

Assessing Professors' Prestige, Reasons behind Declining Dignity: A Special Review of Nepalese Context

Atindra Dahal¹ 
Kathmandu School of Law, Nepal

CORRESPONDENCE

Associate Professor

Dept. of Political Science

Email: atindra.dahal@ksl.edu.np

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Abstract: *Across the globe, a professor is not only an academically alluring position but also one of the most vital and valuable statuses that the government, as well as other professional societies of respective countries, pay with unparalleled dignity and prestige. However, the situation of professors in Nepal has gone haywire, setting a noticeably regressive and defaming decline compared to the other countries of the world. This paper tries to thoroughly assess the situation of decaying dignity of the professors in Nepal. Besides, it tries to unearth those substantial causes that have obstructed professors from upholding the expected dignity of position as earned by the professors in other countries. As an inference, this study has found that the dignity of professors in Nepal is at a constantly declining state and deplorable downward trajectory. An apparent erosion in academic integrity and honesty, zero research engagement, fewer professors and more political fellows, followed by excess politicisation in*

universities, has degraded the system. Thus, they should be completely barred from political engagement. Making quality research works compulsory and refraining universities from political intervention and experiment is a must. Finally, this paper argues that reviving authentic academic culture might assist in repairing the decay of professorial dignity.

Keywords: Professor, dignity, politics, research, knowledge.

1. Introduction

The world always experiences constant progress, aiming to ease human lives and ensure the highest sense of development and the largest sphere of comfort as far as possible. Every institution of the country shall be bountifully assisting the pace and path of the development with eclectic inputs. Rightly assumed as the chief defence, education often receives the first and foremost attention regarding such precious contribution, which is devised for an exceptional expedition in espousing the gear on the expectation of such progress and development. Professors, who are the top academic layer, the centre of dazzling attraction, and among many dignified professionals globally, do guilelessly unleash their expertise in this noble mission; and the world has adequately acknowledged it. But, respect and reputation seldom seem well sustained and maintained everywhere. Serious erosion and deadly depletion of professorial dignity in many countries often take space in intermittent academic discourses and public discussions. Like many other issues, professorial proficiency also needs some critical assessment and engaging studies. The necessity seems to be more urgent in Nepal.

2. Methodology

As an archival mini-research work, this study adopts a blended, descriptive, and analytical study method. Being an explanatory assessment in nature, the researcher has reviewed several pertinent research works and other forms of literature to second and support the key objectives of the paper. Altogether, about five dozen materials made up of three categories were consulted: books, journal articles, and other survey reports. These are outsourced primarily from three methods: keyword search, through reference list of the reviewed literature, and consultation with seniors and other colleagues. Such pieces of literature are mostly traced from search engines like academia.edu, Research Gate, and Google, as those are common search options that avail most of the desired materials to researchers. Such materials are reviewed considering relevancy and recentness; hence, most materials were taken from the last fifteen years except for some. The entire data that are

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mentioned either in the form of in-text citations or references for numerical or empirical information, while synthesising the arguments, are only secondary data in nature.

The result of the study is inferred with the help of cross-comparative analysis, intermittently reported news and reporting, and narration of self-observed field-based realities. Since expert opinion and views are cardinal considered to base and build the paper's argument, this study follows the Delphi method of research alongside the integration of insight and hindsight as well.

3. Discussion and Analysis

3.1 Professor: Potentials and Prestige [Literature Review]

Stressing on the gravity and prowess of professors, Bain (2004), in his book, *What the Best College Teachers Do*, gracefully remarks that professors are 'university-based top-ranked expert academicians' and devoted human resources to extend then enforce knowledge and virtues. Heesen (2107) respectfully calls them 'academic superstars' while Ma (2021), with deep regard, assesses professors as an apex authority of knowledge. Noticeably, the contributions from the learned professors of the nation appear in the first and at the front in all branches of human knowledge, Harper (2007) claims. Owing to the fact and in respect of that strength, in Nepal, professors are co-positioned to the distinction class bureaucrats (secretary) in order of the precedence or position protocol; and this is mentioned accordingly in the Protocol and Consular Handbook (2018) published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nepal. Such a distinctly distinguished and academically apex position automatically attracts an intense gravity as well as magnanimous meaning. Society pays an unending and ocean-depth acknowledgement to them. For the same, Carrell & West (2010) have delightfully analogised professors with an endless ocean in the course of extending academic excellence, knowledge, and studies cum research. Fully aligned with the notes of appreciation from previously cited scholars, Bronte (2021) and William (2021), too, in their most recent studies, make impressive sentences to eulogise the efficacy of professors— recalling those they met in their university lives. Someone can command the position of that prowess only after super-excelling in advanced knowledge, insightful intellect, intensive research, and significantly substantial experience in the teaching-learning activities in the university, as Figlio et al. (2015) remark.

Knowledge never and nowhere expires; it always remains equally valued and priceless despite time changes. Bearing the same characteristics, professors, the sound cum strong beam and proficiently perfect pillars of depth knowledge, progressive intellect and boundless values, too never retire. Hence, every society acknowledges it as a never retiring, non-tenure-track lifetime permanent recognition. Thus, unlike other professionals, professors need not mention the former even after retirement. It is a life-long ornament that people enjoy getting adorned with even after service. Assimilating the fact, Allen (2005) and Allen et al. (2004) also express that it is not needed to write past or retired even on addressing the professor who has passed service time. However, recently, the term 'phased retirement' has been brought into practice in some countries. Nonetheless, Baccalaureate institutions have recently practised other way categorisations of professors: non-tenure-track and part-time. However, Anderson (2002) has hugely disagreed with this practice. Besosa (2007) notices the increase of part-time faculty to 58 per cent by 2002. However, Bland and Risbey (2006) also treat them as critical assets with profound vitality; and Yakoboski (2007) agrees with the ideas and then urges utmost respect and utter appreciation for all the professors owing to their noble contribution and distinct recognition.

Consequentially, the weight of the professors is internationally marked and of good repute. Many top position-bearing officials and high-class experts or consultants in the foreign embassies/agencies are seen as being commissioned by renowned professors. Gross and Simmons (2014) present a relatively higher trend of appointing renowned professors in such responsibilities, especially in developing countries.

Most professors are visibly illuminated with a wonderful blend of knowledge, intuition, excellence, and intellect, then persist in shining as organic and original sources of the same for the society and country. Any overseas professor having visited Nepal receives much respect. Respective embassy officials duly engage in facilitating and fostering the same. Any professor's note on any issue drags immense value and becomes a convincingly eventual inference to others. They are, thus, referenced

as the final front of intellectual, analytical, pragmatic, and logical discourse and mindset. *The Professors' House* by Cather (1925) regards professors as the most prestigious and highly venerable persons in society and cites similar justification for the inference. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) feel that 'exploration on the application of services' is a prime quality that professors' quarters pour into society, and Neena (2015) considers them as a pool of people to promote an efficient innovation system. But the situation of Nepal can be noticed in reverse gear and wrong direction.

3.2 Assessment of Nepal's Situation

Nepal has approximately two thousand professors; however, there is no exact study or research made on it. Nonetheless, Shrestha (2010) charts a dismal picture of the extremely disproportionate status of gender disparity among professors. He presents data that there is only 10 per cent of female assistant professors, and only 3 per cent of them opt and try on vying for promotion to professor. The ratio of female to male doctorate holder professors is 5 out of 100. A report titled 'Education in Figure' (2017) points out that there are 98 constituent campuses under various universities in Nepal, and those professors are stationed there. The height of utter dismay is that most are far insufficient and noticeably flop to demonstrate the commensurate dignity and esteem of the professor, who is, by principle, supposed to embody a highly distilled blending of purified knowledge and super extensive research. Dahal (2020) pinpoints that professors tend to decay deeply and grossly pollute the facets of dignity, fade the embellishment out, and ridicule the positional prestige. Goodall (2013) regards that hoisting the excellence of professors is a prime tool to upgrade the strength and standard of university, along with the all-around sustainability of the nation. Fairbairn (2013) lays stress on Khaniya (2007) and accuses the mostly nil and rarely planned reform schemes, which are occasionally sub-standardly implemented at universities, are responsible for having such a pathetic situation of academic excellence within the university. Thus, caring about the situation and assessing the need for some breakthroughs on this downward spiralling stigma, Manandhar (2011) urges redefining professorial esteem through rapid and robust reforms. At the same time, some non-PhD professors (professors who do not have PhD degrees) plead to supervise doctoral researchers without caring about ethics and honesty. This also unfolds an unsolicited non-academic approach and reveals the boundless vilification of academic integrity and honesty.

Except for narrow exception, most of the professors these days are unduly and extra-academically infatuated with obtaining various pro-political appointments. For the same objective, they often intensify exponentially politically-coloured engagement. Simkhada and Teijlingen (2010) rate this tendency and obsession as the prime challenge for any sort of reform scheme in higher education. Unleashing an untiring effort in enhancing academic excellence, technical knowledge, and purified research to galvanise and lionise the university's dignity gets nil attention. Dangol et al. (2013) find it taking root in schools and comment as "this was mainly due to the absence of monitoring, lack of effective use of available resources, absence of accountability mechanisms and over-politicisation of schools and the education system" (p. 36). Political parties have used and preferred to use schools for vested political gains. The same has been an endearing trend inside the university, leading to a broad daylight seduction over the true academic spirit of the university. Many universities are currently badly served and suffering from politics in Nepal. Exam, results and admission activities get hampered a lot and influenced by political activities. Contributing to glorifying the nation's future by instilling and injecting 'demanded scientific and pragmatic quality university education' is broadly and virtually deleted and forgotten. In his studies, Dharel (2012) finds low budget allocation and high political intervention as two arch reasons for such a sorry state besides the deviation of interest and lapse in ethics.

The position and prestige they hold urge them to be an epitome of a commendably positive trendsetter in academic revolution and behavioural modification on self and among associates, particularly in respective institutions and, generally, in overall society. But our professors are engulfed and intensively indulged in the continuous countdown of declining dignity beyond explanation. Publications are seldom or negligible as customary or perfunctory practice; academic updates are in deeply daunting deficits. Most professors seem seldom updated about new books, rarely spend hours in the library, and hardly walk around taking books with themselves. Promotions are based on seniority on age than competency in research and publication. Bhattarai (2014) points out these lacunas as a set of key challenges driving them towards a nasty nightmare situation and

dilapidated glory ahead. Those with positions do active politics; those without positions barely visit the university for attendance, then robustly rush to mushrooming private colleges to eke out a lavish life. They are derogatorily called 'helmet professors' since most of them literally only profess (root word for professor)- always repeat the same idea everywhere and every time without adding recent research findings or existing implications on society. By rule, professors are supposed to be available for six hours, one complete shift, at their station on all working days, but that is hardly noticed. Most of them take only a class a day and run away immediately. Some have remained absent for many years without any report. Tribhuvan university often publishes notices on the name of such professors asking them to come in contact. This happens so since such professors, who malfunction, do have a connection with this or that political party and leader. Therefore, Thomas (2013) and White (2012) consider education and politics not to be mixed and feel that they cannot be ended once interference takes place. But that is exactly what Nepal is experiencing and heading happily at doomsday reality or deeper ruin. Tuladhar (2012) also blames concerned regulating bodies and involved associates for having no exact plan for the nation's education development and repealing the overtly romanticised politicisation in academia. But, unlike our journey towards complete jeopardisation, many overseas nations tailor sufficiently unique and exemplary instances on professors' prestige and incredible instantaneously simulating smartness.

3.3 Excellent Exposure

Professors are rightly assumed and assimilated to be country's invaluable gems and jewellery. A report (2013) from the US Department of Education also rates them as a blueprint of society's most respectful and prestigious positions. Society begets brand-new policies of remarkably positive social drive and 'equal to quantum-leap for developmental forward' on appreciative bond and a blend of professors' intellect and intuition. Realising the gravity, Thuraisingham (2021) feels them worth being deeply honoured and respectfully acknowledged, ever and everywhere. Currently, science and technology professors at NASA are untiringly working to investigate the probability of human settlement on Mars, what is usually known as Space Launch System, Arnhof (2016) mentions in his article. However, a couple of scholars across the globe blame the move and initially love to study it as a sign of space colonisation. A pool of veteran professors in the European world is finely active in retrofitting and rectifying the regularly diminishing strength (followed by the world economic recession of 2008) of the entire European economy. And in the language of Stiglitz (2020), they are working to ensure monumental changes in 'economic and social policies. Recent research, titled 'Professing Passion' by Neumann (2006), conducted at Columbia University in 2006, has concluded that professors are the unrivalled or most competitive pillar of most pragmatic truth-value; therefore, such countries take accelerated speed in all-round development. Aligning with the tone and touch of the message, Wicklund and Pantaleo (2012) deem the same as the true role of professors. Another scholar, Clasquin-Johnson (2014), claims professors from Germany, where many Sanskrit universities are in function, are busybodies to explore new dimensions of knowledge. Thus, he calls them action heroes and actual working scholars. Even Petochi (2012) would also imagine such newer exploration and brand-new knowledge discovery from university professionals.

Kautilya was a proactive preacher of good administration and governance, Lamichhane (2021), and the most venerated classical Asian philosopher. He was a top-ranked professor of contemporary Takhsashila academy, the knowledge hub of that time. The state would solicit his recommendation on issues of good governance and ensuring the common good of all to derive eventual truth on most contemporary disputes and decisions to be developed (Addink, 2019). Those who propounded and propelled mile-reaching ideologies on socio-economic progress and changes were mainly from the pool of professors. In their separate studies, Dahal (2017), Gavriluta and Lotos (2018), Khanal (2018), Rahman (2016), Rai (2019) and Sangroula (2020) regard that good governance bears and manifests many features which are already succinctly elaborated in *Arthasatha* as well, which Kautilya has written. Obviously, it was his pronounced and professed contribution to society on the status of a notable professor. However, we have other shameful cum sordid realities at our nearest sight and scene. The existing realities among Nepali professors are largely different from the beauties of other countries discussed above.

3.4 Existing Realities

Contrary to such beautiful foundational truth, professors in Nepal often engage with scheduled protests, ultimatums, demonstrations, rallies, confrontations, politically based exhibitions, strikes, and others. Malik (2021) calls them 'protesters' instead of professors due to this very fact. To the utmost dismay of all, now, even permanency in service is being demanded through strike and demonstration. They demand the position through strikes rather than quality, competition, and creativity. As a news report, Onlinekhabar (2021) calls it fresh protests, it can be understood that such protests are in a series in Nepal. Aryal (2021) argues that teachers in TU are doing that because of feelings of insecurity, and it is so because of extreme political intervention, which is indeed unwelcome. This is an utmost shame over competence.

Where else is an open political association of professors in the world? Can it be admissible if a professor becomes a spokesperson of a political force, appeals for membership, engages in active political functions, bears a political organisation's position, and carries a flag? Is it necessary to enamel the professor's prestige with any political credo? Only 'no' can be the sure answer. But this happens in Nepal with much fanfare and hoopla. There are political associations of professors called Democratic, Progressive, Socialist, and others. They even organise the periodical congress like political parties. Various rallies are cast, and frequently, they join the political parties' meetings, send representatives to their congresses, invite party leaders to their meetings and actively engage in front political activities. As Siyum and Gebremedhin (2015, p.233) infer from their studies, mostly teachers and professors join political parties and look for their membership because of deeply engaging in active politics and leaving the prime academic duty at the side "thus, quality of education is endangered". Therefore, such associations are denied and discouraged globally. Nonetheless, the shame has precisely been the same fate that Nepal is bearing. Further to this conclusion, Mewcha and Ayele (2015) find such teachers not being much capable of adopting ICT-based education, which has been one of the strong and desirable trends in the world after the pandemic. Hence, they are twice detached from the ethics and integrity that the modern education system demands. It is grossly unethical to be party's cadre while assuming responsibilities in university because even the ToR bars it, and other existing laws disallow them to engage in active politics. Recently, a verdict from a high court in Nepal has invalidated the political engagement of professors/higher secondary teachers considering it unethical and a deviation from professionalism. Their active political engagement costs a lot and hugely harms the quality of education. Poor quality of higher education causes the formation of unskilled and dishonest people. All other sectors also either underserve or ill-serve society. Professors need to realise they are highly responsible for such tragedy because of their failure and insincerity in the profession.

3.5 To Realise

Today, few professors are seldom acknowledged in terms of contribution and excellence. Most are noted based on their active political affiliation. Universities during top recruitments are visibly divided among ruling parties coalitions and leaders. Sharing this as one of the latest but lethal trends, Gross and Simmons (2014) lay stress that it is one of the most motivating factors that influence professors to engage in party politics.

A professor contradictorily reaches the classroom as a political cadre and political party's plenum on the capacity of the professor, thus, spoils both meetings with incongruous performance. Unwrapping such mistimed effort and contribution, Sangroula (2007) worries much and analogises present universities with a cowshed. If the unrivalled towers of intellect and knowledge, that is professors, get politically split and deviated, their lore, skill, ethics, and ethos become ignominiously harmful rituals. As Carell and West (2011) deduce, leaving further chain effect, it emanates profoundly negatively correlated series of ominous outcomes on students' achievement. Therefore, most graduates grow unproductive, unemployed, exist unskilled and frustrated. Nepal is being synonymous enough to reflect this bizarre reality and unfold brazen mockery of quality education. The unemployment rate is high, and underemployment is stark. All discussions conclude that it is mostly because of the gross failure of universities and teachers there.

Few business-driven colleges, which are neither constituent nor certified status on quality assurance and accreditation, in Kathmandu valley, wrongly and unethically, address their associates with titles like professors/associate professors. Furthermore, some educational institutions running technical

courses like engineering and medical studies publicly promote their associates with professors or even deans, which are awarded from only the universities. Such activities defame and defile the professors' passion and position. Evans (2014) agrees that only universities can award those positions accordingly or the University Grant Commission's quality rating process, commonly known as Quality Assurance and Accreditation mechanism, may approve it. It can never be an arbitrary allocation like Rana regime rulers who would earmark positions of General or Colonel to their offspring. Those who worked academically hard to prove themselves as professors are vying for political attachment. Those institutions that do not have the authority to adorn anyone with professors are illicitly doing the same. Thus, the beauty of position is not only trapped but it is plundered and polluted as well. Based on such affairs and attempts, Fanghanel (2012) concludes that it happens when academicians fail to serve the nation in the expected manner and voice against the rogue.

Owing to excess political intervention, most professors are now tagged as Congress Professors, UML Professors, Maoist Professors, and Forum Professors than being nationally recognised as synonymous with academic excellence. Most commoners first recognise the professors based on political engagement and partisan association than other academic strengths. As a result, overseas professors are developing while those in Nepal are dauntingly decaying.

The nation's underdevelopment has evidently oozed out from professors' degraded and downgraded status. If education splits, no other thing unties further. 'If education decays, nothing progresses further. Higher education is the nation's spinal cord, and professors are key pillars'. This foundational reality can be straightly inferred from the majority of the above-cited scholars and their studies' findings. To rightly elucidate the gravity, Bolden et al. (2012) deem that if professors have intensive research strength and competency, their output will drive the nation at the path of progress and prosperity with their expert guidance. Evans (2014) firmly unholds the fact that the same is what the nation expects of professors.

If there is a crack, break, or the wrong composition on professors' quality and commitment, education and the entire nation suffer and succumb to failure. They produce incompetent and unethical human resources for all other sectors, and Nepal is perfectly experiencing the very ruin. Lack of intellectual leadership in higher education is causing the same across the globe, Macfarlane (2012) notes. Professors' act of degenerating them into question is also one prime share bearing cause of the nation's relegation to under-civilisation, unlawfulness, deviation, and underdevelopment. Despite the trend, Hoskins (2012) finds more male professors compared to females to have engaged in such ethical lapses. Nepal would not have plunged into this pitfall had there been hundreds of sound and true professors. Professors not being able to hold their prestige and uphold professional ethics have also largely caused the country to suffer from suffocation and underdevelopment. Professors failed, and they have made the country too likely to fail. Engaging in active politics is obviously against honesty and integrity because that violates the norms, mocks the rules, spoils the quality of education, and thus, directly harms the life of graduates. It even causes them to lose their esteem and respect in society. Besides, demonstrable academic efficiencies and continuous research engagement also go into deep deficit or remain dormant.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The prestige of the professors is seriously in question and positioned at crumbled crossroads. Their dignity is in constant and impervious decay and dilapidation. Degeneration of dignity and decay of delight is mostly sponsored because of them. There is utter defamation and utmost wreck on the beauty of the profession, while travesty on quality is observed everywhere. The level of reputation has headed towards a regressively downward trajectory.

There should be stringent regulation and decisive intervention to ensure higher academic integrity and honesty among professors. Obligating rigorous research engagement as a professional requirement and detaching universities from politicisation or its shade should be initial attempts to depart to rectify the onset of regressive reputation.

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