

Teacher Professional Development Model in Special Education in Nepal

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to generate a special education teacher professional development model for Nepal. The study covered all geographical regions representing special schools and general schools with special class. The survey group was 200 special education teachers. Data were collected using focus-group interviews and survey questionnaires. Data analysis was carried out by using descriptive statistics, content analysis as well as t-test and ANOVA. Special education teachers viewed the need of teacher professional development at high level including initial preparation, induction and mentoring, recognition of special education services and continuous professional growth. Individual socio-demographic characteristics: level, type and location of the school, gender, age, qualification, experience, and service type of teachers, and disability category of the students were significantly related to special education teacher's views. There is no Special Education Teacher Professional Development (SETPD) plan due to the lack of expertise and training materials. Recommendations to implement are in organizational, program, teacher, and individual level. Special education teacher professional development is recommended as a long-term process making Universities, NCED and local level agencies responsible.

Keywords: Professional development/Initial Preparation/Induction and Mentoring/ Continuous Professional Growth

Background

Nepal has committed achieving universal primary education as a part of its effort to reach the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The country is a part of the Education for All (EFA) campaign to ensure all children, particularly girls, and those in difficult circumstances have access to, and complete, free and compulsory education of a good quality" (CERID, 2009). School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) (2009-2015) aims to improve access, equity and quality within the education system to meet the EFA goals and MDGs, with an emphasis on out of school population. In spite of these efforts, there are several challenges in managing barrier free education increasing equitable access to the students with exceptionalities. National Center for Educational Development (NCED) has one month training for teachers to be completed within 5 years but shrinks their provision within regular school teachers. Human Rights Watch (2011) criticizes that the government provides minimal special education training only to teachers working in special schools or resource classes and teachers in mainstream schools do not receive adequate training on how to integrate children with disabilities in their classrooms. Special education is not taught in higher secondary and university level but there is one year B. Ed course in Tribhuvan University in Special Needs Education, even though, it does not offer specialization in any area of disability in particular. National Human Right Commission (2013) states that there is the deficiency of adequately trained teachers in special or resource schools

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that is becoming unable to expose the full potential of the children with disabilities. Many countries in the world have their specific laws to regulate special education. Special education is taught as a separate discipline in many universities of USA, UK, Australia, Japan, and Korea. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in USA is the leading Special Education Law to ensure special education provision with teacher preparation for quality education.

The purpose of this study is to generate a special education teacher professional development model by analyzing special educators' views with the research questions: what is the existing status of special education teacher professional development in Nepal, and what could be the appropriate special education teacher professional development model (SETPDM) with institutional arrangement to address a) Initial preparation; b) Induction and mentoring; and c) Continuous professional growth.

Analytical Expansion of the Contents

Teacher Professional Development

Teacher educators provoke positive correlations between teacher certification status and students achievement. The quality of educational services for children and youth with exceptionality resides in the abilities, qualifications, and competencies of the personnel that provide the services (Council of Exceptional Children, 1988). Special education teachers are required to be generally competent in many areas, especially in interpersonal skills, including counselling and conducting teaching services for students with special needs (Branch, 1990). Professional development of teachers is closely associated with the quality of initial training, in-service training and professional and technical support made available to the teachers. Teacher professional development program is a long term commitment of time, energy, experience and resources.

Paradigm Shift in Teacher Professional Development: Instruction centered paradigm has been shifted to a learning paradigm. Traditional professional development opportunities have tended to be isolated, one-shot experiences, disconnected from each other and only remotely related to the subjects, activities, and challenges of teachers' real work. Rapid globalization, liberalization, and market oriented economy have strong influence in public education. Teachers need to update their knowledge, understanding and skills accordingly on a continuous basis. One-shot or face-to-face, or single model conventional types of training are insufficient to capacitate the diversified teachers groups.

Models of Teacher Professional Development: Several teacher professional models have been developed and implemented in different countries. One country may implement more than one model at a time. Selection of model depends on the need of the school and teachers' knowledge, resource, skill and time. The most prominent models are: Organizational Partnership Model and Small Group or Individual Model.

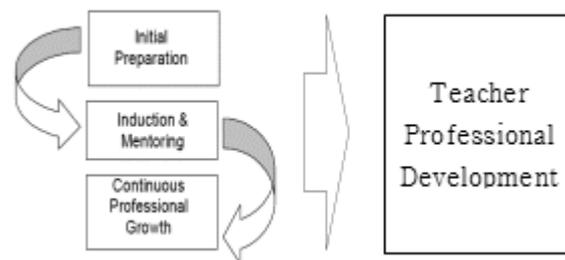
Pre-service teacher training refers to the training of teachers before their employment as teachers commences. Indicating *induction and mentoring* maintains the second stage of teacher education that starts when the newly trained teacher is inducted into the teaching job. Although it is less formal and the least organized, it helps the new teacher to gain a better understanding of

classroom realities, the tricks of the trade and with the adjustment to the school environment, to develop a greater degree of self-confidence (Siddiqui, 1991). Similarly, *continuous professional development* is a planned, continuous and lifelong process whereby teachers try to develop their personal and professional qualities, and to improve their knowledge, skills and practice, leading to their empowerment, the improvement of their agency and the development of their organization and their pupils (Padwad, A. & Dixit, K., 2011). There should be an appropriate balance between pre- and in-service training. One-shot pre-service training or one-size-fits-all approach is never sufficient. Therefore, teacher preparation is not a "one and done" proposition (Berry, Daughtrey, & Wieder, 2010).

Recent trends in special education include the use of technology to provide essential supports with the collaboration of multilevel agencies. Collaboration begins with the understanding that all teachers will be working with both regular and special needs students. Four major delivery modes are used in teacher training: online; teletutorial; online with face to face; and face to face.

Traditionally, professional development activities have overlooked the unique learning needs of the adult learner in the teaching and learning process (Carper, et al., 2009). Recent research on best practices in professional development has determined that traditional lecture-style adult learning experiences do not attend to the learning needs of adults (Cercone, 2008). Teaching younger children and inspiring adult to learn, for instance, andragogy, are different ways of learning process. Moreover, passive learning experiences do not significantly impact learning in the classroom (Desimone et al., 2002). Emerging from the field of extant literature is more thoughtful consideration concerning the needs of the adult learner (Cercone, 2008). Therefore, adult learning theories are supporting to implement professional development activities with the exact needs of adult learners.

As defined by the Council for Exceptional Children (2004), the professional careers of special educators can be thought of as a continuum, including initial preparation, induction, and continuing professional growth. Nine dependent variables used as socio-demographic factors in this research are: teaching level; school type; school location; gender; age; teaching experience; educational qualification; condition of service; and school serving disability type.



[Fig: 1] Continuum of SETPD (Special Exceptional Children, 2004)

Research Methods

The study utilizes a mixed-method design - qualitative and quantitative, explore an appropriate special education teacher professional development model for Nepal. Focused group interview was conducted to collect qualitative data. Survey questionnaires included the three components of the SETPD. Population of this study was the 172 special education teachers of 24 special schools and 377 special education teachers of regular schools with resource class of Nepal. Population census method from purposefully selected 20 districts was applied to collect data for this investigation. A total of 200 special education teachers were selected as the respondents of the questionnaire whereas 14 special educators were selected for the focus group interview. Two sets of the questionnaires- interview and five-point Likert scale questionnaire was prepared for the respondents. The data collection work was carried out through 39 items from which 100% completed data were returned from the respondents.

Data was summarized in the order in which they were gathered according to the research questions. Quantitative data from the survey were entered into SPSS version 16 and analyzed by applying percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, and ANOVA. To analyze the qualitative data, content analysis method was applied. Reliability of the questionnaire was tested with Cronbach-Alpha co-efficient.

Findings

Existing Status of Special Education Teacher Professional Development in Nepal: Research found that some of the teachers were untrained at all and some had training opportunity for few days. Non pedagogical training, such as sign language and braille also were studied. A total of 39 teachers were with two weeks to one year long training experiences in the general course of special education. Only two participants had the opportunity of one year training program in special education whereas 15 teachers had less than two weeks training experiences. A total of 41 respondents had sign language training of one to six months whereas six teachers had more than 6 months experience. A total of 11 teachers were trained for less than one month. Similarly, among 200 respondents, 68 percent of the special education teachers had some kinds of training whereas 32 percent of the teachers were completely untrained. Furthermore, only 10 special education teachers were trained with braille use whereas 3 teachers had more than one month of braille orientation. Five teachers were trained with one month braille training. Only 8 teachers among 200 teachers had the training related to teaching children with intellectual disability. Among them, 87.5% were with the training of below 15 days.

Special Educator's Views on Teacher professional development: In initial preparation, the result demonstrated that overall level of views of special education teachers was high with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.47 and SD of 0.60. The highest level of view with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.64 and SD of 0.59 was in "Pre-service Special Education Teacher Training as the demand of the current special education program" whereas lowest level of agreement with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.24 and SD of 0.68 was in using new technology including ICT in the course of special education in higher education. Teachers agreed with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.59 and SD of 0.60 in the provision of stipend for the needy students of special education in higher education. Similarly, teachers viewed the need of four year Bachelors' program in special education with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.54 and SD of 0.59.

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The overall level of views of special education teachers was high with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.53 and the SD of 0.60 in induction and mentoring. The highest level of views with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.73 and SD of 0.56 in in-service special education teacher training qualifies to unqualified or poorly qualified teachers and upgrades once qualified teachers whereas lowest level of views with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.39 and SD 0.60 in the training period must be at least 10 months. Likewise, the respondents agreed in "all the novice teachers should be given in-service training within five years of the selection in the profession" with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.57 and SD of 0.59. It was followed by the views of in-service teacher training curriculum covering the general and specific instructional aspects of special education with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.56 and SD of 0.60.

The result obtained indicates that overall views of special education teachers was high with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.56 and the SD of 0.58 in continuous professional growth. The highest level of views with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.72 and SD of 0.45 in the support of Department of Education in the center and District Education Office, Resource Center and School in local level for continuous professional growth whereas lowest level of views with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.45 and SD 0.60 in the variety of time period in the different models. Similarly, periodical workshops, seminars, and conferences on special education was viewed with mean (\bar{x}) of 4.65 and SD of 0.58 whereas the importance of generational model where first generation of teachers teach to the second generation teachers, was viewed with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.63 and SD of 0.48. Distance mode of training has got the importance with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.60 and SD of 0.58 keeping the reality of the country. Exposure visit and cooperative collegial development model were also viewed with the mean (\bar{x}) of 4.55 and SD of 0.61 and mean (\bar{x}) of 4.55 and SD of 0.60 respectively.

Comparison of the Differences between Sociodemographic Status and Its Effects on the Level of Agreement

Initial Preparation: The level of view on initial teacher preparation within the basic level (\bar{x} = 4.10) and the secondary level (\bar{x} = 4.01) were high and the level of views within the special school (\bar{x} = 4.14) and the regular school with resource class (\bar{x} = 3.97) were also high. But significant difference was there in agreed level of the both levels of teachers with statistical significance level .05.

The level of view within the urban teachers (\bar{x} = 4.11) and rural teachers (\bar{x} = 3.96) were at high. There was the significant difference in the level of views in the both levels of teachers on initial teacher preparation in statistical significance level .05. The level of views on initial teacher preparation within the male teachers (\bar{x} = 4.10) and female teachers (\bar{x} = 4.16) were high too. There was also the significant difference in the level of views on the both levels of teachers. Regarding to the age group of the respondents, there is the difference in views between the special education teachers' age groups. Similarly, respondents with low experience viewed much than high experience. Respondents with low qualification viewed highly than their counterparts with higher qualification. According to the service type, significant difference was found at the level of .05. Contract teachers viewed highly than permanent and temporary teachers.

From the focus group discussion, special educators viewed that initial preparation must be one of the components of the HSEB and university program. It must be initiated from higher secondary level. Duration and curriculum must be harmonized with the academic program

specializing from universities and introducing from HSEB.

Induction and Mentoring

Within the basic ($\bar{x} = 4.17$) and the secondary level ($\bar{x} = 4.07$), respondents viewed at high level. Result shows that the respondents of special ($\bar{x} = 4.21$) and the regular school with special class ($\bar{x} = 3.03$) viewed at high level. There was the significant difference in the level of view of both levels of teachers in statistical significance level .05. The differences within the urban teachers ($\bar{x} = 4.16$) and rural teachers ($\bar{x} = 4.05$) were at high level. The level of view within the male teachers ($\bar{x} = 4.08$) and female teachers ($\bar{x} = 4.22$) were also at high. There was also the significant difference at the level of view of both levels of teachers at statistical significance level .05.

Similarly, in the case of experience, result shows that all groups of respondents viewed highly. In terms of special education teachers' qualification, all of the respondents viewed highly. The respondents with SLC qualification viewed highly than the respondents with qualification of Master degree. Teachers of the students with physical disability and visual impairment highly viewed than other disabilities. In terms of disability type, the result indicates that there is the significant difference at the level of .05. Multiple comparison Scheffe test shows that there was significant difference between the teachers of children with physical disability and hearing impairment.

In focus group discussion, it was viewed that there should be intensive sessions for the teachers ranging from content support across subjects, pedagogical approaches and assessment methods to special education, character building and critical thinking. It must be compulsory for all new comers within 3 to 5 years of their appointment in service with credit count for the promotion in collaboration with universities. One month training with paid leave must be provided twice in his or her service period making NCED responsible in the conduction of training.

Continuous Professional Growth

Respondents viewed on continuous professional growth within the basic level ($\bar{x} = 3.92$) and the secondary level ($\bar{x} = 3.87$) at high level. There was no significant difference in both levels of teachers in statistical significance level .05. Similarly, regarding types of school, the respondents viewed within the special ($\bar{x} = 3.95$) and the regular school with resource class ($\bar{x} = 3.83$) at high level. The result indicated that there was significant difference in both levels of teachers in statistical significance level .05. Special school respondents viewed highly than general school respondents. The special education teachers viewed with the urban teachers ($\bar{x} = 3.92$) and rural teachers ($\bar{x} = 3.88$) at high level.

The level of views within the male teachers ($\bar{x} = 3.86$) and female teachers ($\bar{x} = 3.95$) were at high. There was the difference in views between the special education teachers' regarding age groups. In the differences between the special education teachers' work experience groups, the result shows that all groups of respondents agreed highly. Although there were minimal differences, all of the respondents viewed highly and there was significant difference at .05. The result also indicates that respondents with SLC holders agreed more than respondents with qualification of 10+2. In the category of service type, all groups viewed highly and temporary

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teachers agreed more than the contract teachers. Similarly, comparing to the disability type group, teachers of the students with autism and ADHD viewed highly than teachers of students with other disabilities.

In focus group discussion, it was viewed that special teachers need more multiple training with new strategies. Some of the local level partners could contribute to teacher professional activities applying multiple partnership models through different modes in different time periods. The curriculum must be flexible and based on special education teacher's need. Teachers' professional organizations, school administration, local government, and many other nongovernmental organizations in local level may organize the trainings with the local resources.

Discussions

Existing Status of Special Education Teacher Professional Development: The research indicates that there is poor situation of teacher training even in common subject of special education. Out of 70 teachers from the deaf schools, 41 were trained with sign language. Government of Nepal has no any kind of sign language classes and authentic curriculum. Among 30 respondents from the blind school, 10 were with any kinds of brail orientation. Remaining others were either newly appointed or used to teach orally. This indicates that teaching in blind class is poor because of the lack of trained human resource. "Blind students have problems when the teachers want them to write since teachers in regular classrooms are not trained in Braille" (UNICEF, 2003).

Current in-service training (TPD) for regular school teachers does not address special teachers. A reason behind it is the lack of expert trainers and training materials in special education. Occasional activities to promote continuous professional growth are happening with the support of non-governmental organizations in some cases but these activities are limited only to certain places.

Special Educator's Views in SETPD

Initial Preparation: Special educators believed the statement with in-service teacher training is the demand of current special education program in a high degree. It indicates the scarcity and teachers' want for preservice training in special education. Respondents viewed less on the need to include ICT in curriculum. Contrasting, Zang (2008) found that participants were univocal to become ICT literate. In these days, teachers' interests are increased in online training using ICT. Good design strategies may incorporate various Internet features and encourage active interaction with the instructors and other learners.

Induction and Mentoring: Respondents agreed highly in the need of in-service training. Johns (2006) found 90.1% of principals reported that "somewhat" or "much more" special education training should be included in administrative course work. Special educators viewed to give in-service training within 5 years for every novice teacher. There is the established practice of counting the score of training for the promotion purpose. Most of the respondents agreed on the need of general and instructional aspects of curriculum. Ergul et al. (2013) discovered that teaching academic skills, classroom management, teaching speech, and language skills

and autism were the topics on which the majority of participants found themselves inadequate and requested in-service training. NCED was strongly suggested to make itself responsible to handle the in-service training. Two months training was in high level. Equal duration of the in-service training for both groups (regular and special) of teachers is rational and feasible as well. Making the courses more field-oriented were the most frequently suggested changes by the participants to be made in the undergraduate special education programs (Ergul, Baydik, & Demir, 2013).

About the diversity of the courses, teachers responses on the statement "In-service training must offer varieties of opportunities for professional development such as action research, problem solving, group interaction etc." was ranked high (mean = 4.53 and SD = 0.59). Teachers' views tended to more towards practical base rather than theoretical discussion. In a study with similar objective, Webb (1993) participants clearly indicated that it was more important for courses to contain a variety of formats (m =4.6) and was ranked significantly more important than courses which contained a detailed theoretical base (m = 2.5). It seems that teachers want to make their training more practical and need based opposing traditional model.

Continuous Professional Growth: Special educators agreed to update teachers through continuously happening professional training throughout their job period. Hustler et al. (2003) found CPD as important and useful to many teachers as a means to update their skills and knowledge for the benefit of themselves and their pupils. In the research of Goodall et al.(2005), continuous Professional Development providers agreed on the usefulness of evaluating different outcomes with improvement of participant knowledge and skills particularly favored in evaluating the impact of continuing professional development. Identifying Department of Education, District Education Office, Resource Center and Schools as the organizers of the continuous professional development was agreed in top rank.

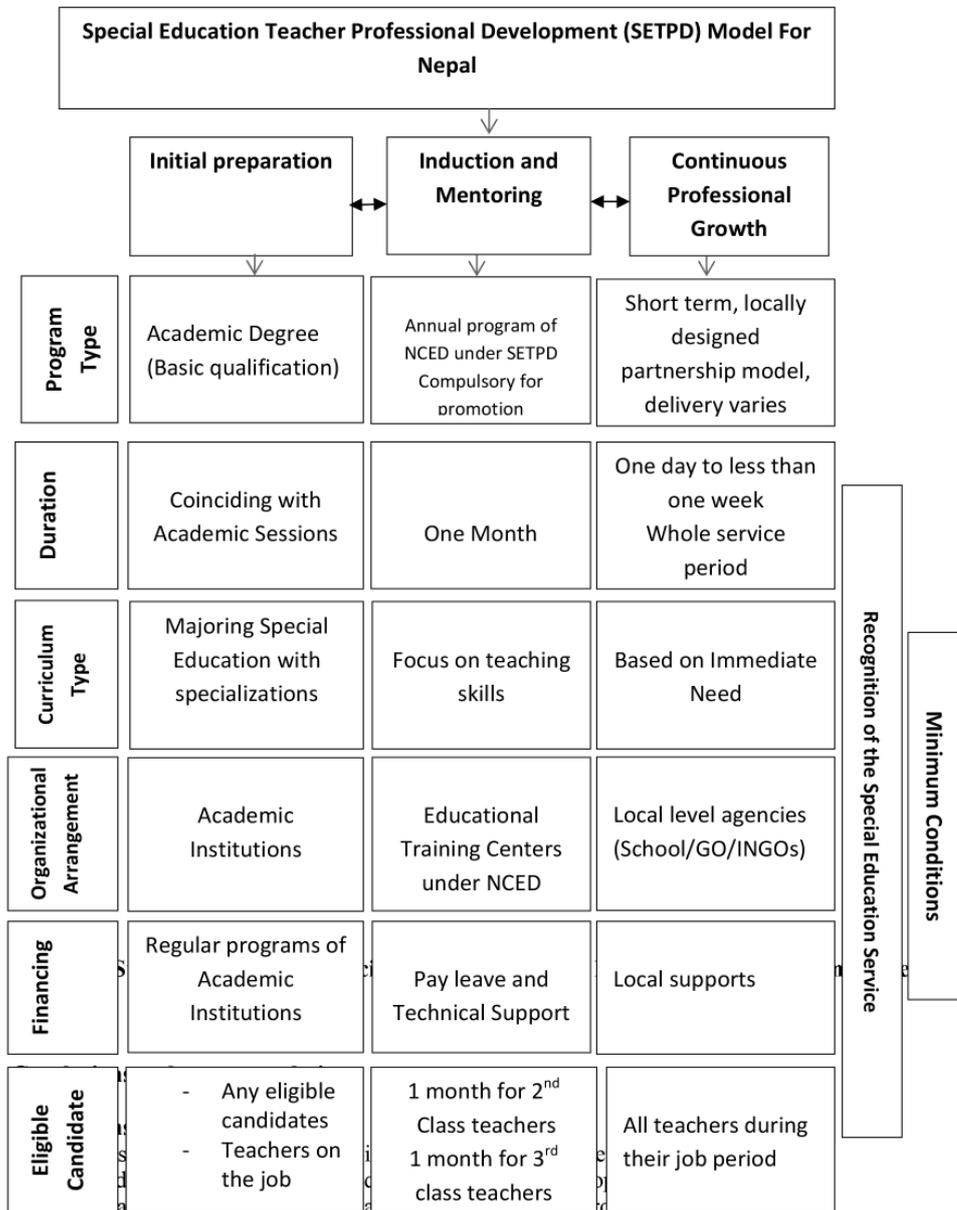
The professional development model involves and requires institutional support (Wise, 2000), and it is one of the models that does work to provide opportunities for teachers' professional development from the beginning to the end of their career (Koehnecke, 2001). As the activities of the continuous professional growth, periodical workshops, seminars and conferences on special education involving special education teachers was also emphasized.

One of the most common ways is workshop method continuous professional development. It also indicated that the workshop could enhance their critical thinking about their teaching methods, develop competence and make them aware of whole school development. Continuously happening need based training has multifarious values in educational management. It is not possible to arrange such types of multiple trainings from the central level at a time.

Use, Implications and Future Direction

The prime focus of this study was to devise a special education teacher professional development model to capacitate the special education teachers in Nepal. Analyzing the research results obtained through the use of mixed method a model for the special education teacher professional development, as shown as Figure 2, is developed considering program type, duration of the training, curriculum type, organizational arrangement and financing under three components of teacher professional development- initial preparation, induction and mentoring and continuous

professional growth under the mandatory provision of recognition of special education service. The model developed to apply within the same framework of teacher education as regular teacher professional development and the legal provision to fulfil the present lacking.



[Fig: 2] A Suggested Model for Special Education Teacher Professional Development in Nepa

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

The more essential equipment of special education is the teacher's the specialized training for the teaching of special needs children this is lacking due to the absence of proper teacher professional development plan in Nepal. Occasionally happening orientation is not supporting professionally to the special education teachers. There is an urgency to implement a special education teacher professional development plan. Teacher professional development program is the joint responsibility of multi-level agencies like NCED, universities, Schools, NGOs and local governments once the state possesses the TPD plan. Initiating the special education course from the higher secondary level and specialization in Bachelors' and Master's Degree is essential to prepare future teachers. Bearing this fact in mind, a special education teacher professional development model including pre-service, in-service and continuous professional growth training is developed on the basis of views of Nepali special educators with reference to program type, duration of the training, curriculum type, institutional arrangement, and financing considering future administrative division of the country.

Recommendations

Special education teachers' professional development must be taken as a long-term process including initial preparation, induction and mentoring and continuous professional growth throughout their service period. It should be supported by multi-level agencies making universities and NCED responsible. Varieties of models maximizing technology must be applied depending upon their situation in school level to enhance continuous professional growth which supports teachers' development on a regular basis in the workplace. A special education teacher professional development model developed on the basis of views of Nepali special educators is recommended considering future administrative division of the country. Special education teachers need to improve their ability recognizing the diverse situation of the students respecting their ability to adapt content, teaching methodology and delivering instruction to meet the appropriate needs of each child with special needs.

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