

Transformation of Training Skills: A Case of TPD Program

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Abstract

This article is based on the study entitled "Teacher professional development programme: skills transformation issues" conducted by National Center for Inclusive Education (NICE) Nepal for NCED. The main focus of this article is to present existing condition of TPD program, explore strengths and weaknesses of different phases of training, identify the enabling factors and recommend future directions for the betterment of TPD program. The TPD phases go through the cycle of workshop, project work and counseling. One of the significant achievements of TPD training is that it has developed a culture of learning and sharing in the schools. Teachers discuss their ideas with fellow teachers, share problems and at times do some collaborative projects as a part of their TPD training. Strengthening the capacity of the training centre, developing in-built mechanism of monitoring and follow up programs, selection of qualified roster are the main aspects of the needed improvement.

The context

Teachers' training is one of the essential components of quality education. Attempts have been made by Governmental and non-governmental sectors to provide training to the teachers.

National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) is the apex body for taking initiatives in implementing every provision of the policy guidelines regarding teacher professional development. Nepal has developed Teacher Professional Development (TPD) strategies for enhancing teachers' continuous professional growth. The current TPD program offered by the NCED provides a 30-day professional development opportunity over five years to all teachers in Nepal. This training is being implemented in three phases of 10 days within five years. This has tried to explore the training transfer issues and assess the factors contributing to inhibition and support for the transfer of training into the classroom.

A study was conducted by NCED with the objective of assessing the existing TPD program and its implementation as well as transfer of training activities in the classroom. The study also tried to identify factors supporting and inhibiting the transfer of learning into the classroom.

This study was undertaken with the methodological groundwork for looking into the effectiveness of Teacher Professional Development (TPD) training, with a focus on the application of the training in the classroom as well as on the factors supporting and inhibiting the transfer of training. Being qualitative in nature, it has utilized the information collected directly from the field using methods like discussion, interviews, observation, and field notes. Study tools were developed after the discussion with expert team of NCED and field plan was also prepared in consultation with the NCED officials. The study was conducted in four districts- Morang, Sindhupalchok, Kathmandu and Dadeldhura. Three

[This article is prepared by Prof. Dr. Prem Narayan Aryal for NCED based on the study entitled "Teacher professional development programme : skills transformation issue" who was the team leader of this research conducted by National Centre for Inclusive Education (NICE) Nepal.]

training centers of Kathmandu, Biratnagar and Dadeldhura were observed based on the objectives of the study.

The data were collected from the District Education Offices (DEOs), Resource Persons (RPs), Training Centres and schools. For the data collection task, semi-structured interviews were used for the DEOs and RPs. In the school-level study, questionnaire, observation and Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) were employed by which data were obtained in the form of questionnaire transcripts and field-notes.

Purposive sampling technique was applied in order to select respondents for the study. While selecting the sample of the study, a careful consideration was given to the variations in geographical location of the schools, economic and educational status of the community, and levels of schooling (primary, secondary and higher secondary. Key respondents of the study were DEOs (4), RPs (8, two from each district), head teachers (14, one from each school), and teachers (56, four from each school). Sample schools and respondents were selected in consultation with DEO personnel available in the districts.

Four different groups of researchers were given responsibilities to undertake the fieldwork in four different districts – Kathmandu, Sindhupalanchok, Morang and Dadeldhura, in order to collect information for the study purpose. Study tools of the study were semi-structured interview for district level informants i.e. DEOs and RPs and questionnaire for school level informants i.e. teachers and head teachers; a separate FGD guideline for students, separate observation forms to record what has been observed in a class during teaching as well as in the training centers during training sessions. Three development regions – Eastern, Central and Mid-Western Development regions – were covered by this study which also includes both urban and rural areas of the selected districts. This variation was done to make the study more 'information rich' (Patton, 2002). One district, each from the three development regions is selected at the discretion of the researchers in addition to Kathmandu district from the Central development Region.

Ethical consideration had been taken as a serious matter to make the study more authentic and reliable. The ethical concern of “research subjects have the right to know that they are being researched, the right to be informed about the nature of the research and the right to withdraw at any time” had been taken seriously in the study (Ryen, 2004, p. 231).

Training management

There is a provision of training management committee at the district level. Training management committees were found functional at the district level. It makes important decisions about the allocation of the TPD quotas as per the number of teachers in training centers. The major decisions that the committee make are concerned with the Head teachers' orientation at the Hub, need collection, verification and clustering of teachers' demand, model development, technical supporting, supervising. The decision-making at the committee-level is based on the principle of collaboration, coordination and teamwork. As found from this study, RPs were found to have effectively engaged in the training process and they were able to undertake the responsibilities such as recommending roster trainers, collecting demands from the teachers and scrutinising and prioritising them for the training package. They had also fulfilled the responsibilities of developing training package and implementing the TPD training in the schools.

Training environment at the training centre

The training centres are located at an appropriate place, accessible to the teachers from different corners of the district. The training centre is equipped with basic facilities, including spacious training hall, furniture, overhead projector, teaching/learning materials such as charts, graphs, card boards and other stationary materials. The participants generally were found to sit around a table and participate in discussion led by the trainer. Some training centres also have hostel facilities for the participants. The Educational Training Centres (ETC) had more resource materials than the Resource Centres. Some ETCs were found to have library facilities, with basic books and reference materials relevant to school teaching. Provision was made to have a roster of the trainers. Trainers were selected on the basis of their experience, training and exposure to the training. The study showed that RPs and FPs were found to have overloaded. As a result, they were facing difficulty to manage time for continuous and effective follow up and monitoring of the trainings

Planning and delivery of TPD training

The TPD training is delivered in different phases. The TPD phases go through a cycle of need collection, clustering, filtering and verification of the needs, prioritizing the needs, designing of the course based on the prioritised needs, implementing/delivering the training and providing effective feedback to the teachers. Design and delivery of the training is described in the following headings:

Collection of teachers' demand: Collection of teachers' demand is the first step of TPD cycle which decides the type of course to be developed and the types of trainings to be delivered. Teachers have to suggest their demand based on their needs required for quality education. Head teachers collect, categorize and submit the demands to Resource Person. There is a process of the verification of the needs based on the demands of the teachers.

A two day orientation training is provided to the HTs at the hub (resource center) which is found to be helpful for understanding the requirement and process of demand collection from the teachers. This training provides the basis for the head teachers to create an environment at the school to solicit training needs from the individual teacher. The study depicted that the needs of the teachers, according to the HT, vary from schools to school.

The study also found that Teachers generally demand generic problems of teaching such as use of materials in teaching, child-friendly teaching, use of technology in teaching etc. Some teachers have very small problems to address by the training, but they are reluctant to ask for training in 'trivial' matters. The TPD trainings were found to have encouraged teachers to explore needs for training and teachers are increasingly involved in finding out their most-preferred needs that TPD training could fulfil. However, teachers claimed that trainings were not properly based on the demand of the teachers. It is indicative that more efforts have to be made to make the training demand based instead of supply based.

Development of training package: Package development is one of the important aspects of TPD training. After the collection of demands from the teachers with the facilitation of head teachers, head teacher conducts meetings for the purpose of prioritizing the needs of the training and forward to concerned RPs. After verification of the needs and its prioritization, the training package is developed. Then the training package is sent to the district TPD coordination committee which approves the package finally to deliver the training. It is

notable, according to RPs, that the training package is almost unable to incorporate all the needs as recommended by the respective schools to the training center. Only 34 % of the total teachers were found to agree that they got the training as per their demands and needs. Remaining 66% teachers opined that whatever they explored the needs as a demand from their classroom teaching and experiences, the training package were less succeeded to address those needs. It is clear from the study that teachers are interested to demand their training needs, however, the problem exists to address their demands in the package. It also shows that either teachers are not technically sound to identify their needs and translate their needs into demand or process of verification of needs is not effective to incorporate their needs in the training package.

Delivery of the workshop (first phase of the training): The first phase of the training is of 5 days where demand based package is delivered in a face-to-face mode. It is also known as workshop module. According to the RPs, the workshop is very important for the teachers for development of overall skills based on their demands made in schools. The DEO opined that the training center convert its effectiveness into package implementation in the participation of school teachers who are the sole target of the programs. As reported by the trainer, the workshop at the first phase provides the participants with sharing, interacting and approaching their problems among participants as per the demands made in schools. It also promotes collaborative learning environment in the centre.

A majority of roster trainers were involved in the delivery of the TPD trainings with the aim of bringing desirable changes in teachers' traditional delivery of their lessons. In some cases, problems were observed because of the more qualified trainees in comparison to competent and trained trainers. Such situation returns into reluctance in trainees to be regular and attentive.

Moreover, TPD raining, which is organized at any time of the academic year, is therefore increasing the burden of head teachers in managing the schools as well as reducing the teaching hours at the school because of the TPD training organizing at the school hours. It is indicative that TPD training should be organized during winter and summer vacation in the schools.

As reported by the teachers, workshop phase has some weaknesses. They question the capability of the roster trainers. Roster trainers were reported to be less effective as they were little known to the use of technology to make the training effective. As a shadow side of the training, RPs revealed, workshop has become a platform for some teachers to talk their personal matter with the friends, rather than getting involved in the delivery activities.

Project work (second phase of the training): The second phase is the practical and practicing phase of the TPD training. After attending the five days workshop the teachers go to their school to do project works for a month which is counted as three day training. Within one month of field visit to their own schools, they prepare the project work and try to implement the learning skills learnt in the workshop phase. This, in fact, according the RPs, has not only promoted the skills of developing projects and working with their colleagues at schools but also made them engage in consulting the textbooks, materials and mental exercises for the development of project works. As DEOs viewed regarding the project reports, teachers had been receiving positive information from the training centers, sharing

with the other teacher and developing collaborative culture . But the RPs liked to comment on the development of the project reports was somewhat poor and not well prepared as per the knowledge gained from the five days workshop. As claimed by the teachers, inadequate time for the project work had resulted into poor performance in project preparation skills. It was found increasing the administrative burden of both RPs and head teachers.

It was also reported that teachers were less responsive and they had poor attachment and ownership with the programs. Similarly, the roster trainers and RP, including Cluster Focal Officer (CFO)s are equally responsible for not allocating proper time to support and facilitate the teachers at worksite in order to support project work and transfer of learning. Monitoring is another issue for not preparing project as per the objective of training. Teachers further claimed that they got little or no support during their project phase. On the other hand, teachers at schools become less sensitive with their own roster trainers as if s/he was his/colleague also equally reduces the quality of project doing at schools.

Counselling (the third phase of the training): Trainee teachers are provided counselling by trainers and RPs. The counselling phase of the training consists of two days. According to RPs, in counselling phase, roster trainers and RP visit the school in order to provide the feedback for improving the teacher's performance. With this visit, the counsellors manage time to provide the counselling on the issues where the teacher experience difficulty while transferring their learned knowledge to the classroom practices as per the developed project.

For many teachers, counselling was found to be a good learning avenue to update and improve their teaching performance. Majority of the respondents opined that the counselling phase had become a theoretical phase only. Dialogue with the head teachers and teachers depicted the fact that counselling as a systemic process of TPD is not properly implemented. It is due to the fact that counsellors are not properly trained and capable of assisting teachers in their project work problems. Similarly, teachers were also found reluctant regarding their improvement in project work that resulted into not having good sense of ownership of the training.

To sum up, one of the significant achievements of TPD training is that it has developed a culture of learning and sharing in the schools. Teachers discuss their ideas with fellow teachers, share problems and at times do some collaborative projects as a part of their TPD training.

Transfer of training

The main focus of this study was to identify supporting or promoting factors that may help the teachers transfer their training knowledge and skills in their classrooms. It has been a general claim that there is minimal transfer of training in the classroom. Transfer of training depends upon different promoting factors like quality training, supportive trainers, professional support to teachers, and positive attitude of the teachers. Many teachers were found to be enthusiastic to implement knowledge and skills received from the training. For teachers facilitating factors for transfer of training are small class size, classroom management, resource facilities, motivation on work, need based training and cooperative school environment. As suggested by head teachers, enabling factors for transformation of training are administrative support, motivation on work, qualification on the part of the teachers. Skills not adequately transferred in the classroom were found to be the skills of

managing diversity in the classroom, planning and preparation for lessons, using instruction materials adequately based on the nature of the lesson, appropriate techniques of questioning in the classroom, making parents' involvement in their children's learning, practical and project works, child friendly classroom management for better learning environment, use of appropriate motivational techniques in the classroom, regular checking of students' class work and homework and giving feedback.

Future directions

Based on the study, impression of the researchers, observation of stakeholders, the following suggestions have been made as future directions.

1. Roster selection criteria have to be improved in order to select qualified roster trainers. While selecting the rosters, consideration should be made specific merit-based criteria, giving more emphasis on academic qualification, research and publication, knowledge and skills in ICTs and others.
2. Since head teachers commented the timing of the training as inappropriate, TPD training be conducted during the summer or winter vacation or during the time of examination.
3. Since monitoring and supervision of the training was reported not to be effective, in-built monitoring mechanism should be developed and RPs, School Supervisor (SS), and roster trainers should be involved in monitoring and follow-up of the training.
4. The existing facilities and resources at the training centre should be upgraded with sufficient computer-assisted materials, including hardware, software and Internet facilities. Since ETCs are more equipped with computer, library and training facilities than RCs, emphasis should be given to provide training in ETCs than in RCs.
5. Existing RCs and LRCs were not found in a better position with respect to adequacy of instruction materials than ETCs. It is thus suggested that existing facilities and resources at the training centre should be upgraded with sufficient computer-assisted materials, including hardware, software and Internet facilities.
6. Roster trainers should be provided intensive ICT training so that delivery of the training can be improved and quality of teaching can be enhanced thereafter.
7. Since the present study on skills transformation issues of TPD training has been conducted in a small scale, there is a need to conduct an intensive study with a focus on effectiveness of TPD training with respect to transformation of training skills into the classroom.

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