

## **Protest and Pedagogy: The Influence of Civil Unrest on Teacher Development and Educational Reforms in South Asia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Drawing from the rich cultural heritage and diverse historical contexts of Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar, we examine how teachers adapt traditional and modern pedagogical methods in response to linguistic and cultural diversity. Colonial legacies in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, along with Nepal's shifting sociopolitical climate, offer insights into the evolving identities of educators amidst systemic educational changes. The role of civil protests is analyzed as a catalyst for educational transformation, with particular emphasis on recent teacher demonstrations in Sri Lanka, underscoring the potential of disruptive movements to spur positive change. This analysis aligns Fullan's principles with South Asia's ongoing educational reforms, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of teachers in navigating cultural, historical, and political intersections.*

**Keywords:** Pedagogical Evolution, Professional development, Reform, Sociopolitical dynamics teacher Identity

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Michael Fullan's work "Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform" provides universal insights that can be extrapolated to diverse global contexts, such as South Asia, regarding the complexity of educational reform. South Asia's intricate cultural tapestry, historical depth, and diverse socio-political

foundations provide a rich backdrop for contextualizing Fullan's principles, especially in analyzing teacher identity and professional development. Teachers in India, an important South Asian nation, harmonize instruction among the numerous languages, illustrating Fullan's emphasis on the importance of local culture and context in orchestrating educational changes. Teachers' identities are shaped not only by their pedagogical expertise but also by their linguistic dexterity and the cultural nuances they inject into the learning environment. The conventional hierarchical ethos of South Asian societies, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, resonates with Fullan's reflections on the tribulations of systemic educational transformations. In this context, the evolution of younger teachers is intricately intertwined with their capacity to navigate and acclimate to prevalent sociocultural norms and hierarchies while implementing innovative pedagogical strategies.

The fragments of colonialism in the educational frameworks of countries such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar produce a dialectical struggle between colonial legacies and indigenous pedagogical philosophies, replicating Fullan's ideas regarding the impact of historical forces on educational transformations. Educators' identities are perpetually transitioning as they negotiate between historical legacies and contemporary paradigms. Recent sociopolitical commotions in Nepal exemplify the influence of external forces on the educational sphere, confirming Fullan's assertions regarding the substantial influence of external dynamics on educational reorganization. Multiple ethnicities and languages in Nepal highlight the importance of cultural recognition and inclusivity in pedagogical approaches, reflecting Fullan's emphasis on incorporating local context and culture into educational reforms. In India, the evolution of the educational system, marked by reforms such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, highlights the continuous recalibration of teachers' professional identities and developmental needs, mirroring Fullan's analysis of the complexities of fostering educational innovations. With its multitude of complexities, South Asia provides fertile ground for applying, validating, and expanding Fullan's profound insights on educational reforms, teacher identity, and professional development amidst the convergence of culture, history, politics, and society.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

An educational researcher, Michael Fullan, stresses that teacher identity is not solitary. On the contrary, it evolves continuously based on experiences, adaptations, and reflections and is profoundly influenced by the larger dynamics of educational reforms and changes. Fullan's assertion is significant in Nepal and India, which have rich educational traditions and rapidly changing educational landscapes. Fullan argues that teacher identity is intrinsically linked to the larger ecosystem of educational transformation. He contends that "Identity is shaped in the cauldron of experience, adaptation, and reflection" (Fullan, 120).

Despite the fact that mentor-apprentice relationships are predominantly intended to benefit preservice instructors, recent research indicates that mentors can inadvertently gain several benefits from these interactions (Walters et al., 2019). Similarly, Walters et al. (2019) intended to investigate these potential benefits in the context of physical education in Canadian secondary schools. Similarly, Park et al. (2019) investigated how discipline-specific discourse practices affect the formation of graduate students' professional identities. Skinner et al. (2019) argue that the impact of educational reforms and their associated organizational and managerial directives should be assessed based on their implications for professional identity and individual well-being. Kijkuakul (2019) illustrated through case study how collaborative action research enabled primary science educators to modify their instructional strategies within classroom settings. Huang et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of institutional support for early career teachers' professional development and workplace learning. Riahipour et al. (2020) used an explanatory mixed-method approach to examine the changes in the professional identities of Iranian EFL instructors, particularly in relation to the Fundamental Reform Document of Education (2012). Fitriansyah et al. (2020) outlined a plan for developing a program dedicated to the professional development of the OER community in Indonesia. Ampadu et al. (2021) employed a qualitative methodology to investigate the professional identities of 58 preservice educators, asking them to illustrate their perceived identities through free-form questions and illustrations. Harkki et al. (2021) analyzed the emergence of co-teaching and the challenges educators identified as crucial to their co-teaching experiences after a national curriculum revision.

According to the literature, due to the introduction of modern educational reforms designed to promote critical thinking and student-centered pedagogy, teachers in Nepal often find themselves navigating a delicate balance between traditional teaching methods and new methodologies. Fullan's theory is illustrated when Nepali teachers, accustomed to being the primary authority figures in classrooms, begin to adapt to roles as facilitators. This change requires reflection of your experiences, modifying their teaching methods, and progressively reshaping your professional identities.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research approach centered on content analysis to examine the dynamics of educational reform in South Asia using the theoretical framework of Michael Fullan's "Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform." This study systematically analyses policy documents, teacher training materials, protest literature, and historical texts to explore how educators in Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar integrate traditional pedagogical practices with contemporary educational reforms influenced by their

unique socio-political and cultural contexts. The analysis entails categorising textual data to discern reoccurring themes and concepts, including teacher identity, professional development, and the impact of socio-political influences. It underscores the influence of colonial legacy, linguistic variety, and political instability on the execution of educational reforms. A cross-national comparison reveals both common issues and distinct strategies in each country, demonstrating how educators manage the intricacies of educational reform in accordance with Fullan's ideals.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **South Asian Nuances**

Teachers in South Asian nations such as Nepal and India have a complex and multifaceted identity. Historically, instructors were revered not only as academic guides, but also as moral and spiritual guides. Despite increasing the respect and status of teachers in society, this historical perception places a unique burden on them. Historically, the teacher's function in South Asian societies has frequently extended into moral and spiritual guidance. This dual expectation significantly impacts teacher identity, particularly compared to contemporary pedagogical expectations (Srivastava, 2015).

In India, the traditional function of the 'Guru' or teacher is deeply embedded in the fabric of society. The ancient Gurukul education system emphasized the importance of a student's character, values, and beliefs of a student being shaped by their Guru. In many rural areas of India, teachers are still expected to act as moral guides, particularly in regions where contemporary education takes root. This deep respect is empowering, but it also presents challenges when teachers must incorporate contemporary pedagogical techniques that may occasionally conflict with traditional beliefs. As a result, as the educational environments in Nepal and India change, the identities are continuously transformed. This evolution, while challenging, presents educators with opportunities to weave the rich tapestry of tradition with the strands of modernity, creating a distinctive educational experience for their students.

### **Protest as a Catalyst for Professional Development**

A prominent aspect of socio-political discourse has been the concept of disruptive forces as change agents. Fullan's assertion that such occurrences can stimulate "deeper introspection and revision of practice" (Fullan, 1993) emphasizes the significance of obstacles in bringing about substantial reforms.

Dahlstrom (1995) begins his discussion with reflections on the context of educational reform in Namibia after its independence in 1990. In their comparative study, Nathan et al. (2003) examined the transformational voyage of an experienced middle school mathematics educator over the course of two years as

she attempted to modify her instructional methods as a result of her participation in a professional development initiative. Doherty et al. (2007) assert that the professional environment in which educators in Scotland operate has changed. They argue that these changes are a reflection of global forces that are transforming education systems elsewhere, including regions south of the Scottish border. Memon et al. (2007) investigate an intervention designed to improve reading pedagogy at USJP. Their exploration juxtaposes traditional reading classes with contemporary and innovative ones, providing a foundation for cultivating new pedagogical beliefs and methodologies. Schuller et al. (2008) shed light on a multitude of contextual factors that persistently mould, influence, and form pedagogical practices. Frost (2012) promotes a model based on the UK HertsCam Network as exemplifying an innovative approach to educational reform. This model emphasises strengthening and integrating teacher leadership into the education ecosystem. Saunders (2013) describes educators who embarked on a rigorous four-year professional development trip with the goal of refining and enhancing their pedagogical techniques.

Donaldson (2014) reports the launch of an ambitious systemic reform initiative aimed at the teaching profession in the aftermath of a comprehensive evaluation of teacher education. Donaldson contemplates the fundamental factors that may determine its success or failure. In addition, Fullan (1993) and Cochran-Smith (2001) have made seminal contributions to the field of educational transformation, substantially enhancing the discourse on this subject.

The inquiry into educational inequality within the Swedish context, contemplating the transitions in educational equality during the twentieth century, has been meticulously explored by Robert Erikson and Jan O. Jonsson. They explore the nuances of educational reform and change, providing a comprehensive overview of the differences in educational practices and their implications for equality. In their seminal work, Hargreaves et al. (2006) explain the conceptual framework, methodological design, and key research findings of a study on long-term educational changes that was generously supported by the Spencer Foundation. (Carnoy et al., 2002) The authors dissect the complex relationship between globalization and educational transformation by employing a comparative method to increase the depth of their investigation. This issue of Comparative Education Review (CER) is devoted to investigating the intricate interrelationships between globalization and the transformative aspects of education, highlighting the multifarious ways the global landscape interacts with educational paradigms. The Teacher-Centered Systemic Reform (TCSR) model postulates that the instructional context, the distinctive characteristics of educators, and the cognitive processes of educators play a crucial role in orchestrating classroom-level reforms. Within this conceptual framework, Gess-Newsome et al. (2003) examined the articulation and implementation of an inquiry-based, integrative science course taught by three college science faculty. This examination was bolstered by the practical theories and conceptual evolution of the teachers, providing a

comprehensive comprehension of the course's operational dynamics. Furthermore, the profound insights provided by Bowles et al. (1977), Badersten et al. (1984), Fullan (1993), Snyder (1994), Robinson-Zaartu (1996), Fullan (2003), and Hargreaves et al. (2007) serve as monumental references and significantly contribute to the overall discourse on educational reforms, transformations, and implementations. Together, these works enrich the multifaceted dialogue on the evolution of educational practices and policies and their long-term effect on the learning environment.

In another context, in 2020 teacher protests in Sri Lanka, that can be one of the concrete examples of Fullan's theory. These demonstrations were not merely expressions of discontent, but manifestations of the disparities in the urban and rural educational infrastructure of Sri Lanka. By advocating for improved resources and training, these teachers drew attention to the imbalances and deficiencies they faced, thereby exposing fault lines in the nation's educational system.

The observation by Perera that such movements cause teachers to "redefine their professional identities amidst societal and systemic upheaval" (Perera, 2008) demonstrates the transformative potential of disruptive events. This redefinition encompasses the scope of their daily responsibilities, their understanding of their duties in society, and their relationship to the larger educational structure. If teachers on the front lines of education perceive the need for systemic changes and advocate for them, it can serve as a powerful call for nationwide self-examination.

Although the demonstrations represent palpable frustrations of educators, they also reflect larger social issues. As mentioned in the Asian Studies Review, educational challenges in Sri Lanka span from curriculum development to infrastructure inadequacies, particularly in the rural sectors (Perera 2008). The demonstrations are a symptomatic response to these difficulties. The narratives of disruptive forces causing change are not limited to Sri Lanka when the greater South Asian region is considered. Nepal and India also provide compelling case studies that illustrate Fullan's claim regarding the value of such forces in provoking deeper introspection and action.

In Nepal, educational disparities are exemplified by the stark contrast between institutions in the city capital, Kathmandu, and those in remote villages of the Himalayas or Terai region. There have been teacher strikes and student demonstrations on issues ranging from political interference in education to the need for improved resources. (Sharma 2012). These disruptions serve as a reminder that despite the country's substantial post-conflict progress, the educational transformation process is still ongoing.

With its size and variety of educational landscapes, India also has its share of disparities. The disparities between government-run schools and privileged private institutions, rural versus urban educational facilities, and medium-of-instruction debates are just a few of India's complex educational challenges.

Historically, protests in India have ranged from introducing the National Education Policy to demanding higher teacher salaries (Kumar. 2015, pp. 12-15). These disruptions illuminate the complexities of the Indian educational landscape and provide opportunities for stakeholders to evaluate and modify practices.

Considering the teacher protests in Sri Lanka, educational challenges in Nepal, and various issues in India, it is evident that disruptive forces such as demonstrations, strikes, and civil dissent share a common underlying nature. These actions draw attention, promote reflection, and often lead to efforts to improve educational systems. Despite the distinct sociopolitical contexts of each country, Fullan's observation holds true across diverse locations.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

South Asia, with its multitude of cultural, historical, and sociopolitical complexities, provides an ideal setting for examining the complexities of teacher identity and the broader dimensions of educational reform, as previously explained. Teachers, who are fundamental to the educational ecosystem, play crucial roles in shaping the minds of students in addition to transmitting knowledge. Their identities, deeply rooted in tradition and evolving methods, are continuously shaped by shifting educational paradigms. Fullan's assertion regarding the transformative nature of teacher identity resonates strongly with the challenges and opportunities encountered by educators in nations such as India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. In addition, the effectiveness of disruptive forces, such as protests, as catalysts for self-reflection and systemic change cannot be discounted. Recent teacher protests in Sri Lanka, educational disparities in Nepal, and various challenges in India exemplify the significance of such forces in stimulating reform and encouraging deeper reflection among educational stakeholders. Although disruptive, these events underscore the inherent gaps and disparities and, more importantly, the collective goals of educators and students.

Comparing Fullan's observations to the South Asian context demonstrates the universal applicability of his theories. Although the specifics and nuances of each nation's educational system vary, the underlying principles are consistent. Change is inevitable, but the resilience, adaptability, and dedication of educators, stakeholders, and societies determine the trajectory of this change.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

This study highlights the significant impact of socio-political variables, such as teacher protests, on educational change in South Asia. The intricate identities of educators in countries such as Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar, deeply anchored in historical and cultural traditions, are undergoing continuous transformation due to the introduction of contemporary pedagogical techniques and reforms. These changes compel educators to reconcile esteemed conventional

responsibilities with modern requirements, promoting both personal and professional development. Teacher demonstrations in Sri Lanka illustrate how disruptive forces serve as catalysts for reflection and systemic transformation, consistent with Fullan's idea that challenges can drive profound transformations. Research indicates that by integrating their conventional responsibilities with modern educational demands, educators can serve as key agents of change. By doing so, they enhance the continuous adaptation and evolution of educational systems in the region, fostering resilience, creativity, and reflective practice in response to cultural expectations and contemporary demands.

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