CASE STUDY

Shift from the conventional model to the transformational model of TPD in Nepal through MATPD intervention

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.

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TPD Policy in Nepal

Policymakers in Nepal have placed a high priority on teacher professional development in their policies over the years. This is represented in various sector-wide reform plans, including the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP:2009-15), the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP:2016-21), and the future School Education Sector Plan (SESP:2021-2030). A brief summary of recommendations for teacher professional development in Nepal policy in the last 20 years is discussed below.

School Sector Reform Plan (2009−15)- It emphasized a 30-day TPD program for all the teachers in the system (across all grades) over a five−year period. The policy highlighted the role of NCED in monitoring the implementation of the training programs. **School Sector Development Plan (2016-2021).** In the plan, it was mentioned that teachers will take pre-service and in-service professional development courses based on a teacher competency framework. Teachers' subject matter and pedagogical knowledge and skill set will be enhanced through (a) course attendance, (b) mentoring by peers and head teachers, and (c) classroom practice.

Nepal's most recent **National Education Policy (2019)** recognizes this requirement and emphasizes the importance of strengthening teacher selection and preparation, as well as mandated and continual professional development for teachers in the system. The policy recommended the formulation of national teacher competency standards. Teachers must be prepared based on these standards and their capacity to be developed based on the set competencies; which will help teachers gain knowledge and skills in subject teaching, multi−grade teaching, and classroom teaching methodology. It also mandated that training centres be transformed into teaching academies for continuous professional development. Intensive refresher training is to be conducted at both the provincial and local levels through different modalities in all three modes in-person, virtual, and blended. It is also mentioned that the local government should conduct a diverse range of school-based continuous professional development programs, such as customized training, workshops, seminars, collaborative research, observation tours, reflections, teacher networks, mentoring, coaching, etc. The role of head teachers has been redefined in terms of being responsible for the continuous professional development of the teachers at the school level and also linking CPD with student's learning achievement. As per the policy, the teacher training providers at the federal and provincial levels will continue to run capacity-building programs based on innovative ICT-based resources such as websites, online tutorials, discussion forums, simulations, and virtual imaging for developing qualified teachers and trainers and enabling them to conduct scientific research and the use of ICT.

School Education Sector Plan (2021–2030) Draft version recommended review and updating of the Teacher Competency Framework 2015 and the Teacher Professional Development Framework 2015. A revised model and courses for teacher preparation were introduced in Nepal. There is an increase in the number of teacher training centres to conduct TPD, and it is suggested to conduct a minimum of 10 days of teacher training. The draft revision of the TPD curriculum is being recommended with the inclusion of topics such as teaching during educational emergencies like epidemics and other calamities like earthquakes, using ICT in teaching and learning, gender, equity, inclusion, peace education, environmental change, formulating learning plans by identifying students' personal capacities and diversities, etc. in the TPD curriculum. It is mentioned in the draft that ICT-

based online and offline training can be conducted. Another recommendation is one-month induction training for newly appointed teachers. The need for instituting teacher professional support networks at the local level has been highlighted and hence needs to be addressed. Apart from these 3 days, capacity development training for school-based supervision for the school head teacher, mentors, subject matter specialists, and peer teachers needs to be conducted.

Multimodal approach to Teacher professional development (MATPD) project in Nepal

The goal of the Multimodal Approach to Teacher Professional development (MATPD) project is to develop practice, engage in research and inform policy on teacher professional development using distance learning modalities, social learning communities and practice-based and action-research-based professional learning and development. It draws from the professional development of CLIx at the Center for Excellence in Teacher Education. CETE, TISS was the knowledge partner for Nepal

In 2022 CETE, TISS conducted a Landscape Mapping Study (LMS) to identify gaps in policy and practice & issues faced by teachers and teacher educators. The aim was to design interventions and risk mitigation strategies for adaptive management of the interventions. The study is based on a secondary literature review of relevant policy documents, desk analysis of research articles, and an in-depth interview with 11 key stakeholders, including teacher educators, government officials, teachers, resource persons, NGOs, and principals.

After the LMS study, the South Asian Fellowship for Teacher Educators (SATE) was provided to 15 fellows. These fellows were selected through an interview selection method by the faculty of CETE, TISS. The rationale of SATE was derived from the LMS study, i.e., a lack of practice-based professional development opportunities for teacher educators and teachers that support social learning from peers and experts, address contextual problems through action research, enable the agency of teacher educators, and enable south-south collaboration and learning among South Asian countries.

In 2023, a Beliefs, Attitude, Skills, and Knowledge (BASK) study was conducted. The research questions of the BASK study included:

1. What are the beliefs and attitudes of the fellows with respect to the use of ICT, action research, and mentoring to support TPD? What are changes in beliefs and attitudes as a result of participation in the fellowship?
2. What is the level of confidence among the fellows in the skills and knowledge required for the use of ICT, action research, and mentoring to support TPD? What is the change in skills and knowledge of the fellows as a result of fellowship participation?

3. What are the levers and barriers to supporting pedagogically rich distance learning methodology for scaling an innovative TPD model?

The BASK study was based on quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Data from all 15 fellows (8M + 7F) was collected. For quantitative data collection, 6 thematic surveys were conducted before (pre) and after (post) the fellowship. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential methods. For qualitative data collection, in-depth interviews with 15 fellows were conducted. Interviews were conducted both prior to and after the fellowship. Thematic deductive analysis approach was taken to analyze the qualitative data.

The sections below use the findings of the landscape mapping study to elaborate on the practice policy gaps in the context of Nepal. BASK study findings are used to elaborate on the shift from the conventional model to the transformational model of TPD in Nepal.

Gaps in policy and practice

Top-to-bottom Approach

Teacher professional development (TPD) is identified as a critical priority area in the national education policy and multiple education sector plans, including the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP), School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), and the most recent School Education Sector Plan (SESP). Though the policy has recommended decentralization of teacher training, the teacher professional development programs are developed centrally from the top down, not sufficiently addressing the actual needs and concerns of the teachers. Even though plans for school visits and observations are included in SSRP and SSDP plans in Nepal, few trainers visit schools to assist teachers in putting training into practice.

Action research: missing link between theory and practice

In Nepal, action research is emphasized in teacher professional development programs. However, teachers rarely employ action research as a key tool to develop their classroom practice, preferring instead to write action research papers in order to qualify for promotion. It is observed that there is a lack of mentoring, a lack of communities to sustain action research, and opportunities to learn from each other. There is a need to encourage the development of a research culture among teacher educators and teachers by providing chances for them to participate in field-based action research, identify difficulties, and find contextualized solutions. For classroom instruction and practice, there are insufficient ICT skills and expertise. ICT is employed as a means of transferring information, rather than Teacher professional development (TPD) is identified as a critical priority area in the national education policy and multiple education sector plans, including the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP), School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), and the most recent School Education Sector Plan (SESP). Though the policy has recommended decentralization of teachers training, the teacher professional development programs are developed centrally from the top down, not sufficiently addressing the actual needs and concerns of the teachers. Even though plans for school visits and observations are included in SSRP and SSDP plans in Nepal, few trainers visit schools to assist teachers in putting training into practice.

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Monitoring vs Mentoring

For TPD, the majority of stakeholders viewed "monitoring" and "mentoring" as the same method. (Kumar et. al, 2022) However, there is a trend toward school-based ongoing professional development initiatives, such as mentoring (School Sector Development Plan 2016/17-2022/23).

Collaboration and communities

Furthermore, there is a shortage of opportunities for teacher educators to collaborate with teachers and gain a contextualized understanding of their jobs and issues. There are currently limited chances for educators to form communities and exchange knowledge about teaching-learning processes.

While certain communities, such as the Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA), concentrate on the professional development of teachers, more bottom-up strategies are required to extract and disseminate the expertise of teachers and teacher educators within their local environments.

Lower resources and minimal budgeting

The budget allocations, however, are extremely minimal. While teacher professional development is a policy objective in Nepal, policy papers make no mention of teacher educator professional development. As a result, there is a paucity of opportunities to improve the competence of mid-level functionaries, who are critical resource individuals for teacher training. Mid-level functionaries are lead teachers, principals, NGO members, government officials, and university teacher educators. Their role is very critical for bringing any quality change to the field, as they are the individuals who provide on-site or offline support, give feedback to teachers, discuss specific problems, provide teacher training, and provide continuous professional support to teachers. They are those cogs in the wheel that can influence and impact teachers' work. Hence, their capacity building is as significant as teachers' capacity building is.

Significance of reflection and exploration

Although in NEP 2019 it is recommended that provision be made to share best practices and exchange ideas, in practice there is no such system or structure that has been established that could bring about this change. Teachers also do not get the opportunity or time to reflect on their practice, and there is also no provision for peer reflection. The process of reflection is not institutionalized. Hence, in practice, teachers do not reflect on their practice, although they agreed in the baseline study that through reflection, they can improve their practice. Also, peer reflections and taking feedback from peers in their classroom help improve practice.

### Meaningful and Constructive Use of ICT

The NEP 2019 recommends the use of innovative uses of ICT such as websites, online tutorials, discussion forums, simulations, and virtual imaging for developing qualified teachers and trainers and enabling them to conduct scientific research. However, BASK study reveals that teachers did not have any prior experience using technology meaningfully in a constructive manner.

MATPD transformational model is addressing those gaps

The MATPD transformational model for TPD is an attempt to address the above-mentioned gaps and has been successful in addressing them given the short time frame it has. The model caters to the needs of the teachers, such that classroom-based problems are the ground for professional development. The uniqueness of the MATPD project and TPD model it executed is the interconnectedness of the various components and processes it included. Due to the nature of the model, it has the potential to have a lasting impact through the combination of different processes such as action research, mentoring, reflection, collaboration, and ICT. The initiative has a transformative agenda of bringing about change in the professional development of teachers through changes in classroom practice and teachers' beliefs about pedagogy and how children learn. Kennedy (2002) defines a transformative model of CPD as one involving the combination of a number of processes and conditions. Kennedy (2002), in his article, quotes Hoban (2002)

> **"What is really needed is not a wholescale move towards the teacher-centred, context-specific models of CPD, but a better balance between these types of models and transmission-focused models." (p 246)**

The MATPD transformative model also creates balance between different components of action research, mentoring, collaboration, reflection and with meaningful use of ICT as depicted in the figure below.
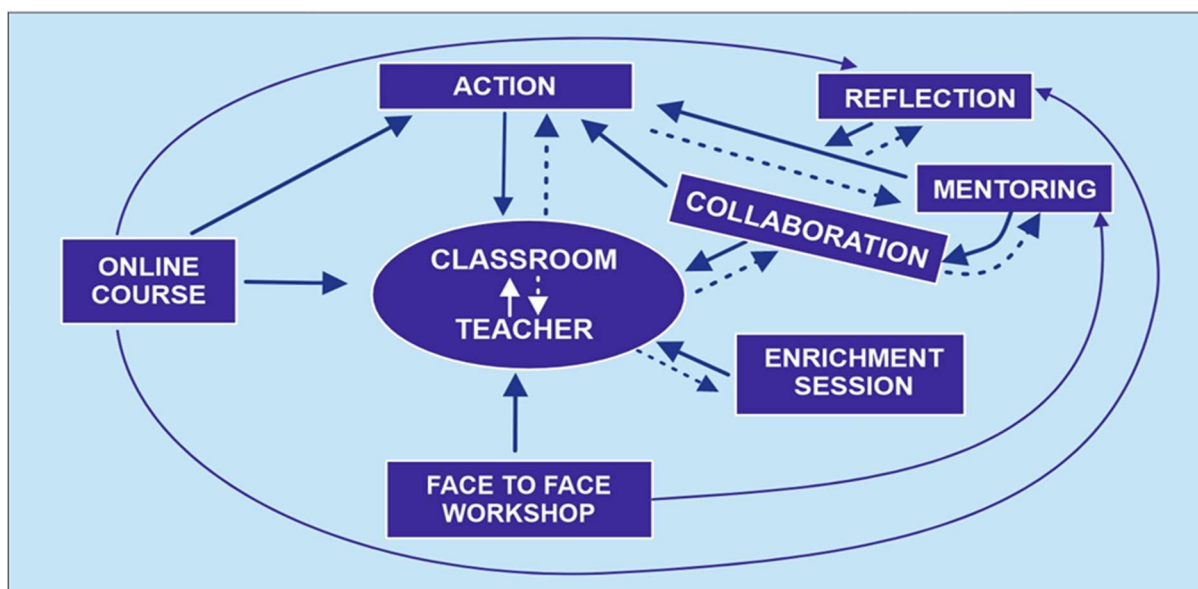
Here, action research plays a significant role in involving teachers in their own professional development, keeping the classroom as the primary site of learning. Hence, classroom inquiry becomes the core of teachers' professional development. By studying the intricacies involved in practice and studying evidence of learning through students' artefacts, teachers can simultaneously reflect on practice and make decisions to improve it. In this way, one can say it is a bottom-up approach that is contrasting/opposite from the cascade and conventional model of mass continuous professional development, where teachers are not autonomous learners and are not involved in decisions about the content of the training. Stenhouse (1975) uses 'autonomous professional judgment' as a phrase to define this process. As we are aware, teaching involves taking decisions both before teaching by planning and in-the-moment decisions at every step of teaching. The process of action research provides space to reflect on these everyday decisions. This can pave the way for improvement in decision-making in their practice. Regular teaching does not provide teachers with the opportunity to explore new practices in the classroom due to various reasons, including the pressure of completing the syllabus. Action research can be fruitful in providing this exploration space to teachers. Professional development in this way becomes a constituent of teachers' practice.

One of the features of effective CPD is that expert internal and/or external support is available to teachers (Borg, 2015). It was found that most of the stakeholders could not distinguish between monitoring and mentoring support. Mentoring teachers is also a significant aspect of action research, specifically in the low-resource context of South Asian countries. In Nepal's scenario, teachers do not have practical knowledge of conducting research, though they understand it theoretically. However, implementation in practice requires support and mentoring. The MATPD transformative model places mentoring as another important aspect of CPD, through which teachers can get support to understand action research practically. Here it becomes very important to assign mentors who could empower teachers & enhance their autonomy by focusing on understanding teachers as agents of change. (British Council, 2020) Understanding teachers, what they think and helps them choose their pathways by reflecting on their practice. The role of the mentors would not be to judge or simply advise, rather it would be to support teachers to become autonomous professional beings. (British Council, 2020). Two mentors for field based and for academic support should be available for teachers' professional learning. It is found in the BASK study that fellows (teacher educators) were able

to distinguish between mentoring and monitoring by the end of the fellowship. This can be attributed to adopting theoretical (online distance learning) courses and practically experiencing mentorship through field and academic mentors. Hence, they could act as 'Mentees' as well as 'Mentors' in this model. Mentoring in AR has the potential to engage teachers in the revision of their beliefs about learning and how students learn. The BASK study also revealed that teachers

This iterative process of reflection and action is built into the phenomena of action research and mentoring. Rather the whole model is based on an iterative process where classroom practice is feeding back into each process and each dimension of this model is also feeding into the classroom. In this course of action exploration and reflection for teachers are underscored. Teachers get opportunities to reflect through various maintenance of their own reflective journal, through mentoring, and taking feedback from each other i.e. peer reflection. It has emerged in BASK study that there is a significant difference in the end line from the baseline that after engaging in the reflection process, they believe that peer reflection will help in improving their practice. BASK study also has emerged that most of the fellows found that reflection has contributed to improving their practice, navigating their assumptions and identifying strengths and weaknesses. These reflections can be conducted with peers in asynchronous and synchronous modes. Field mentors can facilitate peer reflections and individual reflections can be facilitated through academic mentors. Transformational model in this way deals with the significant gap of reflection and exploration as well the collaboration to an extent.

MATPD model also promotes the use of technology for meaningful and constructive learning for both teachers and students. The gap in the innovative use of ICT is being dealt with in the MATPD transformational model. BASK study further revealed that fellows have made use of ICT tools but also applications for resource sharing, conducting meetings and best practices. These apps can be used for the purpose of collaboration for reflecting on practice as mentioned in the above paragraph. The facilitator put necessary simulations to initiating reflections on classroom practices. One of the findings was related to OER, where fellows expressed that they need to explore it further if given the opportunity. Fellows agreed the blended approach or distance learning is useful as it gives access to distance and increases efficiency by providing flexibility of timings with their practice as well. Hence it is recommended that further opportunities of distance learning should be explored and there is no doubt that it will be a cost-effective method.

Conclusion

From the above case, one can conclude that the practice-based model of CPD of Teachers educators and teachers is effective. As discussed above BASK study has shown changes in the practice of fellows and in the understanding of conducting action research as well as mentoring. This has further helped in resolving contextual problems through action research given the classroom-based practice framework of action research.

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