stambach, 2003; Jacobs and Winslow, 2004a, b). Likewise, the teaching profession is more flexible than other professions.

I have observed that the women teachers devote their 10-4 time to school and also get benefits from the Summer, Dashain, Deepawali, and winter vacation which is very helpful for the women teachers to manage time for both the home and school. The women teachers find the teaching profession suitable for them as they have dual roles at home and at the workplace. Women teachers seem to bear dual responsibilities from the early days of their professional careers. Janu narrates that *"She started teaching after completing an intermediate level as her school was few steps from her home, she was much interested in teaching and she wants to be independent from her early career"*.

In the same way, in the study by Albelushi (2004, p.17) found that immediate placement, attractive work conditions including salary, and having more free time to spend with their children are the key motivations for women to opt for a teaching career. Women teachers know their responsibilities at home and workplace so, they choose to become in the teaching profession. According to Habermas, critical knowledge is devoted to uncovering the conditions of constraints and domination within society. The goal of this critical knowledge is to increase the emancipatory interest, leading to growth and greater freedom for individuals and groups. It has provided a root for women teachers to pursue the teaching profession, work hard for professional stability despite of dual responsibilities of home and school, and struggle inequality at the workplace. Similarly, there are higher number of women teachers at the primary level. The policy to recruit women teachers from the government to increase the number of girls is a good initiation. CERID (2009) highlighted that the policy on recruiting women teachers is relevant to girls' education, as women teachers not only fulfil their teaching duties but also provide care and support for the students (p. 37). Women teachers know better to take care of the children as they have the experience of motherhood and nurturing nature. Sanders (2002) also believed that women are more naturally or intuitively inclined towards caring for and nurturing children compared to males. Furthermore, Bina states that she had to struggle for her higher studies. Her brothers were allowed to join schools whereas her

parents refused to pay for her education. Her parents forced her to learn household chores. Bina narrates; "*She joined the school after her intermediate because the community members allowed her to work in the school as she was the only girl having a good degree from the Chaudhary community. Her main motto of joining the school was to support her further studies*".

She was not permitted to work from her family members they were against her job as her mother wanted her to do all the household chores. Although her neighbours were in favour of her. Being from the Chaudhary community where education was less valued she proved herself as a hard-working student and a teacher. She experienced that her presence in the school makes the female students feel easy to deal with all the matters in the classroom.

From the experiences of these teachers, we can say that despite the government policy to recruit women teachers and their contribution to school education women teachers face barriers from their families in their professional growth.

Responsibility Both Family and Professionalism Kill Creativity

Women teachers have the dual responsibilities of being a homemaker and a professional. The women teachers' priority is their family and their second priority is they choose to be professionals. Attempting all the home and workplace responsibilities creates stress for the women teachers. Being the role model in both places the women teachers' creativity is lost. Damiano-Teixeira (2006) found that women's dual roles and responsibilities - both in their family and profession - can create dilemmas and challenges in their attitudes. The study suggests that women teachers often choose their job based on household duties, and after employment, they face significant stress stemming from the demands of both family and profession. In the same way, (Bhatta, 2023) explores the stories of women English language teachers, narrates the struggles of women teachers in learning English, and sees how English language proficiency helped them be empowered. The women teachers struggled for professional growth working at home and the workplace. Moreover, Manzano (2021) highlights that academic activities

and workload are major contributors to elevated stress levels among women faculty members. In essence, the research indicates that the balance between women's family obligations and professional commitments can lead to internal conflicts and high levels of stress for women educators.

The women teachers have to bear the responsibility of both the house and their profession. Women teachers have to perform unseen responsibilities at home and the workplace; the participants of my research are also juggling between the responsibilities of home and work. Junu narrates;

Being a homemaker and professionally engaged she felt to have more responsibilities for children and being a private school principal she faced loaded responsibility of school and home being a mother of two children and living with in-laws. She admits that Working 10-4 is not enough for her professional development. She realised that She's unable to devote more time to school.

Janu is not able to provide sufficient time. She is not able to know the experience of students, which hinders the student's overall learning. Being a married woman she devoted her time for the sake of family.

Despite essential differences over the last few decades, working women continue to devote more time to homemaking and caring for family members than job holder men (Bianchi et. al., 2007). The critical theory analyzes the competing power interests between different groups and individuals and aims to identify who benefits and who is disadvantaged in specific situations. Critical researchers are concerned with understanding how underlying social structures oppress particular groups, such as the working class, women, and ethnic minorities (Foard, Henn & Weinstein, 2006, p.16). Similarly, the battle through time spent on occupation and care can be especially extreme for women academics (Suitor et. al., 2001). Furthermore, Jacobs and Winslow (2004) remark that women who are married and single parents with children spend fewer hours working than singles without children, although these effects are stronger for women than males. Bina states that "*She had to bear all the responsibilities of home and*

workplace as a result, she cannot concentrate on her profession as the male teachers do. At school, she recalls the household work to be done at home. The responsibility of both house and profession disturbs the concentration in one place".

The imbalance or conflict between professional work and family responsibilities can have real and significant consequences for women's careers and professional advancement. According to Friedman and Greenhaus (2000), women whose career goals differ significantly from their husbands tend to experience greater conflict between their work and household roles. Additionally, disagreements over family responsibilities and the husband's attitude towards the wife's employment can contribute to an imbalance between a woman's work and family life. The dual responsibility and less creativity at the workplace create a barrier to women teachers' professional growth.

Freedom to work professionally

Despite efforts by international organisations like UNESCO to promote gender equality in education as per the Millennium Development Goals, many girls and women continue to face gender discrimination in schools (UNESCO, 2015). Studies in various contexts show that schools have become a place to perpetuate gender biases and discrimination against girls and women teachers, ignoring their leadership and career development potential (López et al., 2020; McGinley, 2019; Poudel, 2019; Rangvid, 2019). Schools are an important agent of gender socialization, and unequal treatment of students based on gender is a violation of human rights and social justice. Such gender discrimination in schools can discourage students and lead to poor performance, high dropout rates, irregular attendance, and depression (McGinley, 2019). Similarly, Bina experienced that despite working in the public school she had a bad experience of not getting any opportunity to participate in the training sessions and other decision-making-related issues. She further narrates that *"There are many training sessions conducted by the government but the men teachers do not ask for our participation rather they say you please take my class too instead of you I will be there"*.

She had to face the autocratic rule at the school which brought many barriers to her professional development. Similarly, Acharya et al. (2007), even when women are

equally qualified as men, their access and participation in business, work, institutional decision-making, and development sectors remains limited. This is true across different ecological regions, urban/rural areas, and ethnic/caste backgrounds. The research indicates that women often still require permission or approval from their husbands or parents to pursue business or employment opportunities, despite their qualifications and capabilities as men. As Turner, (2003) stated that critical theory is focused on revealing the conditions and circumstances that lead to constraints and domination within society (pp. 211-212). Furthermore, critical theory is concerned with issues of power dynamics and social justice (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 306). This suggests persistent sociocultural barriers and gender biases that constrain women's access to professional and economic opportunities. Janu has also experienced a lack of freedom as she was occupied with household responsibilities and she had to ask for permission whenever she had some more professional working hours at school. Janu says "*If she's given the freedom from the family to work professionally, she would devote her time to help the weak students and make them able in their studies. Due to the lack of time, she is not able to do so*".

In a study by Rijal and Wasti (2018), women teachers shuffle between communal norms, family responsibility and expectations of the organization, Women teachers have a lot of responsibility to look after as they don't have a balanced life. Similarly, Bista, (2004) also focuses on other matters where groups of women with eligibility to become teachers exist; however, family members' unwillingness to allow women to join in schools and community and school principal's preference for men teachers guided by a belief that it is men who should run schools. Women teachers need time to develop themselves professionally. Women teachers need more time to support from their family to prove themselves. For this change, society should not make the social values and responsibilities only for women, but the responsibilities should be equally divided with each family member.

In the same way, Hoel (as cited in Abrahamsen, 2005) mentions that professional work with dedication and determination to be sound in their related field. The women teachers

who work for their professional development seem to be hard-working. Women teachers mainly work full-time. In the context of the Far-West working professionals have some hazards which draw them back. Furthermore, Bista, (2006) explains that there are boundor no opportunities for women to get promoted. This studyfound that Nepali women teachers have taught in schools as an additional job to their household chores since their engagement in the profession outside their home is not an excuse for the reduced domestic duties, and no democratic environment in the workplace which becomes a barrier for women teachers to grow professionally.

Conclusions

The study's findings reveal that women teachers in the private and public sectors have different barriers of professional development. The women teachers' dual responsibility of both family and professionalism kills creativity as they are unable to concentrate in one place. Lack of freedom at the workplace is also a barrier at the workplace which results in a decline in professional development. For professional growth, one needs to be physically and mentally healthy. Then only womenteachingprofessionals can have a good outcome in the teaching-learning. Even the policy for recruiting women teachers needs to be improved and the women teachers should be given the obligation at school in overall participation.

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