Research Article

Initiatives Undertaken by EFL Teachers for Professional Development

Abstract: The enhancement of knowledge, skills and understanding of individuals in learning contexts that maybe reflected in themselves or in their work place is generally described as professional development. This research aims at exploring the most common initiatives undertaken by EFL teachers for their professional development. The study applies open-ended questions to gather information and descriptive analytical method to analyze the collected information. Five teachers teaching at undergraduate level in public college of Nepal were selected as participants through purposive sampling. The result indicates that the EFL teachers often have the opportunity to participate in teacher development activities but they don’t take part these activities to develop themselves in their own profession.

Keywords: Strategies, professional development, EFL teachers, initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

I as an English teacher often got opportunities to take part in different work-shops, trainings, writing research articles from the college but I did not show any interest in these activities thinking that I must be potential on subject matter to be taught as if my academic evaluation is how my students take me but when I find my colleagues who participated in these activities performed better in their profession because of their academic endeavor. Their growing academic performance made me realize the importance of professional development and I attempted to write this paper to explore the initiatives taken by EFL teachers for their professional development.

Professional development is a process which makes the teachers professional so that they are efficient at their work growing themselves in academic field. Along with that it is teachers around whom the entire academic activities are circled so teachers need to be developed. Those teachers are developed who can identify their own potentials and problems and find their way forward (Gnawali, 2016). Professional teachers identify the problems and find the way to solve so that teaching and learning go forward in a proper way following no fix way as it is viewed as a lifelong learning for developing teachers to be professional.

EFL teachers learn successful practices and implementation of instructional strategies in their classroom by initiatives of professional development helping them to understand the general cognitive and social/emotional characteristics of students enhancing them to use knowledge of their students’ interests and backgrounds to assist them in planning meaningful and relevant lessons through different strategies with the goal of keeping the teachers up-to date on current trends as well as help them develop new skills for the purpose of advancement in the field. Professional development of teachers implies adaptation to change with a view to changing teaching and learning activities, altering teacher attitudes and improving the academic results of students beyond informative stands (Heideman, 1990).

Teacher education has shifted its focus from institutional and managerial dominated fashion to individual teachers ‘self-directed process where provision of resources and materials of self-improvement are ensured in consultation with the institution and management bodies’ (Richards & Farrell, 2005). It means that an education agent or resource often plays a facilitating development has shown a shift of formal institutionalized based practices to individual driven activities where teachers are assumed to engage in careerism i.e. self-learning, evaluating and reflecting. Teacher education focuses on professional development of teacher as the ultimate goal of educating teachers is not only helping them to get mastery over the scientific concepts of teaching and learning the foreign languages but also enabling them to make use of the skills and knowledge, they have gained in actual classroom instructions. The teachers themselves are likely to be more responsible for professional improvement with the assumption that individuals could identify their own learning needs and more interested in taking actions. For this Guskey (2000) points out the essence on self-initiated professional development stating as ‘a process in which a learner assumes primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process where an education agent or resource often plays a facilitating role in the process.’
Professional development is the work of collaborative teams of teachers, school leaders, and other administrative, instructional and educational members working together to accomplish common goals. The aim of professional development is to help teachers obtaining new knowledge and improve their teaching through direct experiences with methods that help students learn in new and effective ways (Lee, 2002). Since it has a specific goal of improving teaching through experiences, how the EFL teachers are engaged in their professional development is very much crucial so I want to explore their initiatives for professional development.

The Importance of EFL Teachers’ Professional Development

Professional development is lifelong learning process in which teachers has to understand the need of learning in either setting formal or informal. The new technologies emerged the world today oblige teachers to be aware of their applications in teaching and learning. Technologies have brought different dimensions which demand more on teachers to cope with the students in the class. OECD (2009) states that the development of teachers beyond their initial training can serve to update skills, attitudes and approaches enabling them to apply changes on teaching practice. It further helps to exchange information and expertise among teachers.

Characteristics of Teachers’ Professional Development

Professional development activities have positive effects on developing knowledge and skills and changes in their teaching which focus on subject-matter knowledge, opportunities for active learning, and coherence with other development activities. Villegas-Reimers (2003) states a professional development is a long-term process where teachers learn over time with active participation through evaluation, observation and reflection in specific contexts. It is a collaborative process that involves cooperation viewing teacher as a reflective practice. The author finally states that no single professional development model is effective and applicable.

Teacher should monitor their own practices to decide which professional development model seems more appropriate and beneficial to them. There is an urgent need to shift from the traditional development practices to creative and teacher-centered practices which help to raise students' achievements, and also help them to become proficient learners and speakers of EFL.

Techniques of Teachers’ Professional Development

The entire education system is influenced on the quality of teacher as teachers are in the place of implantation. An education system is as good as its teacher (UNESCO, 2015) highlighting that the strength of education system is reflected through the potentiality of teachers. Thus, it is teachers who must be professional and professional development can be seen as ‘a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically’ (Glatthorn, 1995). Learning through experience and reflecting own performance is two major aspects that incorporate the above definition. Writing reflection, taking part in the trainings, publishing articles on journals, doing action research, being the member of learning communities, attending different seminar and work-shop are some common techniques of teachers’ professional development. Similarly Shoqair and Shaaban (2013) mention that attending educational lectures, participating in academic activities (conferences, workshops, educational magazines, reading different educational articles and researches, participating in discussion groups with colleagues in school, depending on self-reflection based on international standards (standards check list), considering reports of exchange visits, asking my students for feedback, consulting experts of education, using social networks like Twitter, Facebook, and others in exchanging viewpoints and experiences. Participating in educational e-forums, conducting action research continually, preparing a portfolio, participating in peer coaching sessions, participating in designing educational programs engagement in academic writing and familiar with digital literacy are some of the techniques of professional development.

Statement of the Problem

The need for adopting different initiations of professional development for EFL teachers is highly urged to cope with the present academic environment globally. Weakness of teachers in adopting new trends in teaching and updating their knowledge in their specialization remains to be the most important factors that affect their performance inside the classrooms. Several literatures mentioned in the introduction section reveal that it works for the advancement of professional life. So, I think it is an essential aspect to explore the initiatives undertaken by EFL teachers for their professional development.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the initiatives undertaken by EFL teachers for their professional development.

Questions for the Study

The following research questions were addressed in the study.

1. What are the most common initiatives undertaken by EFL teachers for their professional development?
2. What are the challenges for professional development to EFL teachers?
**Methodology**

I followed qualitative research approach as I was exploring the lived experience of EFL teachers. For this I gathered information applying semi-structured interview to understand ‘the world of human experience’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) (Appendix-1) thinking that participants are not limited to supply needed information. For participant selection, I selected five EFL teachers having experiences in teaching from five to fifteen years teaching at bachelor level in two different colleges located in Butwal Sub-Metropolitan, Western, Nepal city through purposive sampling procedures ‘to get in touch with people who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) thinking that I could have been able to get the adequate information. I analyzed the collected information applying descriptive analytical method.

**Discussion and Findings**

The collected information has been discussed and analyzed under this heading in six different thematic headings incorporating major ideas drawn from participants with literature available.

**Membership of Professional Organization**

NELTA, an organization, working for EFL teachers for their professional development in Nepal aiming that members can get national and international exposures for promoting themselves so that they get opportunities of collaborative and cooperative learning. Emphasizing on this one of my participants stated that

*Since I am a life member of NELTA, I often take part the international conference of NELTA which makes me familiar with current issues and sharing ideas among the people of same area which helps me to update my professional skill.*

It clearly shows that the teachers strongly acknowledged the statements that reflect the importance of updating themselves with existing professional skills being the member of professional organization. It is a common phenomenon in most of the countries around the globe to be a member of ELT association which aims to provide opportunities for teachers to come together. For this (Gnawali, 2016) writes that linking ELT professionals through conferences and other events, they provide learning opportunities for members. In favors of the statement, one of my informants acknowledges NELTA as the plate form of developing professionalism in bringing about real change on their pedagogical effectiveness.

**Participation in the Activities of Professional Development**

Training and work-shop believes on the notion that ‘one size doesn’t fit all’ where participants get ideas on treating individual differences as workshop focuses on developing ‘content knowledge and active learning’ (Wallhead & Ward,2006). The response of my participants in terms of participation in the activities of professional development clearly indicate that they often take part in work-shop and trainings and seminars either by their own initiations or organized by the colleges where they are working but they believe that these activities have very little things to do as one of my informants experienced that *trainings and work-shops and seminars are often conducted without doing need analysis to spend the allocated budget only*. They questioned on the purpose and procedures of trainings, work-shops and seminars. However, they are somehow positive in participating NELTA conference specifying that they get an opportunity to be aware of global issues in English language and pedagogy.

**Engagement in Academic Writing**

The responses of the question related to publication being asked to my participants were responded in the way that four participants out of five haven’t written any research article till the date. The reason behind this can be drawn that there is no research environment at their working place. They simply blame on college environment as one of my participant’s states that there is *no favorable environment for writing and publishing*. They neither write reflections, keep journals nor any articles. It shows that they have very poor initiations engaging themselves in academic writing rather they have strong blame on others without having a single effort. They need to understand that blaming others doesn’t bring solutions rather they need to be engaging on academic writing and one of my participant’s states that there are *no significance differences in the treatment from the administration between the teachers who are engaged in academic writing and who are not*. The statement reflects that promotion and incentives are to be given to those who are engaged in academic writing. Teachers are to be evaluated based on how much they are engaged in academic writing not how many years they spent on teaching without writing a single research article.

**Listening Radio/Watching YouTube /Browsing Web**

Internet as a component is a tool that has immense potentials in encouraging and facilitating teaching and learning. Olowa (2012) maintains internet as a component having immense potentials in encouraging and facilitating teaching and learning allowing content to be delivered anywhere and anytime improving professional development as one of my participants viewed internet as *teacher and best...*
Engagement in Research Activities

Action research process embarks on a problem finding, and then formulating possible actions for the problem, applying an action, and finally evaluating on the outcome of the action. These activities go round in a circle and the process is repeated until we can get the desired behavior. Lewin (1946) described action research as ‘a form of social action that uses a spiral of steps in a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action’. Most of my participants have not carried out action research in their class however some workshop organized in the college. For this most of my informants put their view forward that they have theoretical knowledge about action research but they have not practiced as one of my participants stated that I have idea that action research formulates possible actions to solve the problem in a very short span of time but it is not in practice. Having theoretical knowledge is almost equals to having no knowledge so teachers need to focus on implication. Since I am a student of English language education, I know importance of research but I have not carried out any research related to classroom activities. The statement made by one my informants clearly indicates that teachers are not involved in any type of research activities even though they have realization of the importance of research activities.

Challenges

Lack of access to required resources and encouragement by the administration are the major challenges faced by the EFL teachers while acting for professional development as the common reaction of my participants was that we want to be potential by taking part in different trainings, work-shop but we can’t get required sources and motivation from the administration. The teachers do not mention their internal factors that hinder their efforts for professional improvement like time they spent, their eagerness, capacity etc. The teachers emphasize on the limited resources provision and encouragement mechanisms as the major factors for conducting professional development activities rather they blame on college administration. The teachers concern the existing college management system of incentives like promotion and reward (Herallah, 2011) and resources availability affect them in undertaking their professional development activities. Policy of college, self-desire and inadequate resources and materials are major challenges for initiating the activities of professional development. Ahmed’s (2003) maintained that ‘financial constraint’ as one of the affecting factors for professional development which is supported by majority of my participants stating that professional development directly attached to the money matter for employing self-driven professional development activities. (Guskey, 2000) wrote in favor of my participants that self-initiated professional development demands teachers to be self-motivated and committed regardless of the available backing and encouragement. Financial status is one of the factors that affect professional development. The teachers, however, reminded that some kind of incentives like salary increment and promotion is to be given to those who succeed in achieving the required level of professional competence through their personal effort and initiative.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study results that the initiatives undertaken by EFL teachers for their professional development appears noticeable. The responses reveal that associating in the learning communities, participating in work-shop and trainings, engaging themselves in academic writing and being digital literate are essential for professional development. The teachers expressed their positive feelings towards employing initiatives professional development, and they note that other stakeholders must encourage the teachers’ endeavor for successful implementation. However, the teachers do not seem to be consistent in their responses to the inquiries of employing the initiatives of professional development tasks and activities. The teachers respond to the factors affecting implementations like lack of resources and encouragement. They note that there are difficulties of accessing materials and resources required for professional improvement. However, the astonishing result for this study is non-reactive responses to their personal commitment as a factor affecting for their professional development.

REFERENCES

Appendix-1

Dear sir/mam
Please supply the information based on your experience.
Name:
Gender: Male Female
Age: Qualification: Academic degree:
Years of EFL teaching experience:
Grade level(s) currently taught:

1. What professional development activities have you participated?

2. What is the level of impact of each of the activities you marked your teaching?

3. What do you consider as the most important for effective for professional development?

4. List some of your publications for professional development, If any?

5. What are the different technologies you have applied for your professional development?

6. What are your research-based efforts for professional development?

7. What are the problems you faced when you put your initiations for your professional development in to practice?