

Carrier or Preparing for Other Carrier: A Study of Dropouts Instructor in Technical Education

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Abstract

This study examines the professional challenges and opportunities faced by technical instructors in secondary education, focusing on the issue of instructor turnover in technical streams. Study captures the lived experiences of instructors who left their roles, revealing that societal and familial pressures, along with institutional neglect, contribute significantly to their feelings of inadequacy and humiliation. Despite their technical expertise, these educators often struggle with a lack of support, recognition, and alignment between their roles and societal expectations, leading to emotional distress and diminished motivation. The research highlights systemic gaps in integrating technical education into general school curricula, where the contributions of technical instructors are undervalued and overlooked. To address these challenges, the study emphasizes the importance of fostering a culture that appreciates and supports technical educators, bridging the gap between education and industry. It suggests strategies such as implementing supportive policies, providing professional development opportunities, and ensuring proper recognition and rewards for technical instructors. By improving the professional environment for technical educators, the study aims to enhance retention, boost morale, and align technical education with workforce demands, ultimately contributing to better educational outcomes for students and advancing Nepal's technical and vocational education sector.

Keywords: Technical Education, Instructor Turnover, Narrative Inquiry, Professional Challenges, Vocational Training, Employability, Apprenticeship Models

Background and Context

After completing my Bachelor studies, I began my teaching journey in 2015, teaching civil engineering at the diploma, pre-diploma levels and Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) schools. This path, though challenging, was equally rewarding. My experiences in teaching across multiple institutions in the Butwal region and serving in administrative roles provided deep insights into the field of technical education. These roles allowed me to understand the dynamics of both private technical schools and the political challenges within community-based schools running technical streams. Over nearly a decade in this field, I witnessed the interplay of opportunities and challenges, shaping my perspective on the systemic issues affecting instructor retention and performance in the technical education sector.

Like many civil engineers, I initially viewed teaching as a temporary role, a stopgap while pursuing aspirations in larger engineering projects. However, the classroom experience offered profound opportunities for growth and fulfillment. Guiding students through the fundamentals of civil engineering and seeing their success in real-world applications made me rethink the perceived temporary nature of this profession. Despite systemic challenges, such as limited resources, outdated infrastructure, and the pressure to balance professional growth with classroom responsibilities, the role of an educator proved transformative. The ability to contribute to society by shaping future engineers gave me a sense of pride and purpose that extended far beyond personal aspirations.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is an essential component of education systems in developing countries, as it equips individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in the labor market. In Nepal, TVET programs are primarily offered in community schools, which face challenges such as inadequate funding and lack of resources, hindering the provision of quality education. One of the key goals of these programs is sustainability, ensuring that they continue to meet the needs of both students and the workforce in the long term.

While TVET employees in Nepal have shown positivity towards their work, they remain dissatisfied with the benefits provided (Sapkota et al., 2019). Job satisfaction within TVET-related institutions does not meet expectations, as noted by Rimal (2022). Teachers, who play a critical role in ensuring high-quality education and preparing students for the labor market, often face overlooked challenges. In particular there has been limited research on the role of educators in the

Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) programs within community schools. The CEHRD manages various technical programs for classes 9 to 12, covering fields like Computer Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, and Agriculture.

Instructors in technical streams of general schools face a range of challenges that contribute to high turnover rates. A primary issue is the significant disparity between their qualifications and compensation, which leads to dissatisfaction and prompts many educators to seek higher-paying opportunities. Additionally, limited career growth prospects, large class sizes, insufficient resources, and administrative burdens contribute to their frustrations. The lack of institutional support, outdated equipment, and difficulty balancing heavy workloads with personal lives further exacerbate the situation. These cumulative challenges fuel instructor burnout, which has led to the departure of experienced educators, undermining the stability and quality of technical education.

Research results help to gain a deeper understanding of the retention rates within these programs and the real situation of the instructors. By offering insights into the instructors' perspectives, the study can help decision-makers, program managers, and educators improve the effectiveness of TVET programs in community schools.

Instructor turnover in technical streams, particularly within TVET systems in general schools, is a result of deep-rooted systemic challenges. These include outdated curricula, lack of professional development opportunities, and inadequate support systems for instructors. These issues not only affect instructors' morale but also compromise the quality of education provided to students, limiting the ability of the education system to meet industry demands and foster innovation. For instance, mismatched skills and curriculum irrelevance have been highlighted as major contributors to dissatisfaction among TVET instructors, ultimately pushing them out of the teaching profession (Minghat et al., 2023).

This study narrates the reasons behind instructor turnover in TVET programs and understand the perspectives of those who leave the teaching profession. The study aims to identify the underlying factors contributing to turnover and to explore the views of technical educators regarding their experiences in the profession.

Review of Related Literature

Technical education in Nepal presents numerous challenges from the perspective of instructors, including resource shortages, outdated teaching methodologies, and a lack of professional development opportunities. Instructors often face limitations such as insufficient teaching materials, inadequate infrastructure, and outdated equipment, which directly impacts the quality of education they can provide (Adewumi et al., 2019). These limitations hinder instructors' ability to offer hands-on experience, an essential component of technical education. The frustration that arises from these challenges is evident in studies that emphasize how instructors must navigate these barriers while striving to provide quality education to students.

Moreover, political interference in Nepal's technical education system has been a significant issue that instructors must contend with. Political influence often results in frequent administrative changes, unstable policies, and shifts in priorities, which disrupt the educational process and limit the ability of instructors to engage in long-term planning (Nir & Kafle, 2013). This environment of instability further complicates the role of the instructor, as they are forced to adapt to constantly changing conditions, which can undermine their teaching effectiveness. The lack of stability in educational leadership also affects the implementation of long-term curriculum reforms, which instructors may see as necessary to improve the quality and relevance of technical education.

In addition to these structural challenges, technical educators in Nepal often experience societal undervaluation. Technical instructors face a lack of recognition for their contributions to national development, as technical education is generally perceived as inferior to academic education (Sharma, 2019). This societal devaluation is compounded by lower pay, fewer career advancement opportunities, and a general disregard for the profession's significance. The demoralization of instructors due to these factors often leads to burnout and diminished job satisfaction. Despite their crucial role in shaping a skilled workforce, instructors in technical education are frequently overlooked in the broader educational landscape.

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities to address these issues, particularly through the integration of apprenticeship models. Apprenticeships offer a practical solution to bridge the gap between the theoretical knowledge imparted in classrooms and the real-world skills needed in the workforce. Research shows that apprenticeship programs not only enhance the employability of students but also provide instructors with valuable insights into industry practices, allowing them to update their teaching methodologies accordingly (Smith & Doe, 2020). This alignment between

education and industry needs could be transformative, providing instructors with the tools to enhance the relevance and impact of their teaching.

The growing recognition of apprenticeship programs in Nepal offers a promising avenue for instructors to improve the quality of education they provide. For instructors, this gap between the classroom and industry is a critical issue that needs to be addressed to ensure that students graduate with the skills that are truly needed in the workforce. Therefore, while the current challenges facing technical education in Nepal are significant, the potential for apprenticeship models to bridge these gaps presents a hopeful opportunity for instructors to enhance their teaching effectiveness and the employability of their students.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study of instructor turnover in technical schools is primarily qualitative, focusing on an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perceptions of instructors who have left their teaching roles. The research design is centered around a case study approach, which allows for a detailed examination of the specific context and factors influencing instructor turnover within the technical education environment. This approach is particularly beneficial for understanding complex phenomena that are difficult to quantify or replicate in controlled settings.

Participants in the study were selected targeting former instructors who had relevant experiences related to instructor turnover. The study was conducted having informal discussions with several drop out instructors and detail interview were taken with five participants from different technical schools, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives. The selection criteria required that participants have been involved in full-time teaching for at least six months, which provided a solid foundation for their insights into the factors contributing to turnover.

Data collection was conducted through open interviews, which facilitated a deep dive into the participants' experiences and opinions regarding their teaching roles and the reasons for their departure. The interviews were with open-ended questions to study in detail of work-life balance, compensation, and professional development opportunities. Probing questions were used to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses, thereby enriching the data collected. Ethical considerations were paramount, with informed consent obtained from all participants to ensure confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their involvement in the study.

This study focus on the understanding of instructor turnover, capturing the subjective experiences of participants within their unique organizational and cultural contexts. This qualitative approach not only highlights the individual perspectives of instructors but also informs potential strategies and interventions to address the issue of turnover in technical education settings

Findings of the Study

To explore the complexities surrounding instructor turnover in the technical stream of general schools, qualitative study involving selected participants who had direct experiences in this domain were done. The participants, all with substantial teaching backgrounds in TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training), were chosen for their diverse perspectives and roles within the education system. This included individuals who had transitioned out of teaching. The study employed deep interviews, offering participants a platform to candidly share their frustrations and moments of excitement regarding their teaching journeys.

The discussions revealed a duality in the teaching profession within technical education. Participants expressed frustration over systemic challenges such as inadequate resources, outdated curricula, job insecurity, and limited professional growth opportunities. These barriers often led to feelings of disillusionment, prompting some to seek alternative careers. On the other hand, many recounted instances of profound satisfaction and pride, especially when their efforts positively impacted students' careers and community development. This juxtaposition of challenges and rewards highlights the need for systemic reforms to create an environment where educators can thrive, fostering both their professional fulfillment and the advancement of technical education. These insights form the foundation for a deeper understanding of instructor turnover and potential strategies to address it.

The interviews revealed diverse experiences among the participants, yet all emphasized the critical role vocational training played in enhancing their employability prospects. The participants, aged between 25 to 30, specialized in fields like Civil Engineering, Computer Engineering and Agriculture. Of the five participants, all had left teaching but expressed a strong desire to return. Each respondent's journey highlights both the opportunities and challenges they faced transitioning from

teaching to drop out.

Initial Motivation, Expectations, and Early Career Challenges

Amar, from the middle-class family just after the graduation in agriculture was in search of job. He has completed the BSc. Ag. In scholarship, his family background was not good, and he tried to seek any opportunity. After one year of graduation, he got chance to teach in technical stream of general school 9-12, Plant science. He was excited to get the job as the salary was also satisfactory. He recalls his excitement as

“When I first got the chance to teach plant science to grades 9-12 at a technical school, I was really excited! Coming from a family that struggled financially, finding a stable job was something I really needed, and this teaching job felt like the perfect opportunity. Not only would I have a steady income, but I also felt proud to be able to teach young students about agriculture, which is so important in our community. I worked hard to prepare lessons and activities, and seeing my students excited to learn made me feel like I was truly making a difference. It was amazing to know I was helping them gain skills that could improve their lives and contribute to the future of farming!”

(Field Note, October 2024)

Unlike Amar, another participant, Raj had a clear goal when entering the teaching profession—he saw it as a steppingstone to securing a permanent government job. He had a keen interest in working in a government position, and teaching provided him with the perfect opportunity to manage his time while preparing for exams. The flexibility of teaching allowed him to balance his professional duties with his studies, and it helped him stay updated with the required knowledge.

Technical professionals often enter the teaching profession for practical and personal reasons. Teaching is seen as an accessible career, particularly in regions where qualifications are straightforward and roles are readily available, making it an attractive option for those in fields like engineering or IT. Many view teaching as a temporary occupation while preparing for competitive exams, such as the Public Service Commission (PSC) tests, offering financial stability and a structured schedule.

But as the time passes initially instructors did not get everything as they were expecting for Raj recalls,

“When I first entered the school, I quickly discovered that the reality of teaching wasn’t as easy as I had expected. As a technical professional, I thought my role would mainly focus on teaching, but I was also responsible for preparing detailed lesson plans and handling administrative tasks. These additional responsibilities felt overwhelming and suffocating, leaving me with less time and energy to focus on what I truly enjoyed—teaching the students.”

(Field Note: 2024, October)

Struggles with Job Satisfaction and Retention

When discussing how their teaching experience related to the demands of the technical stream in schools, the majority of participants shared that although they had acquired valuable teaching skills and knowledge, the curriculum and resources did not fully align with the current needs of students and the industry. Many instructors noted that while the training provided a solid foundation in teaching methodologies, it lacked in-depth coverage of the technologies and tools that students would encounter in real-world applications. One of the participant, Anita, recalled,

“The training gave me the basics, but the tools and techniques were behind what I was seeing in the industry. I had to adapt and learn new methods on my own after realizing the gap between what we were teaching and what the students needed to know.”

(Field Note: 2024, October)

Raju, a civil engineer with a passion for teaching, dedicated three years to the TVET sector, aiming to bridge the gap between education and industry by inspiring students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios. Initially, his career as an instructor was fulfilling, with his students thriving in hands-on projects. However, over time, administrative duties began to overshadow his teaching role. The increased focus on bureaucratic tasks, such as extensive documentation and procurement management, took time away from his students, causing his passion for teaching to wane.

Frustrated by the lack of recognition for his expertise and the diminishing quality of education, Amar found himself overwhelmed. His students’ struggles with projects, like a shelved solar-powered water pump, highlighted the negative

impact of his increasing workload. He advocates for reducing administrative burdens, involving instructors in decision-making, and investing in resources for practical learning. Raju recalled,

"When I first started teaching, I felt an immense sense of purpose. I was shaping the future, guiding students through practical learning. But as time went on, the mounting administrative tasks and lack of support drained my passion. Teaching should be about inspiring, not paperwork. I miss those days."

(Field Note: 2024, October)

The journey of a skilled technical professional transitioning into a teaching role at a secondary school can often be fraught with societal and familial challenges. Despite possessing valuable expertise, society tends to view technical educators as less prestigious compared to those in higher-status roles within industries or government positions. This perception is often mirrored by family expectations, where individuals with technical qualifications are pressured to pursue careers that are seen as more lucrative or respected.

The constant judgment from both society and family can lead to feelings of humiliation and inadequacy. The individual may be labeled as underachieving or wasting their potential, despite being passionate about education and working with students. This societal stigma erodes self-esteem and causes emotional distress, as the individual struggles to find validation in their chosen path. The lack of understanding and support from those around them can lead to feelings of isolation and depression, making it difficult to maintain enthusiasm for teaching. Ultimately, this sense of being undervalued can diminish the joy and fulfillment that should come with contributing to the education of future generations.

Paras one of the participant recalled,

"When I first began teaching at the secondary school, I was full of enthusiasm, hoping to inspire the next generation of agricultural professionals. But over time, I began to feel humiliated. As a skilled technical professional with a degree in Agriculture, society often saw my role as lesser because I was teaching in a secondary school. Many viewed me as overqualified for the job, and this perception weighed heavily on me. It made me question my worth and caused a deep sense of frustration and depression. I felt that my expertise was undervalued, and the lack of support from the administration only added to my disillusionment. The societal judgment of being a technical manpower stuck in a teaching role left me questioning my career choices and the impact I could make."

(Field Note: 2024, October)

The story of a seasoned educator in the technical stream offers a poignant reflection on the challenges faced by experienced instructors in the TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) sector. With years of industry experience, the instructor initially entered the teaching profession with a deep passion for bridging the gap between theory and practice. By introducing hands-on learning opportunities, including site visits and real-world projects, the educator quickly earned the respect of students and colleagues alike. The satisfaction of seeing students excel and gain practical skills reinforced the educator's commitment to teaching.

Black Out : Termination

However, as time passed, a sense of stagnation began to take root. Despite years of dedication, the educator found little recognition or opportunity for career growth. Raju recalls

"Younger, less experienced teachers were often given leadership roles or more visibility in institutional activities, while the seasoned instructor, who had contributed significantly to the institution, was overlooked for promotions or professional development. The lack of support and recognition led to a growing sense of frustration and disillusionment."

(Field Note: 2024, October)

After years of struggling within the system, the instructor made the difficult decision to leave teaching for a role in a different sector, where their skills and experience were more appreciated. Despite finding success in a new field, the educator remains deeply connected to the teaching profession and advocates for reforms that would create a more supportive environment for experienced instructors. One of the participants Raju recalled

"The lack of professional development for senior instructors left me disheartened. Eventually, I decided to leave teaching for a new career where my skills were valued. I still miss teaching, but I hope reforms will create a better environment for experienced educators."

(Field Note: 2024, October)

The lack of resources in many general schools further exacerbates these issues. Technical instructors are often left to teach with outdated equipment or limited access to hands-on learning tools, making it difficult to provide students with the practical experience they need. Without modern tools or proper facilities, instructors are forced to improvise, which can compromise the quality of education they are able to provide. Moreover, students, despite their best efforts, often struggle to develop the technical skills necessary to succeed in a competitive job market. This leads to a sense of helplessness and a lack of fulfillment for instructors who know their students are not getting the opportunities they deserve.

Job insecurity is another major concern for instructors in the technical stream. Many are employed on short-term contracts with no clear path to permanent positions. This lack of stability can cause stress and uncertainty, as instructors never know if their contracts will be renewed or if they will have the financial security to stay in the profession long-term. The constant worry about job continuity creates an environment where instructors are more focused on job survival than on creating a dynamic, innovative teaching experience for their students.

In addition to these structural issues, technical instructors often face a lack of recognition and support from the administration. In many general schools, permanent teachers, who have more seniority or hold higher status, tend to receive more recognition and privileges. These teachers are often seen as the “heroes” of the institution, while technical instructors, despite their critical role in educating future professionals, are overlooked. The disparity in recognition creates a sense of demotivation among technical instructors, who feel their hard work and contributions go unappreciated.

“When I started teaching, I was full of passion and ready to make a real impact. But soon, I felt the weight of job insecurity, constantly worrying if my contract would be renewed. The political influence in the school only added to the frustration, where promotions seemed more about who you knew than what you did. Meanwhile, permanent teachers received all the recognition, which left me feeling invisible and demotivated despite my hard work.”

(Field Note: 2024, October)

For many instructors in the technical stream, teaching often felt like a temporary job, more of a bridge between their graduation and a permanent position in the technical field. It wasn’t their ultimate career goal but rather a stepping stone to gain experience and financial stability in the short term. The earnings were enough to sustain them, but there was rarely a deep connection to the profession. Their true aspirations lay in the technical industry, where they could apply their skills more directly. Teaching was seen as a means to an end rather than a long-term passion. Participant Paras stated that,

“I saw teaching as a temporary job, just a bridge to a better opportunity in the technical field. The earnings were decent for now, but I always had my sights set on working in the industry where I could truly apply my skills and grow professionally.” Another participant echoed, *“Teaching helped me transition from graduation, but it never felt like a long-term career for me. It was more about financial stability in the short term.”*

(Field Note: 2024 October)

Discussion

Instructor turnover in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector, particularly in general schools, is a pressing issue that has significant implications for both educators and students. Many instructors in this field, despite their expertise and commitment, face numerous challenges that drive them to leave the profession. Job insecurity, lack of career progression, and inadequate resources are among the key factors that contribute to high turnover rates. These challenges not only impact the retention of experienced instructors but also compromise the quality of education provided to students.

Teaching as Easy Job

Many technical graduates enter the teaching profession for practical and personal reasons, often viewing it as an accessible and stable career option. For those with technical expertise in fields like agriculture, engineering, or IT, teaching offers a relatively straightforward path, especially in regions where qualifications for teaching are clear and job opportunities are abundant (Smith, 2019). Many view teaching as an ideal profession because it provides financial stability and a structured schedule, making it particularly attractive for those preparing for competitive exams, such as government service tests, while also allowing time for personal and professional growth (Toropova et al., 2020)

However, the initial excitement and idealized expectations often change once these individuals begin their teaching careers. While the job provides a steady income and the opportunity to make a positive impact on students, the reality of

the teaching profession is more demanding than expected (Bahtilla & Hui, 2021). Many new instructors find themselves overwhelmed by administrative tasks, lesson planning, and other responsibilities that take time away from their primary role of teaching. These additional duties can feel suffocating, leading to frustration and a shift in perspective. What was once seen as an ideal, flexible career choice can quickly become challenging as the demands of the job exceed initial expectations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

Teaching as Suffocation Time:

One major factor contributing to turnover is job insecurity. Many technical instructors, particularly those on temporary or contract-based positions, experience uncertainty regarding their employment status. This lack of job stability creates a stressful work environment and contributes to dissatisfaction. In contrast, instructors with permanent positions often enjoy more job security, which can lead to a disparity in the experiences of staff (Maynard & Joseph, 2006). Those on temporary contracts may feel compelled to seek more secure employment, which increases turnover rates in the sector.

Another significant factor is the lack of career progression (Clarke, 2015). Many instructors find themselves in a stagnant career environment with few opportunities for professional development or promotion. Although they possess valuable industry knowledge and teaching experience, the lack of recognition and opportunities for career advancement can lead to frustration and eventual departure from the profession. This is particularly concerning in technical education, where the rapid pace of technological change requires instructors to continually update their skills and knowledge. When institutions fail to provide avenues for growth, instructors are more likely to leave in search of more fulfilling roles that offer opportunities for advancement.

In addition to job insecurity and career stagnation, limited resources also play a crucial role in driving instructors away. Many technical schools struggle with outdated curricula, insufficient teaching materials, and inadequate facilities. Instructors often feel constrained by these limitations, as they are unable to provide the hands-on, practical learning experiences that are vital in technical education. Without access to modern tools and resources, instructors cannot fully engage students or prepare them for real-world challenges. The lack of support in this area not only demotivates educators but also negatively impacts student outcomes, making it harder for instructors to maintain their passion for teaching (Clarke, 2015).

Finally, the lack of recognition and appreciation for instructors' expertise and efforts is another key factor contributing to turnover. Many educators feel that their contributions are undervalued by the institution, particularly when there are few opportunities for recognition or reward (Maynard & Joseph, 2006). In such environments, instructors may begin to feel disheartened and disengaged, leading them to seek other career opportunities that offer more recognition and reward for their hard work.

Door to exit:

The high turnover rate among technical instructors poses significant challenges for educational institutions and the students they serve. When experienced educators leave the profession, they take with them valuable knowledge, skills, and mentorship that are crucial for shaping the next generation of skilled professionals. The loss of experienced instructors can disrupt continuity in education and hinder the development of a skilled workforce. Therefore, addressing the root causes of turnover—such as job insecurity, limited career progression, inadequate resources, and lack of recognition—should be a priority for institutions seeking to retain talented educators and improve the quality of technical education.

Instructor turnover in the TVET sector is a multifaceted issue influenced by job insecurity, limited career progression, insufficient resources, and lack of recognition. These factors contribute to an environment where instructors feel undervalued and unsupported, prompting them to leave the profession. To address this issue, institutions must focus on creating a more supportive environment that offers job security, professional development opportunities, modern teaching resources, and recognition for the contributions of instructors. By doing so, they can reduce turnover and improve the quality of education provided to students.

Conclusion

Instructor turnover in the technical stream of general schools is a critical issue that negatively affects the quality of education and disrupts the learning experience for students. Job insecurity is one of the leading causes of high turnover rates, as many technical instructors are employed on temporary contracts, creating uncertainty about their future in the profession. The lack of long-term job stability causes stress and frustration, driving instructors to seek more secure

employment. This issue is compounded by limited career progression opportunities, as many instructors find themselves in stagnant roles without clear paths for growth, which contributes to disengagement and job dissatisfaction.

In addition to job insecurity, many technical schools suffer from inadequate resources, outdated curricula, and a lack of modern equipment, making it difficult for instructors to provide effective hands-on training. This mismatch between the outdated curriculum and current industry needs leads to frustration, as instructors are unable to equip students with the relevant skills required by employers. The lack of up-to-date tools and technologies further exacerbates this problem, contributing to burnout and higher turnover rates. Moreover, the perception of teaching as a temporary job, often seen as a stepping stone to more permanent and lucrative roles, encourages instructors to view their positions as short-term solutions rather than long-term careers. The political influences and favoritism that favor permanent teachers create an environment where temporary instructors feel undervalued. Addressing these systemic issues, such as offering permanent contracts, enhancing professional development opportunities, and aligning curricula with industry standards, could reduce turnover and improve retention, creating a more stable and rewarding environment for technical instructors.

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