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Policy Brief for TPD in Nepal

A Multi-Modal Approach to Teacher Professional Development in Low Resource Settings

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The project, A Multimodal Approach to Teacher Professional Development in low resource settings (MATPD) was a collaborative endeavour. A South- South collaboration of higher education institutions and a global non-profit entity. The consortium aimed to address the poor quality of teacher professional development, particularly for distance teaching and learning through this project. Villa College, Maldives was the lead partner of the consortium. The Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) was the co-lead and knowledge partner for the proposed innovation, and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan was the third partner, implementing the project in Afghanistan. The learnings from TISS's award winning and globally recognized initiatives on TPD developed in and for under-resourced and developing contexts were adapted, implemented and researched in Afghanistan, Maldives and Nepal.

Villa College is the first and largest private higher education institution in the Maldives offering a variety of academic programmes. The teacher training programs offered by Villa Collage at the Faculty of Educational studies are known to be popular.

The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) has been involved in implementation of education projects that include capacity development, advocacy and service delivery since 1984. The SCA Teacher training aims at building teachers' capacities in subject knowledge and pedagogy which are geared towards teacher professional development, through short courses.

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India (www.tiss.edu) is among South Asia's premier research and teaching universities in Social Sciences. The Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education (CETE), an Independent Centre on the TISS Mumbai Campus engages in teaching, research, and field action, and has multidisciplinary expertise in the use of ICT in Education for quality reform at scale. CETE envisages its role as a "Catalyst for Transformation in Teacher Education" through multiple activities. The Centre has hosted several UNESCO award-winning field action research (AR) projects including Integrated Approach to Technology in Education (ITE) and Connected Learning Initiative (CLIx). The Centre's in-service teacher education programmes and Communities of Practice have also been awarded a certificate of appreciation. The Centre has also delivered an international project - Teachers Education Master's Program (TEMP) for supporting professional development for Afghanistan's Teacher Educators in collaboration with SCA.

RESEARCH TEAM

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Introduction

The country's National Educational Policy (2019) and various educational sectoral plans focus on the building capacity of teachers by providing continuous professional development opportunities such as customized training, workshops, seminars, collaborative research, observation tours, reflections, teacher networks and mentoring. The implementation on the ground is however weak in practice.

The teacher professional development programs in Nepal are designed centrally through a top down approach, thus not adequately addressing the actual needs of the teachers and the classroom context. Though plans for school visits and observations are integrated into the strategic plans SSRP and SSDP, only a few trainers visit the schools to support teachers in translating training into practice. Most stakeholders considered "Monitoring" and "Mentoring" to be the same approach for TPD. There is thus a need for the system to explore collaborative modes of professional development including mentoring and coaching. Action Research is an integral part of in-service teacher education mandated by policy guidelines. However, it rapidly falls out of practice once the training is over and teachers are back in classrooms as they merely write up action research reports to qualify for promotion. This is due to a lack of awareness on how Action Research can be an effective tool to improve classroom practice, poor/no support and follow-up by trainers/supervisors and low motivation of teachers. There is a need to support the development of research culture among teacher educators and teachers through opportunities to engage in field-based action research, identifying challenges and finding contextualized solutions. There are low levels of ICT skills and knowledge for classroom instruction and practice. ICT is used as a conduit for transmitting information and not used to provide opportunity to students for construction of knowledge and sharing their ideas.

For teacher educators, their professional development is not a key focus area for the policy makers, as it does not find a mention in the national educational policy and educational strategic plans and no budgetary allocation for the same. There is a lack of opportunity to develop the capacity of mid-level teacher educators, who are key resource persons for training teachers. There is also a lack of opportunity for teacher educators to work with teachers and develop a contextualized knowledge of teachers' work and challenges. There is a need for participatory collaborative approaches to developing contextual teaching-learning led by practitioners & Continuous Professional Development (CPD) that is collaborative, democratic and promotes co-learning. CPD experience is key to becoming a reflective and collaborative practitioner, exercising agency and autonomy.

MATPD Intervention

A 10-month innovative continuous professional development (CPD) intervention was implemented as part of an International project - Multimodal Approach to Teacher Professional Development in Low-resource Settings (MATPD). It has been conceptualized by a south-south collaborative MATPD consortium with Villa College, Tata Institute of Social Sciences and the Swedish Committee of Afghanistan as partners.

The intervention was designed to provide professional development to fellows recruited from Nepal, Maldives and Afghanistan by incorporating characteristics like content-based, active learning, supporting collaboration, use of models of effective practice, providing mentoring, offering feedback and reflection and sustained duration of professional development. These characteristics have been found to contribute towards positive change in teachers' practice through earlier research (Hammond et al., 2017) The importance of building teaching and research skills has been recognised (Brew, 2010) through an approach that contextualizes design and takes into consideration the "super-complex, uncertain and ambivalent world in which we practice" (p.114).

The objective of the MATPD project was to develop professional communities that empower practitioners to identify problems of practice and design TPD as part of collaborative action research with teachers to devise contextualized solutions. The intervention design is based on four principles of distance learning through online mode for (CPD); social learning through interaction with peers and experts on various platforms; practice-based learning through engaging in problems of practice and trying innovative practices during action research; and contextualisation by adopting and adapting the design of TPD and lessons based on challenges experienced in low resource settings by learners.
The 15 fellows who were part of the study are based in different regions across the country and are engaged in diverse professions. The sample comprises teachers, teacher educators, school leaders, government officials, NGO professionals and an MPhil. student.

Scaling of MATPD in Nepal

The MATPD project intervention was a new and unique opportunity for the fellows to engage in for their professional development. It was different compared to the conventional cascade model of training provided through workshops, and seminars. It offered the fellows an opportunity to learn through different modalities such as distance education courses; social learning through engagement

Theory of Change
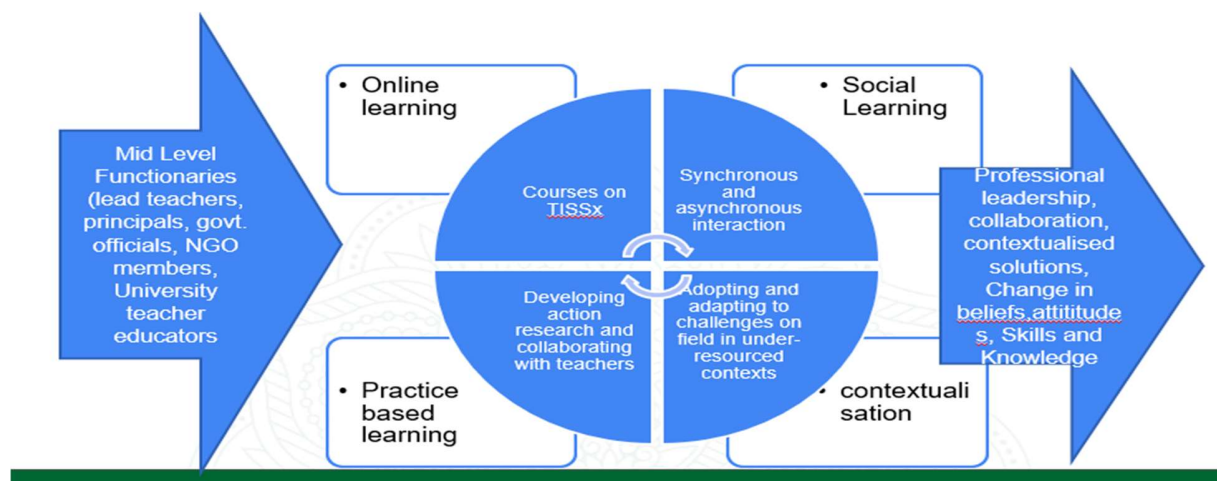
with fellows within and across countries, academic and field mentors as well as interactions with the project team; practice-based action research that was contextual, collaborative and reflective. The MATPD intervention design was successful in developing the capacities of mid-level functionaries to become collaborative and reflective practitioners and develop leadership skills as teacher educators in low-resource contexts through distance learning.

- o **Adoption of distance learning courses on ICT, mentoring and action research**

  The fellows undertook these courses during the project to build their theoretical knowledge and skills. These are self-paced asynchronous courses that teachers and teacher educators across Nepal, especially in remote regions, where TPD opportunities are fewer, can undertake for their professional development. These courses will enable them to develop a strong conceptual understanding of how ICT can be meaningfully used for teaching learning, how action research can be an effective tool to improve one's practice and how mentoring can support teachers in upskilling themselves and taking ownership of their own learning. There is however, a need to ensure provision of adequate infrastructure to support use of technology.

- o **Practice-based Action Research as part of routine practice**

  "Teaching is highly complex, and most teachers have scant opportunity to explore common problems and possible solutions, or share new pedagogical approaches with their colleagues" (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 24). Most teachers do not get an opportunity to explore problems and find possible solutions. Action Research is one of the ways through which practitioners address local contextual problems through a process of inquiry and reflection that they undertake themselves. During the course of the fellowship, the 15 fellows worked on various subjects in different contexts (urban/rural; private/government) in collaboration with teachers to implement various innovative pedagogical practices in low-resource contexts thereby building the capacities of teachers, improving student learning and engagement in the classroom. During this process, the fellows developed an understanding of the context, classroom teaching practices that teachers undertake, how teachers and students learn, on-field challenges etc.

  Teachers and teacher educators in Nepal can also engage in collaborative action research for shared learning and improving teaching-learning processes within the classroom. Having said that, a supportive ecosystem needs to be developed within the school where teachers are given adequate time and mentorship to carry out Action Research effectively.

- o **Mentoring**

  It is important for teachers to evolve and take ownership of their learning. Mentorship is essential not only for teachers who have newly joined the teaching profession but also for experienced teachers. Mentoring can empower teachers to try out new pedagogical approaches and get them to reflect and address issues for themselves as "agents of change" for improving their teaching

practices. During the course of the fellowship, the fellows were mentored by a team of an academic mentor and a field mentor for their action research study. The academic mentor was a faculty from TISS/another Indian academic institution, while the field mentor was from their own country. The mentors provided support on technical aspects of action research as well as contextualization of the intervention. The mentoring process took place in a blended approach where the academic mentor supported and guided virtually and the field mentor through a combination of in-person and virtual modalities. In Nepal, where there are constraints in terms of human resources, a blended approach can work well to provide support and guidance to the teachers.

- ○ **Social Learning**

  through the creation of professional learning communities (PLCs) for collaborative and shared learning. It is important to build a professional network community that facilitates continuous professional learning of teachers and teacher educators in the system. There is, however, a need for someone to take leadership in driving the community, as they do not emerge spontaneously. Posting relevant content, driving discussions, sharing experiences and best practices will facilitate the community to operate in a sustained manner. During the course of the fellowship, the fellows engaged in active learning by discussing their action research experiences, challenges and insights; interacting with the mentors and the consortium team. The engagement was at its peak during the workshop period when the fellows were required to respond to questions, share their opinions, work on an activity etc. In many instances, the learning happened through reading the exchanges that took place in these groups.

- ○ **Use of local resources**

  There is a need to improve access to quality education in the global south, by enabling the use of learning materials that are free, easy to access and of high quality. The use of OERs supports educational practices and promotes quality and innovation in teaching-learning in low-resource contexts that face challenges related to infrastructure, quality resources, funds, training of teachers and technology. It is therefore important to orient both teacher educators and teachers on the OERs (especially locally available resources) and how these can be used to enhance science teaching-learning practice and promote the adoption of more learner-centric strategies, through both pre-service and in-service institutions, so that there is a greater uptake across different regions across the country.

  To provide teachers and teacher educators an effective and enriching professional development experience, it is important to have infrastructural facilities in place. It is also essential to have a school ecosystem that is supportive and believes in continuous professional development of its teachers.

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