Dynamics of a Higher Education Institutional Partnership in a Finnish Nepalese Capacity Building Project

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ABSTRACT

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North South partnerships in higher education are widely implemented through joint capacity building projects. An authentic partnership needs beneficiary engagement in both planning and executing development strategies to achieve the desired outcomes. This thesis examines the dynamics of an institutional partnership between Finnish and Nepalese higher education institutions in a capacity building project with a focus on a training program organized in Finland. Utilizing data from a participant evaluation questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, the study seeks to explore how the institutional partnership contributes to ensuring the goal of reaching the needs of the science, maths and social sciences teachers of Nepalese higher education institution who desire to apply open and distant learning model into their local educational setting. The qualitative research embraces the voices of the project stakeholders from both institutions and from different standpoints including administrators, coordinators and teacher participants.

The road to an authentic partnership addressing the beneficiaries' needs requires essential practices of mutuality, respect, trust, and transparency with a necessity of adequate time and effort in planning phase, open dialogue between the two partners, and attempts to prevail over the divergence in working cultures. The findings from this study makes a significant contribution to the project itself through reflective viewpoints and constructive recommendations from the teacher participants and the project staff, and propose implications for further research on institutional partnership in a similar context.

Keywords: institutional partnership, development cooperation, Finland and Nepal, higher education, capacity building, beneficiaries' needs, beneficiary engagement

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ABBREVIATIONS

ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODL	Open and Distant Learning
SDG4	Sustainable Development Goal 4
SSRP	School Sector Reform Program
UIS	UNESCO Institutes for Statistics

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

Partnership is increasingly emphasized in civil society and development discourse. It has lately manifested itself as one of the preferred means of implementing capacity development projects in North South higher education cooperation. In the recent decades, financial and political support for higher education and research, from North (higher income countries) to South (low-income countries), has played a key role in development strategies (Hyden, 2016). The support centres on exchanging diverse knowledge societies between North and South universities and nurturing a professional environment for the goal of academic pursuits. The international development cooperation, with universities as actors, can be launched in different forms, namely scholarly networks regarding individual researchers, department or faculty cooperation, or institutional partnership (ibid.). However, this prevalent framework has stirred up a wide array of debates. On the one hand, it serves as a platform for fostering experiences and expertise sharing, mutual support, clarity of accountability, equal contribution of resources, and a sense of fair ownership (Hoppers, 2009). On the other hand, it has been criticized for its hidden purposes to uphold stronger legitimacy for Northern operations and its external influence on development interventions. Also, the relationship is inclined to fall into donor-recipient framework, rather than pursue its primary goal of securing an equitable and authentic relationship, especially when Northern organizations formulate and initiate it without Southern engagement (ibid.).

During the time as teacher at a private university in my home country, there was cooperation between one American organization and my university to promote Information Technology teaching for disabled students in Vietnam. The program was found beneficial for the disabled young learners. However, the partnership did not last long and its ending due to unconvincing reasons was acute disappointment for many teachers, coordinators, and students. Even though I did not get involved much in the program, it still caught my attention

towards the partnership between a Northern NGO and a Southern local institution. As a teacher who once worked in the field of education for adult learners and recently as a student of development and international cooperation, I have a strong motivation for doing research on North South institutional partnership, and particularly in a context of Finland and Nepal's development cooperation in higher education. This thesis examines the institutional partnership in a specific capacity building project, consisting of 8 chapters. The research context will be presented in this chapter. Chapter 2 brings up the noticeable issues reflected in Nepal's education context. Chapter 3 delves into both sides of the phenomenon of institutional partnership. Chapter 4 identifies the significance and the objectives of the research. Chapter 5 gives details of the implementation of the study with a focus on contrastive analysis and the reliability issues. The presentation of the results will be in Chapter 6, followed by an in-depth discussion of the key findings in Chapter 7. The final chapter will give brief and focal points to the research task and the research implications.

1.1   Finnish Nepalese Development Cooperation in Education

As promoted in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) by United Nations, "quality education for all" has recently been one of the central focuses for many bilateral and multilateral policy agendas. In fact, equality and quality in education is highlighted in the development policy of Finland, which has maintained constant support for this goal. This is proven by a steady increase from 59.79 percent in 2012 to 68.23 percent in 2016 of total aid to education allocated to the least developed countries (UIS Database, 2019). According to Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Finland and Nepal have been partners in development cooperation since 2001. Education has been an integral part of development cooperation between the two countries, since Finland's planned budget 2016-2019 for Nepal assigns 34 percent of the total fund to this sector (MFA, 2017). Finland has been raising the awareness of the basic rights to

education and enhancing the access of the most marginalised and vulnerable people to decision-making and basic service delivery (ibid.).

Meanwhile, Nepal has collaborated with Finland through their commitment to achieving these objectives, despite the fact Nepal is still struggling hard with its inner issues and the adverse impacts caused by geographic, political, cultural, ethnic, and caste-based dimensions. Though having a considerable decline in poverty, Nepal is ranked 149th among 189 countries in terms of Human Development Index (UNDP, 2018). Nepal has lately undergone a dramatic political transformation from monarchy to a federal republic. A remarkable milestone was marked in Nepal's history in 2017, when millions of Nepalese were eligible to vote in the first general election since the civil war ended (Nepal election, 2017). As an extremely diverse society, Nepal comprises 125 recognized ethnic and caste groups and over 100 spoken languages. Also, a regional disparity between rural areas and growing urbanization is highly visible (UNDP, 2014). MFA (2017) has asserted that poverty and systematic discrimination in Nepal's society are partly caused by geographical and ethnic factors. One of the main concerns is that girls' background from ethnic minorities or low castes can be major obstacles to their enrolment in schools or transition to higher level of education (UNDP, 2014). Additionally, as Nepal is vulnerable to severe disasters, a safe learning environment through preparedness to handle natural catastrophes needs to be secured (MFA, 2017).

Nepal among the Asian countries have constantly received financial backing for education sector from international donors for the past decades (Rappleye, 2011; Pherali, 2013; Witenstein & Palmer, 2013; Hyden, 2016). Nepal aims to attain the goal of providing better quality and more equitable education for all children, with more emphasis on girls and disadvantaged groups, which is also in line with Finland's development policy (MFA, 2017). This is embraced in a new and progressive Constitution adopted in 2015, which ensures fundamental rights including economic, social and cultural rights, equality and

non-discrimination, and provision for free and compulsory basic education for every Nepalese. Meanwhile, Finland's development strategy contributes to these objectives through its support for Nepal's national School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) which seeks to provide access to education, increase transition rates, raise gender parity in enrolment, decrease illiteracy, and enhance the number of educated teachers (MFA, 2017). In the phase of SSRP 2016-2022, Finland has provided technical assistance to the Ministry of Education with a concentration on mainstreaming soft skills into basic and secondary education and enhancing completion rates of basic and secondary students (ibid.). Finnish development strategy through SSRP program targets both reducing dropout rate of girls in disadvantaged districts and raising the number of female teachers in school intended for setting role models for girls to continue their education (MFA, 2017). The Finnish MFA has channelled funding to higher education cooperation, an indispensable part of Finland and Nepal's development cooperation, through the Finnish National Board of Education (MFA, 2017; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018).

1.2   Overview of the Capacity Building Project

The capacity building project, funded by Finnish MFA, is implemented in a collaboration between Finnish and Nepalese higher education institutions. It is a part of international development cooperation programme for higher education administrated by the Finnish National Agency for Education. The project conforms to three result areas of the agency, including increased access to higher education and research information, enhanced quality of higher education and research environment, and improved institutional capacity sustaining quality of teaching and research. Through Open and Distant Learning (ODL) model, the project aims to improve quality of education, which is aligned with SSRP promoted by Ministry of Education of Nepal. The project focuses on developing Nepalese institution's capacity for providing ODL programmes for maths,

science and social studies teachers across Nepal who need to upgrade their qualifications to meet the requirements of SSRP. The project implements one training program in Finland to Nepalese trainers, ODL coordinators and teachers of course development, and on-site trainings to the target groups on regional campuses in Nepal.

I am indeed thankful for the chance to participate in the project as a volunteer in the training program organized in Finland. This participation allows me to conduct a research suiting my interests and study major and to gain an insight into dynamics of institutional partnership in a Finnish and Nepalese capacity building project.

2   REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATIONAL ISSUES IN NEPAL

This chapter will dive into complex issues addressed in the recent decades in Nepal's educational context, concerning the impacts of cultural, social, economic, and political factors on equality in education, the hindrances in higher education, and the influence of external aid on education sector. A closer look at the issues gives an insight into the effects they have on the status quo brought up by the research participants in section 6.2.

2.1   Addressing Inequality in Education

Pherali (2013) debates that the cultural, ethnic, and caste-based dimensions of Nepali society are apparently legitimized by the modern educational system which enables high-caste males to dominate most areas of public life. He criticizes the role of the national education system in perpetuating inequalities by leaving certain social groups out of national development program. In addition, though SSRP has appealed to an immense amount of investment, it has hardly produced any major change in structurally lasting inequalities, as a consequence of dominance of those who are regarded as privileged social groups or power holders in the realm of society, economy, or politics. Koirala (2010) brings up that teachers, educators, or administrators pay little attention to multilingual classroom setting and have not penetrated border crossing to gain proper attitudes of valuing lingual diversity, despite the fact that Nepal holds diverse characteristics of spoken languages. To ensure equality in education, Lohani, Singh, and Lohani (2010, p. 372) underline "decentralization" as a primary strategy that aims to enhance access to schools, address learning needs through an inclusive approach, and increase quality of education, with the ultimate goal of reducing disparities among various groups in the society.

In relation to gender equality in education, Nepal has greatly bridged the gap in primary education. Mishra (2012) affirms that young women in urban areas have gained entry into all levels of education, which has been a great milestone in gender equity compared to previous generations, as indicated in the improvement of the gender parity index of gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education from 0.82 to 1.12, respectively from 2013 to 2017 (UIS Database, 2019). Nonetheless, continuation to higher education for girls still needs to be addressed due to barriers deriving from the negative impacts of cultural, economic, geographic and political factors (Witenstein and Palmer, 2013). With respect to role models for girls at schools, the decline in the proportion of female teachers in higher levels of education provokes concerns of gender equity in educational environment (Lohani et al., 2010). Witenstein and Palmer (2013) identify the hindering factors in female teacher recruitment in remote areas. In particular, male administrators assume that female teachers are generally incompetent and unwilling to move from family homes to other regions in need. In addition, there is an absence of supporting facilities for female teachers in remote environment, referring to sanitation and hygiene issues (ibid.).

2.2   Challenges in Higher Education Context

To provide a perception of higher education system in Nepal, Witenstein and Palmer (2013) state that public and private institutions are currently two main categories of Nepal's postsecondary education system, consisting of five umbrella universities with a total of 80 constituent campuses. Notably, 75 percent of them belong to the state-run university system, a publicly funded schooling system. As claimed by Kölbel (2013), higher education has become widely accessible to Nepali society since the state-run university in 1980s began to increase affiliations with a great number of private and community colleges under the growing pressure of admission and public demand. Furthermore, higher education has been of critical importance to the society due to political

needs for the past decades. Given that Nepal's government has lately heightened public expenditure on education, it is still found insufficient compared to many other countries (Witenstein and Palmer, 2013). The authors elaborate that its dependence on external aid inevitably leads to financial and managerial challenges in formation and implementation of educational policy in higher education.

As asserted in Kölbel (2013), uneven distribution of postsecondary institutions can be one of the major obstacles, which trigger high competition for entry into universities and financial burden imposed on families from remote areas. Another alarming dilemma in higher education institutions is that more students have chosen to study abroad over the recent years (Witenstein and Palmer, 2013), resulting in brain drain of qualified human resources. As in figures, the outbound mobility ratio has been considerably soaring from 6.74 percent in 2013 to 13.32 percent in 2017 (UIS Database, 2019). In respect of youth aspirations and career prospects, Kölbel (2013) mentions that most students are under the financial burden and the pressure of successful performance at university to gain opportunities in job market. Responding to gender's unequal participation in higher education, Witenstein and Palmer (2013) cite an example of the low proportion of female students at one public university, ranging from 20 to 27 percent of all study levels. Also, teaching personnel, at the same university, comprises only 18.3 percent of female staff, and women tend to have lower positions than men. Even more concerning, there is seemingly no representation of women from marginalized ethnic and caste groups (ibid.). The country's recent figures show that the number of female teachers at all levels and all types of school accounts for 36.88 percent of the total (Education in Figures, 2017), which illustrates the existence of gender gap in higher education.

2.3   Influence of Development Aid on Education Sector

Nepal has received foreign aid for over six decades, which accounts for

approximately 20 percent of the national budget (MFA, 2017). The external aid prioritizes the top sectors, namely education, health and population and energy (OECD, cited in MFA, 2017). For a long-term goal, Nepal seeks to reduce its reliance on aid and to boost domestic resource mobilisation and business links with partners (ibid.). In fact, the foreign aid has been found exerting certain influence on Nepal's education system. Rappleye (2011, p. 28) draws out that the emergence of civil society NGOs that soared to 100-fold from 1990s to 2000s has been implicated in "the wider convergence on globalization" due to their participation in the formation and implementation of educational policy through employment of official aid.

Novelli (2010) points out that most Northern organizations or institutions facilitating educational projects are powerful in terms of political economy, thereby they tend to employ their own educational system or agenda. Similarly, Pherali (2013) argues that instead of fostering the conception of mutual cooperation among all actors, for instance donors and local governments, aid-giving partners have taken more leading roles in implementing agendas. Also, there has been a growing tendency towards global educational changes and reforms in which the standards and concepts from the North extensively influence administration and management in education sector of the South (Novelli, 2010). Within the educational context of Nepal, Rappleye (2011) invokes a subtle fact that scholars have been concerned about how the external factors greatly influence endeavours of educational development. There has been a paradigm shift in educational policies in the country, which has converted Nepal once as a "unique, culturally legitimated Panchayat system" into "one committed to the global educational template of universal participation" (ibid., p. 29).

According to Hyden (2016), under the pressure of committing to global development goals, the aid recipients tend to switch from the focus of education quality to the pursuit of a quantity of built schools or enrolled students to reach tangible outcomes; and the costs for teachers' salaries might be allocated to modernizing learning environments. In a similar viewpoint, Pherali (2013)

identifies a false insight of Nepal's complete control over its educational agenda. The author argues that Ministry of Education has placed more emphasis on management of aid operation than development of a national policy structure. This has given rise to doubts about the effects of educational aid which in fact requires Nepal to comply with global educational targets. Paradoxically, the donors hold more chances to achieve the global development goals, whereas the recipients might lose their control in working towards the benefits of their own country (Hyden, 2016.). Thus, the needs of beneficiaries are likely to be ignored due to aid-givers' preference for focusing on issues officially presented in global development discourses, rather than embedding themselves in educational issues deeply rooted in unfair social and political system (Pherali, 2013).

3   PARTNERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

This chapter is intended for understanding how partnership has become one of the buzzwords in international development policy, pinpointing several controversial thoughts revolving around this framework, then drawing attention to North South institutional partnership, and approaching capacity building as a key means of developing an authentic partnership.

3.1   Emergence of Partnership in International Development Cooperation

There has been a major shift from implementation to partnership in international development policy since 1980s with the aim of strengthening democratic procedures and responding to the failure of state-led development approaches (Lewis, 1998). The term is born within the emergence of third sector along with the concept of civil society to set up a new form of relationship which authorizes local partners to conduct most development work and defines the North' funding and organizational role (ibid.). Fowler (1998, p. 140) defines partnership between Northern and Southern organizations as a means to promote "the ideological aspiration of international solidarity in the development cause". The scholar presents an assumption that the similar term has been utilized with different emphasis by different types of aid agencies. For instance, the employment of the term by the World Bank is not based on solidarity, but for creating connections with non-state actors to enhance its performance.

In education sector, this form of development cooperation between ministries of education from North and South has taken shape since 1990s for the sake of capacity building and institutional improvement in specific areas (Hoppers, 2009). The "inter-ministerial cooperation" entails "an institutional

relationship created between ministries across two or more countries with a similar sectoral mandate" (ibid., p. 47). Concerning an institutional collaboration, it is significant to look at the vision depicted by Poole (1995) (as cited in Holmarsdottir et al., 2013, p. 18)

> An association between two or more persons, or organizations who join together to achieve a common goal that neither one alone can accomplish [and] characterized by shared responsibility. Each member agrees to contribute resources to the partnership with the understanding that the possession or enjoyment of the benefits will be shared by all. Partners work hard to strengthen each other and to endure conflict and change, because they recognize that their shared goal extends beyond the reach of any one member.

In addition to these indispensable characteristics of a strong partnership, Fowler (1998) maintains that partnership should be established based on equality and mutuality in terms of working manner, identity, role, and position. Also, it is emphasized that authentic partnership requires "mutually enabling, interdependent interaction with shared intentions" (ibid., p. 144).

It is essential to encapsulate different frameworks assessing the authenticity of a North-South partnership. Lister (2000) employs four main aspects, including elements of relationship, tension, accountability, and dependence to explore the dynamics of North and South partnership in a realm of local NGOs and donors. Meanwhile, Nossum (2016) brings up the model of an effective partnership in education sector, which upholds a common sense of ownership, an awareness of partner's cultural and working environment, an existence of joint decisions after real negotiations, commitment and fair contribution to the partnership, and openness and clarity of expectations and interests. Also, the relationship is identified as equal and authentic when it is premised on respect, trust, transparency and reciprocity (ibid.). However, it is stressed that not every collaboration between organizations should be assumed to be partnership, for

partnership requires long-term development of linkages and feasible mechanism through efficient management (Lister, 2000).

3.2 Reflections and Criticism on Partnership

Banks, Hulme, and Edwards (2015) state that partnership between Northern organizations and local government offer opportunities for both sides to learn from each other with mutual interests to address actual development issues and obtain plausible solutions. This form of two-way learning contributes to establishing institutions that design, plan, and implement joint activities and programs. This approach also allows Southern organizations to raise their voice and contribute to constructing various forms of service delivery (ibid.). However, Lewis (1998) debates that this current trend could lead to either active partnership that involves negotiating, risk-taking, and learning through trial and error; or dependent partnership which appears to be at project or product-based relationship and solely serves the interests of the North. In a similar stance with Lewis, Ahmad (2006) points out that the high cost of implementation and operation and the adverse influence of funding agencies in the North have given rise to partnership; however, this form of collaboration tends to demonstrate donor and recipient relationship between Northern and Southern organizations rather than reach the goal of constructing authentic partnership. Elbers and Schulpen (2013) illustrate unbalanced power within North-South partnership which is unfolded through the rules governing the relationship. These rules tend to be established and institutionalized by Northern agencies, allowing them to execute power on their Southern partners. It is further implied that the rules are not likely to be fair unless Southern partners manage to manifest their autonomy and shared decision-making (ibid.).

Lister (2000) asserts that the concept has become mainstream because it contributes to increased sustainability and enhanced beneficiary's engagement in development strategies. Also, it is significantly useful for "tailoring

development projects to local needs and concerns, thus leveraging the development expertise and resources of outsiders well beyond Northern capabilities" (USAID, 1997, as cited in Lister, 2000, p. 228). On the contrary, the framework is criticized for the dilemma that local organizations are unlikely to be engaged in decision-making process or crucial participation, which possibly ends up in conflicts between overall control of funding organization and local educational settings (Cassity, 2010). Discussing the beneficiary involvement, Harris (2008) raises practitioners' perspectives expressing a desire for a more equitable and collaborative relationship with the North based on mutuality and trust. Also, they voice a genuine concern over inconsistency towards shared values and objectives, as indigenous contexts and the needs of development targets seem to be neglected (ibid.).

Cassity (2010) pinpoints the advantages of partnership in education sector, as it produces a stronger connection between national policy and implementation. However, it is argued that this pattern is mainly employed as a means to fulfil a legal ground that authorizes Northern organization while operating in the South (Lister, 2000; Hoppers, 2009). As demonstrated by Carbonnier and Kontinen (2015), one of the obstacles in North South institutional partnership in research is a wide gap in interests and capacities that might lead to unsatisfactory research design and implementation following Northern perceived quality. In certain cases, Southern partners do not grasp funders' expectations and guidelines, thus they are not adequately competent to participate in the planning phase and end up as being only implementers of Northern research projects (ibid.). Another challenge arising in an institutional partnership, as identified by Ishengoma (2016), relates to mismatched motives between the two partners. For instance, Northern institutions might steer their priorities over obtaining knowledge for their own purposes, while Southern counterparts are not ready to enter the collaboration with their limited capabilities. In certain cases, the South might prefer financial benefits to other significant goals, as Northern partners guarantee enormous grants including

salaries and infrastructure. This reality in fact indicates a false objective of partnership framework in the first place (ibid.). Therefore, Riitaoja, Posti-Ahokas, and Janhonen-Abruquah (in print) put forward that a close review of existing practices and funding mechanisms should be enabled, as the funding instruments in a context of North-South partnership often raise the issues of power and reciprocity.

3.3   Building North South Institutional Partnership in Education

In this part, various lessons of success and failure in North South institutional partnership from different case studies will be discussed. The Finnish National Agency for Education (2015) has stressed the importance of international institutional collaboration due to its strength in creating societal effectiveness through development of education, research, development projects and innovation actions.

Drawing on the experiences of an international partnership in higher education between Australia and South Africa which Desai (2013) has been involved in for over a decade, the scholar points out divergent perspectives of the two institutions. Southern institutions identify their own positions as active partners when making contributions to the project. Nevertheless, the study brings up that Australian report tends to highlight their strengths to export education in the global scale, inherently reflecting a one-sided relationship. In the two case studies of inter-ministerial cooperation and North South institutional development in education within Hoppers' study (2009), both have barely succeeded in inducing equitable partnership intended for benefiting both education systems. One of the reasons lies in the overemphasis on policy implementation in certain sectors, instead of the attention to reforms of educational management. Despite the North's efforts to grasp South partners'

needs, the preferences for what activities North partners are able to offer might entail failure to ensure an authentic partnership (ibid.).

Two contradictory case studies have been also discussed by Desai (2013). One of them refers to a Master program's module of teacher training that is mainly UK-based and fails to incorporate experience and knowledge of international students into the curriculum and implementation. On the contrary, Norwegian Programme for Development, Research and Education, though having been through many tensions in the beginning phase, is such a fruitful project. Learning takes place in the North with their willingness to negotiate with their Southern counterpart and the expertise of the Southern researchers are highly appreciated and employed in the collaboration (ibid.). Meanwhile, Holmarsdottir et al. (2013) draw attention to experience learnt from the institutional partnership involving two African universities and one Norwegian university. The institutional collaboration seeks to maintain shared responsibility and avoid centre-periphery mechanisms, whereby Northern institution plays the role of owner through managing data and Southern institution merely serve as workers with the main task of providing research contexts in the South. Openness to dialogue and discussion on tensions and conflicts is therefore necessary for achieving their aforementioned goals. Significantly, the location where activities of capacity building take place is also considered in their study, which implies possible hindrance to equal partnership if training is merely implemented in the South (ibid.).

In response to North South research collaboration in higher education, specifically from Southern perspective, Ishengoma (2016) justifies that as long as the relationship lies in donor-recipient framework which is still common in most operations, it will hinder attempts to produce positive impacts and reach desired effects. Consequently, Southern higher education institutions are subject to Northern funding, meanwhile Northern priorities turn more dominant on research agenda. Also, Southern institutions can contribute limited financial and material resources, thus have little power in controlling knowledge production

(ibid.). However, the Swedish model in North South institutional cooperation brings a good example of succeeding in an equal partnership, as Hyden (2016) implies. Swedish development policy seeks to provide funding for Southern research-based universities covering capacity building and improvement of research conditions and allow them to work with any partners in Sweden or in the South. Receiving support for certain core activities, Southern institutions can make their decisions to utilize external funds into their urgent needs and frame their own strategies without dependence on donors or universities in the North (ibid.). Likewise, Carbonnier and Kontinen (2015) suggest one of the feasible solutions for the gap in interests, stating that funding agencies can empower Southern research institutions by allowing them to choose their Northern partners before submitting research proposals. This leads to a development of a sustainable and shared intellectual affinity (ibid.).

3.4 Capacity Building as an Important Role in Authentic Partnership

Capacity building is widely employed for the purpose of building self-reliance and resilience among Southern partners, which fosters an authentic partnership (Fowler, 1998; Lewis, 1998; Carbonnier & Kontinen, 2015). According to Finnish National Agency for Education (2018, p. 6), capacity development is defined as "a continuous process of increasing the abilities of an organisation to perform its core functions, solve problems and achieve its objectives". In addition, according to Kontinen et al. (2015, p. 166), capacities can be related to "reflexity, flexibility, and networking skills", which are crucial for higher education on global scale in terms of institutional collaboration. Also, developing institutional capacities is closely linked with competences to reinforce research and education quality. The Finnish National Agency for Education (2015, p. 77) puts forward a set of principles capacity development is deeply rooted in, as follows:

broad-based participation and a locally driven agenda; building on local capacities; ongoing learning and adaptation; long-term investments; and integration of activities at various levels to address complex problems.

Nonetheless, Lewis (1998, p. 505) points out certain constraints in this framework. Firstly, it signifies only "one-way flow of skills and expertise from North to South", but in fact many weaknesses still prevail within mechanism of organizations in the North. Secondly, this approach implies that the North's role will come to an end once the South's capacity is transformed, leading to baffling situations for Northern organizations. And interestingly, South-South learning and gaining experience proves to be more effective as the result of their similar contexts (ibid.). Furthermore, Hoppers (2009) evokes that an integrated strategy cannot be produced in capacity building projects due to the difficulties in local planning and decision-making over administrative and pedagogical matters. Thus, it is underlined that a demand of a mutual development should decide on approaches and strategies to capacity-building (ibid.). Also, capacity enhancement should obviously result in self-reflection and self-improvement (Fowler, 1998).

According to Bastien, Mukoma, Ezekiel, and Helleve (2013), it is widely assumed that research collaboration will promote capacity building in Southern institutions, which means the South obviously gain knowledge from the North. In reality, capacity building is not merely fostered in the South. In fact, the training and learning experience is necessary for North-based researchers who desire to direct their research attention to the South, for they are required to gain profound insight of indigenous contexts and cultures (ibid.). Similarly, Kontinen et al. (2015) invoke capacity building as participation in the context of internationalization of academics, which highlights the exchange of expertise between North and South partners. In particular, while Northern experts can visit Southern institutions to share their expertise and get engaged in local discussions, Southern scholars should also need opportunities to update their

research knowledge by attending Northern conferences and seminars with the support from aid funding. Concerning the similar working model utilizing technical assistance and capacity development, Hoppers (2009) sets forth that Northern colleagues as technical advisors are supposed to share their own experience rather than presenting widespread international practices.

Kontinen et al. (2015) stress the importance of participation in global academic community as a focal point in institutional capacity building, implying that learning collaboration can be fostered by actual working together instead of giving lectures for each other. Thus, it is inferred that the best way to support higher education institutions is to encourage the staff to get engaged in global research and teaching community. In the study of capacity building higher education collaboration in early childhood education, Ho and Lee (2016) identify the essential factors contributing to the successful outcomes. These include trust and openness shedding light on effective dialogues of negotiation, a learning orientation reinforcing team learning, shared leadership fostering teachers' performance of multiple tasks, a transparent governance mechanism, and a straightforward assessment and evaluation plan (ibid., p. 501). In response to the challenges of the collaboration, the authors propose school-based professional learning community that is intended for empowering teachers as internal change makers, which is significant to develop capacity in educational setting.

4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The previous studies have reflected on both strengths and constraints of North South institutional partnership, and particularly raised the concerns over beneficiary engagement in the framework. However, not many studies have paid attention to embracing the voices of the target beneficiaries of capacity building projects implementing North South partnership. Also, there exists a research gap in the context of Finnish Nepalese development cooperation in higher education. Therefore, this research seeks to fill these gaps and make contributions to the field study. Specifically, this thesis aims to explore the dynamics of institutional partnership in a Finnish and Nepalese capacity building project in higher education and identify the contributing factors to an authentic partnership embracing the beneficiaries' voices. **The main research issue addressed in this thesis is to what extent the institutional partnership contributes to ensuring the goals of reaching the beneficiaries' needs.** The sub-questions serving the purposes of gaining a profound understanding of the research issue are as follows:

1. What are the dynamics of partnership between Finnish and Nepalese institutions in the capacity building project?
2. How is the implementation of the training program as an essential part of the capacity building project relevant to the needs of the beneficiaries?

5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

This section will cover the research design elaborating on how the research was undertaken and how the informants were selected, the rationale for qualitative approach along with the two main research methods of data collection including participant evaluation questionnaire and interview, the description of data analysis procedures, the ethical considerations, and the issues of reliability in gathering and processing data.

5.1 Research Design

As this research is conducted as a small-scale study into the phenomenon of partnership in a specific context, the qualitative approach serves the purposes of the research. The qualitative research seeks to explore meaning of a phenomenon in a natural setting by interpreting it through a multiplicity of perspectives (Denzin and Lincohn, 2011). Given the interpretative framework employed in qualitative research, Creswell (2013, p. 44) underlines the inclusion of "the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem and its contribution to the literature or a call for a change". Being in line with these characteristics, the research aims to raise the voices of the participants in the project including the project staff and the teacher participants of the training. Besides, qualitative approach allows the researcher to get actively immersed in the research setting and to create his or her assumptions, interpretations and constructions of the findings through the participants' lenses; since the researcher is considered as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Cooper and White, 2012). However, it is also significant to realize that qualitative research is mainly identified with understanding the interpretations of the phenomenon rather than attempting to define the truth or explain the event (ibid.). Thus, it gives a reminder that how

the research is processed should be more emphasized than what results it could generate, since the reality in qualitative research is constantly regarded not as a "fixed, objective, and constant construct but as a more fluid, ephemeral, and ever-changing thing" (ibid., p. 6).

I initially contacted the project manager from the coordinating institution to discuss my research plan and express the willingness to be a part of the project through a voluntary role. With the agreement of the project manager and the team, I was allowed to participate as a training assistant in a one-month program which offers training to Nepalese staff and teachers and takes place in Finland. Prior to the training, I had a letter of request (see Appendix 1) signed by the Head of my study program and sent to the Nepalese institution through the introduction of the project manager, for the purpose of presenting the goals of my research and gaining permit to collect information from Nepalese participants of the training program. When being permitted to approach the research subjects, I started to plan methods of data gathering which lead to the utilization of the two main sources of data from questionnaire and interview to discover the findings for the research issue (see Figure 1).
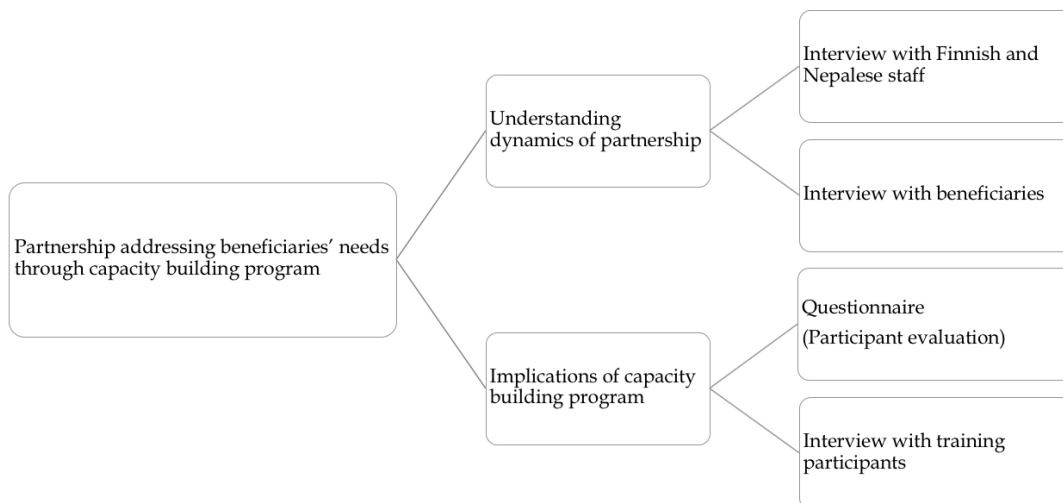
FIGURE 1. Illustration of data gathering for the research task

Utilizing the qualitative methods, the research aims to gain in-depth insight into the dynamics of institutional partnership and explore how the framework serves to address the needs of the beneficiaries through a capacity building program. Firstly, questionnaire was adopted to cover the training participants' viewpoints in addressing the second research question as to how the implementation of the training program is relevant to the needs of the beneficiaries. Another primary source of information was gathered through interviewing the staff from both Finnish and Nepalese institutions and the selected training participants, which focuses on understanding the dynamics of partnership embedded in the capacity building program. Regarding the schedule for data collection, the questionnaires were delivered and collected at the end of the training programme. Also, the interviews were conducted in the final week of the training program (for training participants and Nepalese staff) and after the training period (for Finnish staff), for the purpose that the research subjects could reflect on the issues emerged from the training. Critically, a detailed introduction about the researcher's role in the training program and the objectives of the research was clearly made at the very beginning of the training period to build trust and good relationship between the researcher and the training participants.

5.2   The Informants

For the first source of data, all 28 training participants from Nepal were officially requested to complete the participation evaluation through a form of questionnaire. In the end, there were a total of 27 questionnaires collected that fulfil the research requirements and yield the requested information in the responses. This collection results in a variety of feedback and opinions. The informants' profile also varies in terms of teaching locations (in one main campus and 7 regional campuses), teaching experience, subjects, and roles in the project (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Background information of the teacher participants

Gender	
Male	24
Female	3
Distribution of Campus (1 main campus and 7 regional campuses)	
Campus	The number of training participants
Main Campus	5
Campus A	3
Campus B	3
Campus C	3
Campus D	4
Campus E	4
Campus F	3
Campus G	2
Distribution of teaching subjects	
Subject	The number of training participants
ICT and Mathematics	7
Social Studies	11
Science Education/ Education	9
Years of teaching experience	
Years of teaching experience	The number of training participants
5 to 10	4
11 to 15	11
16 to 20	7
21 to 25	4
> 25	1

A total of 11 research subjects took part in the interviews including two project staff from Finnish institution, one project staff from Nepalese institution and eight representatives of the training participants. Though these selected training participants already completed the participant evaluation reflecting on

their experience of the training, the direct and semi-structured interviews with them served to obtain more in-depth information concerning the procedures of selecting the training participants and their views towards the partnership between the two institutions. The selection of the training participants in the interviews is based on a wide range of perspectives that was anticipated to emerge from different backgrounds and stances, namely working locations, positions at their institution, range of age, gender proportion, teaching fields, and also the extent of active engagement during the training according to the researcher's observation.

TABLE 2. Background information of the interview informants.

Participant	Gender	Role	Years of work experience
1	Female	Project staff	15 to 20
2	Female	Project staff	not mentioned
3	Female	Project staff	20 to 25
4	Male	Training participant	20 to 25
5	Male	Training participant	10 to 15
6	Male	Training participant	20 to 25
7	Male	Training participant	15 to 20
8	Male	Training participant	10 to 15
9	Male	Training participant	10 to 15
10	Male	Training participant	10 to 15
11	Female	Training participant	10 to 15

In accordance with Elo et al. (2014), the purposeful sampling is appropriate for this study, as the sample should include the informants who have the best knowledge of the research issues. The profile of the informants involved in the interviews is presented in Table 2, yet not all detailed information is mentioned here to avoid revealing the research subjects' identities.

5.3 Data Collection

5.3.1 Questionnaire Design

The decision to employ participant evaluation conducted in a questionnaire form was due to the fact that it is essential to collect direct feedbacks at the end of every training to assess the effectiveness of the implementation and importantly make further improvements in a long-term project. As the training is a vital part of the whole project fostering capacity building, the evaluation of the implementation of the training plays integral role in understanding to what extent the collaboration between the two institutions contributes to meeting the needs of the training participants. Another reason for using the questionnaire is its key feature guaranteeing anonymity that allows the participants to freely express their opinions and reduce insecurity of giving sincere responses (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010). Besides, participant evaluation is in English that is not the native language for all participants, thus a written form gives time and space for them to think carefully and produce well-defined responses. Also, the majority of the given questions are open-ended questions that serve to give respondents choices to note down answers in their own ways.

I also consulted with the supervisor and the project staff on the content and structure of the participant evaluation, as they have experience and knowledge of executing the training feedback. Regarding the structure of the participant evaluation, the first part includes the background information of the participants such as gender, teaching subject, years of teaching experience, and regional campus (see Appendix 3). Participants were not compelled to fill all in this first part, but it was their free willingness to provide information. Questions 1 to 3 are intended for comparing participants' expectations and their learning experience in the training. Question 4 requires the participants to take into account the multi-aspects of the training program, namely content, structure, organization and travel arrangement. Questions 5 and 6 offers the scale to enable respondents to

give evaluation on activities in the training and the overall training. However, question 6 also gives room for detailed comments concerning what factors lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the training, which turned out to be a right choice as it provides justifications concerning beneficiaries' awareness of the significance of their feedback. The last question is of great importance as it aims to cover respondents' personal viewpoints and contributions for the subsequent trainings in the project and other projects under the similar practice of partnership.

Furthermore, the training participants lived in the same dormitory during their training in Finland, and they were familiar with each other in their group. Therefore, the questionaire papers were distributed to the research subjects right on the last section of the training and collected on the same day in the training facility to reduce similarities of the answers and maximize individual opinions. The respondents were free to return their feedback by either paper or electronic form that suited them best. However, every research participant must have their own choice to provide their answers for the questionaires without any ties or pressure (Mills et al., 2010).

5.3.2   Interviews

To attain an insight into the dynamics of the partnership in the project and how the framework contributes to reaching the beneficiaries' needs, semi-structured interview is adopted for the reason that it seeks to partially follow some set themes, while providing the space for interviewer to develop more discussions and interviewees to open more responses within the interview (Willis, 2006). The questions were carefully prepared in advance and also discussed with the supervisor to bring about the most fruitful interviews (see Appendix 4). Well-built questions also serve to boost the researcher's confidence and be prepared for developing further in-depth questions on the case-by-case basis. It is emphasized that the type of interviewee decides what kind of interview the research should employ (ibid.). Thus, I was prepared to expand the questions

and delve into profound issues in case the interviewees would like to put emphasis on certain issues. The optimal setting, namely, quiet room for audio recording, comfortable atmosphere, and a suitable schedule for both researcher and participants needed to be prudently considered. Also, the audio recorder was useful for preventing leaving out any important information and allowing for eye contacts and interactive communications instead of concentrating too much on noting down the responses. It also helps increasing the quality of data through voice recording and avoiding spreading the information within the group and encourage the interviewees to express their actual opinions.

The project staff from both Finnish and Nepalese institutions were individually interviewed with a set of mainly open questions (see Appendix 4). Each individual interview lasted around 45 minutes in general, and the research participants were genuinely cooperative to provide insightful answers. As the voices of the project beneficiaries are of critical importance to addressing the research issue, interviews with 8 training participants were also carried out. The aim of the selection is to assure the variety of the training participants in terms of age, gender, location, subject, position so that a diversity of voices is embraced in the research.

5.4   Data Analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis is applied to the two main sources of collected data, for it characterizes the systematic and objective process of interpreting the data (Elo et al., 2014). Besides, it underscores a cohesive interpretation of speech or texts and their particular contexts, thus it enables the researcher to gain perceptions of social reality of the phenomenon (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). In sum, the collected data underwent the following procedures: organization and grouping, categorization and coding scheme, and finally theme producing and reporting the results.

Though there are two primary sources of data from questionnaire and interview, the whole data are divided into three types: participant feedback, interview with the training participants and interview with the project staff. This is intended for a well-organized procedure of data analysis. In the initial phase of organization, the first step was to transfer all individual feedback from paper and electronic means to one file following the strict anonymity. Meanwhile, I conducted summing up the responses of the participant evaluation on the given questions, pointing out similarities and differences of the responses within the same questions, and highlighting all reflective and critical points provided by the training participants while reading through their feedback. Then, I combined the responses of the different questions into several groups to establish preliminary categories (see Figure 2).

Responses of Questions 1,2,3	Expectations
Responses of Questions 4,5,6	Reflections
Responses of Questions 7	Recommendations
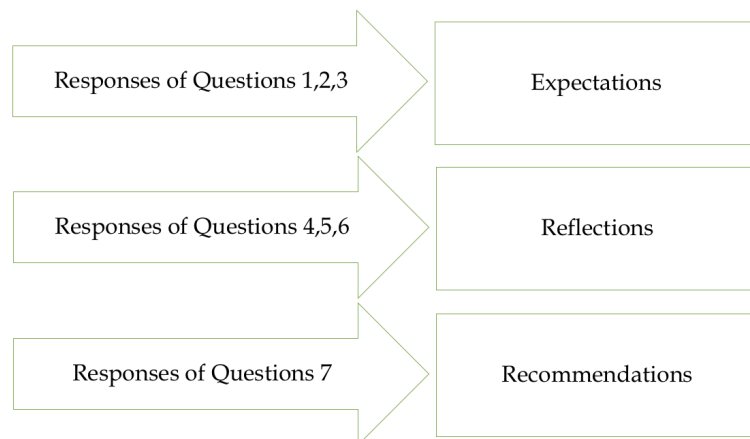
FIGURE 2. Illustration of analyzing questionnaire

As for the data from the interviews, I attempted to transcribe accurately all data from the recorded interviews with caution not to miss out any points or include wrongly misunderstood words. This source of data went through the similar procedure. They were initially organized according to the given questions so that a variety of opinions on the same topic can be thoroughly analyzed. Then they were further categorized into the groups of various topics reflecting connected issues, which allows for developing the insightful themes in finding

the results of data analysis. However, the collected data from interviews with the project administrators and beneficiaries was preliminarily arranged in two different sets of tables to avoid complications from an enormous source of data. Also, the logical arrangement assisted the next step of forming the categories, conducting coding and facilitating the contrastive analysis of the data.

Processing categorization and coding scheme was a key phase of the analysis. Close attention was paid to the research questions in this phase, as the research goals guided the construction of categories (Bengtsson, 2016). As for the initial coding, the groups in the first phase provided preliminary meanings from the extracted data. However, the research can only acquire a profound interpretation when it reaches latent meaning with a satisfactory categorization producing sufficient units of analysis. Therefore, different views and different sides of a matter were brought into one category to facilitate coding process. In this sense, categories did not follow groups of given questions anymore, but rather paved the way for producing meaningful units of analysis. The following example with the illustrations of Table 3 and 4 will explain the importance of an intact coding scheme through the support of a comprehensive categorization.

TABLE 3. An example of preliminary coding

Data extract	Coded for
Training participant: recommendation from committee… based on subjects and efficiency of sending these participants to run pedagogy ODL courses… 7 campuses for ODL program, campus chief is mainly responsible for selecting the participants, then forward to the committee …considering motivation, dedication, and also subject-based person…then the committee discussed and forward to Dean.	Talked about clear criteria of selection of the training participants that are based on specific needs

The Table 3 displays the preliminary understanding of selection of training participants based on the views from training participants and Nepalese staff. However, when including the Finnish staff's perspectives, it evokes such a different insight (see Table 4).

TABLE 4. An example of coding data

Data extract	Coded for
Finnish staff: Decisions of selection of participants mainly are made by Dean of Faculty. Nepal's side needs to take responsibility of that, and they also take responsibility of development of their own institution, it is not in our hands…We discussed the criteria with Nepalese coordinator, but I know that some people do not fulfil the criteria…	Talked about an example of decision-making in partnership and expressed inability to intervene in setting criteria of selection of the training participants

Therefore, these data extracts were categorized into one unit though they initially belonged to different groups of responses. The research underwent the contrastive analysis allowing for comparing between different sides' stances, as "comparison has the capacity to reveal the link between codes and nominate themes using researchers' intellectual judgment" (Vaismoradi et al., 2016, p. 105). Open-coding was mainly utilized as it enabled developing and modifying the codes throughout the process (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The coding process is significant, since it affects the trustworthiness in the reporting phase. This research placed "participant perspective code" in the centre, as it sought to pinpoint the participant's positive or negative comments, or lack of interest towards a specific experience (Vaismoradi et al., 2016, p. 103).

And finally, the core themes and sub-themes aiming to address the research issues required attention, as themes were built for the purpose of drawing out the focuses of the participant's experiences (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Similarly, Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) invoke that theme as coding unit maximizes expressions of underlying ideas rather than describing data extracts. Also, Braun and Clarke (2006) accentuate that coded data is completely different from units of analysis which are broader and considered as themes reinforcing the interpretative analysis proceeding, as illustrated in Table 5.

TABLE 5. An example of producing themes

Meaning unit	Condensed meaning unit	Code	Category	Theme
Training participants: recommendation from committee… based on subjects and efficiency of sending these participants to run pedagogy ODL courses… campus chief is responsible for selecting the participants, then forward to the committee, considering motivation, dedication, and also subject-based person…then the committee discussed and forward to Dean.	Recommendation from the committee, based on subject needs and candidates' capacity to run ODL program, procedure for selection from regional campus to the Faculty of the institution.	Clear criteria of selection of the training participants that are based on specific needs	Reflections on selection of training participants from different perspectives	Emerging questions on selection of the training participants
Finnish staff: Decisions of selection of participants mainly are made by Dean of Faculty. Nepal's side needs to take responsibility of that, and they also take responsibility of development of their own institution, it is not in our hands…We discussed the criteria with Nepalese coordinator, but I know that some people do not fulfil the criteria…	Decisions are mainly made by Dean of Faculty. Nepalese institution takes responsibility. There are discussions, but still some participants do not meet criteria.	An example of decision-making in partnership and inability to intervene in setting criteria of selection of the training participants		

The Table 5 shows a typical example of producing themes for interpreting the data thoroughly and reporting the findings analytically, following Bengtsson's instructions (2016).

5.5 Ethical Considerations

I took ethical matters into consideration prior to, during, and after the research period. The informed consent, anonymity, and assurance of privacy are thoroughly taken into account.

I consulted with the supervisor and the project manager on the consent form (see Appendix 2), as it is essential to provide all research subjects with a brief, straightforward, and informative letter. On the first day of the training, I had an opportunity to introduce the research briefly. Yet, when delivering the consent letters to the participants, I also thoroughly went through the necessary points to make sure that the research subjects clearly understand the significance of the research. There was one minor issue during this phase when not all participants wrote their names in their consent letter, thus I needed to request for all signatures again to assure the eligibility of all consent forms. Also, I was requested to scan and send all of the letters to the participants through email. The procedure of the informed consent is emphasized in the research methodology by many authors (e.g. Lewis-Beck et al., 2004).

The importance of maintaining the anonymity is thoughtfully considered, as it is guaranteed in the informed consent with the research participants (Mikkelsen, 2005). During the interviews, several participants were reluctant to give their opinions on certain questions, as their responses might affect their own benefits or their security in their working place. Hence, ensuring anonymity is crucial in the phase of reporting the findings from the interviews and the results of the questionaire. It has been noted by the researcher since the initial stage of storing the data and the transcription process. Thus, no individual name is

written in any data, and more importantly no specific detail of the project which possibly results in disclosing the research subjects is mentioned in this research.

Furthermore, the ethical question arises as to whether to leave out the contradictory viewpoints on certain issues during data analysis phase, such as the influence of the power issues on the selection of the training participants. It is important to ensure the inclusiveness and comprehensivenes in the data coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Yet, I am highly aware of the risk of revealing sensitive information that might cause harm to the research participants. Hence, a close attention was paid to the decision on the selection of the data demonstrated in the findings.

5.6   Reliability

The reliability and validity of the data have been taken into account in many aspects. Firstly, the different data sets from the questionaire and the interview have triangulative effects that assist supplementing information from both written and verbal communication, reduce bias, and contribute to enhancing the credibility of the collected data. Importantly, conducting the interviews with representatives from both Northern and Southern institutions and with different levels of project involvement including coordinators of the training program and beneficiaries serves to provide various perspectives on the research issue and strengthen the credibility of the research findings (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Being involved in the training and discussing with the project participants enabled my awareness of the reality that some participants migh have influence on others within their group. Hence, I was mindful of gatekeeper issues which might impinge on the accuracy of the collected data (Willis, 2006). Therefore, it was necessary to ensure that the interviewees were telling the truth without control from any gatekeepers through preparedness of critical questions. As a novice in the fieldwork, I am mindful of how not to be naive and ill-prepared by

reading the project's overview thoroughly and consulting with experienced specialists in the field to facilitate in-depth interviews.

Bernard (2011) highlights that the validity of the data is ensured by lower reactivity which is reinforced by building trust. I took part in the project as a training assistant due to the agreement with the project manager which helped gaining trust from the participants. Establishing trust requires enough time to be present and engaged on a daily basis (ibid.). Personally thinking, presence is not sufficient, but also an attitude of understanding and tolerance towards different cultural features and mind-sets. For instance, when conducting the interviews, some teacher participants might not go straight to the point of the question but tend to be indirect. Being aware of this tendency, I was prepared to steer the interviews into the right direction and maximize the efficiency of data collection. However, it is essential to be aware that establishing rapport could be risky in a sense that it could trigger manipulation of trust or overreliance on trust, either of which could not produce the validity and reliability of the findings (ibid.).

Once building up trust with the target groups, the researcher might have a potential to lean towards the informants' side instead of maintaining neutrality. A part of researcher's voice is obviously represented in the process of data analysis and reporting (Braun& Clarke, 2006), as it is the researcher's choice and decision to present the selected data in the research findings. Thus, researchers are recommended to keep neutral towards preliminary hypothesis and to deliver an objective view towards pursued issues (Bernard, 2011). Also, the direct quotes in line with themes were utilized to ensure the conformity of the data interpretation to the objectivity of the findings, by representing the participants' voices instead of the researcher's biases, motivations or perspectives (Elo et al., 2014). Furthermore, an adequate description of context, selection of informants, and participants' background was given to enable transferability of the findings into further research, as implied by Graneheim and Lundman (2004).

6   RESULTS

In this chapter, the key findings from the narratives of the project participants and the results of the participant evaluation will be presented in a story line from the path to the institutional partnership to how it leads to the implementation of the training in Finland, with an ultimate goal of gaining an insight into how the framework serves to address the beneficiaries' needs. A summary of themes produced from the results of data analysis is given in Table 6.

TABLE 6. A summary of the core themes

Main research problem	Research questions	Themes
To what extent does the institutional partnership contribute to ensuring the goals of reaching the beneficiaries' needs?	What are the dynamics of partnership between Finnish and Nepalese institutions in the capacity building project?	Narratives of the path to institutional partnership Understanding partnership from multiple perspectives Factors contributing to an authentic partnership Influential factors on partnership and challenges in the framework
	How is the implementation of the training program as an essential part of the capacity building project relevant to the needs of the beneficiaries?	Affirmation of fulfilment of expectations Contributions to implications of the training Contradictory stances on location of the training Emerging questions on selection of the training participants

6.1   Project Participants' Perceptions of Partnership

6.1.1   Narratives of the Path to Institutional Partnership

The background information of the project staff is taken into account, as it serves to strengthen the reliability of the collected data. One Finnish expert took part in

mostly the planning phase of the project and was involved in consulting on the implementation of the activities. She had long term experience in the field of development cooperation through project-based work in Finland and many other countries. The other Finnish staff worked with the project team in the whole project. She had been experienced in managing international relation at higher education institutions, running workshops in Nepal before, and also had worked on North-South-South exchange program which leads her to this project with more focus on teacher education. The respondent from Nepalese institution participated in previous development cooperation projects, and recently became one of the project administrators from Nepal's side.

The journey on how the partnership took shape was endowed with the accounts of the project staff from both institutions. The Finnish team went to Nepal to search for contacts by visiting many schools and looking for networks and eventually they were able to find the right ones. They were open-minded to the options and they figured out that this Nepalese higher education institution would be eligible for the grant from Finland by meeting the required regulations. The phase of baseline study took half a year to one year. The study belonged to the Finnish institution's assignment, as it was looking for contributing to Nepal's development and they wanted to be part of development pursuing Finnish MFA's strategies. According to the project staff, there were 6 to 7 altogether staff from the Finnish institution; and from Nepal's side, there were approximately 6 to 10 members with either a full-time position or involvement in the project. One of the Finnish staff claimed that there were around 20 altogether, but less than 10 people worked intensively. In a similar narrative, the Nepalese staff stated that the Finnish team visited Nepal to plan out the project, but also stressed that the Dean of Faculty of Education in the Nepalese institution had been looking for a project to cooperate with at that time. The Nepalese staff added that as there had been a slight change in Nepal's education system requiring many teachers to obtain Master's degree, their Faculty was responsible for upgrading around

13000 school teachers. In fact, it seemed that there was a gap in Nepalese education that should be addressed at that time.

According to one Finnish informant, decisions on collaboration were made based on the following reason:

> The university in Nepal covers more than 80% of graduates and wants to have impact in the whole country supporting rural regions; but it is immense with lots of campuses, also challenging because of geography.

In addition, the Finnish institution aspired to reach the areas which were not yet approached by other organizations, finding out that the Nepalese institution was actively searching for a teacher education partner. Therefore, the Finnish institution decided to invite three representatives from the Nepalese institution to discuss the possibility of collaboration before launching the project. Meanwhile, the Nepalese staff stated that they had different countries to offer and they opted for Finland for these particular reasons: Finland is well known for good quality education and especially teacher education and online teacher training is popular. In addition, the cooperation suited the Nepalese institution's needs, as online program was useful for teachers who were working at the same time and found it difficult to get leave from their schools. In fact, it was maintained that the proposal was reviewed by both partners and mutual decisions were made regarding the cooperation. Furthermore, the respondents from both institutions underlined that there was an official contract signed by the representatives who hold key positions in both institutions as well as by MFA of Finland. One of the Finnish staff also mentioned that the contract clearly stated partners, agreement, responsibilities, finance and payments referring to what Nepalese institution had to send Finnish institution before they got paid in accordance with funding instruments, and the implementation process with well-defined details.

In brief, the cooperation was initiated based on both institutions' needs and requirements. On the one hand, it is essential for a Northern institution to conduct a thorough baseline study, with a goal of having a good understanding

of the target country, reaching the right contacts and addressing the current gaps in the country's context, prior to making project proposals. On the other hand, the Southern institution should be able to make a choice on what institution is appropriate for the partnership, implying that the preference should be based on their needs rather than the amount of financial support, as manifested in the studies by Carbonnier and Kontinen (2015) and Hoppers (2009). In practice, it is vital to invest adequate time in communication and interaction. For instance, the Finnish institution organized visits to the target country and invited representatives from Nepal to talk directly with them in Finland. They learnt to know their partner, and their partner needed to know who they were as well. Also, both sides agreed that it was necessary to start early enough to establish the relationship via effective communications. Therefore, emphasis on investing time and money in the preparation phase is genuinely a stepping stone in a project. In this case, the Finnish team spent one and half year on finding needs as well as figuring out the target groups before making the application for the project. In addition, it is necessary for both institutions to get equally involved in discussions and then decision-making procedures before setting off the project with an official contract defining who are the partners, what are the responsibilities and the payment, and how the implementation is performed.

6.1.2   Understanding Partnership from Multiple Perspectives

The analysis of the data gives an insight into dynamics of the institutional partnership from a variety of perspectives, including the project administrators from both sides as well as the project's beneficiaries. The details regarding the key roles and responsibilities were clearly reflected in the narratives of both sides. The Finnish institution kept the role of committing to developing ODL program with a focus on pedagogy, enhancing competence in teacher trainer by offering trainings, and providing different platforms and applications usable in Nepal's context. Besides, the Finnish team oversaw the administration and coordinated the project. Meanwhile, Nepalese institution held these responsibilities:

developing ODL's content itself, conducting activities in their campuses, upgrading infrastructure for ODL program, organizing recruitment of students, and reporting regularly how the project budget was used. The Finnish coordinator elaborated, "from beginning, the idea has been that Finnish is facilitator, try to follow the process and offer expertise and Nepalese is capable to develop by themselves as implementer". In the meantime, the Nepalese staff invoked that they were more likely to be involved in "helping and providing support", particularly in human resources including staff and training participants, and planning and monitoring the program with the ultimate goal of "making the project complete".

Concerning capacity enhancing through self-improvement, the Finnish side stated that they attempted to include more Nepalese trainers, who were mentioned as colleagues by the Finnish team. While the Finnish institution offered expertise in ICT, pedagogical and institutional contents came from the local trainers. Also, one of the Finnish staff underlined that the Finnish institution was "not giving only, but also helping and bringing the conditions for the Nepalese trainers to stand up to train with their own knowledge, which is not appropriate in their culture". The Finnish respondent further clarified that due to certain barriers within Nepal's context, it was often challenging for the competent but not senior teachers to stand out as trainers in the trainings. Therefore, the project sought to offer a platform for the local experts to share their practical knowledge with their teacher colleagues. This point of view stresses the importance of sharing and updating expertise and experience from both Northern and Southern institutions through the fact that trainers can be from both institutions. Also, it prevents the common case of one-sided transfer of knowledge from Northern to Southern institution and creates the opportunities for the Northern institution to acquire first-hand knowledge out of a very specific context, as set forth in the studies by Hoppers (2009) and Desai (2013).

On the subject of decision-making, one of the project staff ascertained that every decision was mutually agreed by both sides, as they had a project board

with representatives from all partners. It was added that the executives of Faculty of Education in the Nepalese institution held accounts for making certain decisions; yet, under no circumstance did they make decisions on their own. The project staff also highlighted the significance of discussing and negotiating together. Examples of how the collaboration between the partners worked were given as follows:

> The main thing is written in the project plan together… I always sent a draft to Nepal's side in skype meetings so they can bring up opinions, face to face meetings, or invite them to here to do planning together… We don't do anything without discussing or negotiating. We have to be sure that everything is clear…

> It is necessary to follow a right proper process in communications and help them function well. Skype or messenger, mostly by emails, as so many things are going on at the same time, easily remember the details.

> We sit together, do collaboration, agree on together…activities mainly from Finland team, but always consult with Nepal's side, not any case we misunderstand decision… we always discuss…we often exchange emails, and have meetings between both sides.

The appropriate mechanisms of communication were emphasized in the Finnish staff's perspectives. It was further mentioned that the Finnish team also discussed and shared information with the bodies, referring to chiefs of regional campuses in Nepal. This practice enabled them to reach specific and accurate information from the right contacts, according to the Finnish staff. As elaborated by the Finnish side, in terms of monitoring and evaluation, there were three sources of evaluation, namely inside the Nepalese institution with an internal evaluation, then an external evaluation at the end of the project, and an audit for financial control. The narratives of the project staff from both institutions provide a useful source of information concerning the mechanism of decision-making, communicating and practicing the partnership.

However, it will be insufficient without raising the perspectives of the project beneficiaries towards the partnership, as follows:

> … because some teachers or people working in the sector want to get Master of Education program, but can't take the leave…ODL program is flexible and useful for those who are interested, want to upgrade the qualification but have no opportunities.

…aims to empower teaching field through working on Moodle platform…

…due to geography diversity, the project gives an opportunity for people to reach education from remote areas…

…to deliver knowledge and information and then certificate of people completing the program, people who are in remote areas, unable to attend regularly in the classes due to their busy work, even who are poor

…enhance capacity of the campuses launching ODL program, enhance capacity for teachers, develop teachers who is able to conduct ODL program…

These statements indicate that most of the training participants clearly understood the objectives of the project and the target groups it aimed to reach. Also, the participants were aware of their roles in the project, as one participant said, "our role is to give information and make it known for teachers in need". However, it was noticed that one participant seemed to lack information, as only talking briefly about the subjects covered in the project. Another one said that (s)he did not gain much access to the project's information until participating in the training; yet (s)he had been aware of the necessity of ODL program and the importance of enhancing teachers' capacity.

Concerning the matter of the cooperation between the Finnish and the Nepalese institutions, five of the interviewed training participants generally found it good in terms of training organization and arrangement in the project. One of them said that in the Kick-off seminar both Finnish and Nepalese experts were engaged, which implies perceptions of equal relationship. Another one asserted that (s)he received the emails related to the project from both sides. However, there emerged several problems in communication, as one of the teacher participants evoked the ineffiency of sharing information mechanism in Nepal, resulting in lack of communication. One teacher participant commented that (s)he had no idea about the issue, as their campus mainly worked with the main campus and the administrators might be "busy on selecting and taking approvals from the seniors rather than contacting participants". Two other participants did not show interests in this issue, as they tended to talk about other

matters, such as the lack of access to satisfactory technology in their campus creating difficulties in implementing the project; and their attempts to empower other teachers through their obtained knowledge from the training. In sum, it can be assumed that the teacher participants of the training were aware of the goals and the desired outcomes of the project that was implemented through the collaboration between the Finnish and Nepalese institutions. However, they were likely to pay more attention to their contributions to attaining the objectives of the project by their active participation in capacity building program and their implications of the training which will be discussed in the section 6.2.2, rather than the administration and coordination between the two institutions. The inclusion of multiple perspectives from both institutions and different levels of project stakeholders has drawn out the divergence of interests in the framework of partnership.

6.1.3   Factors Contributing to an Authentic Partnership

Regarding terms or phases describing the partnership, both sides opted for different use of words depending on the contexts. From the Finnish side, they referred to "development aid" when addressing development issues, and "partnership" following the funding principles. During the project they often employed "our partner university" and the specific names of the organizations involved in the project. From the Nepalese side, they mainly used "partner, cooperation, and partner agreement". The elements of relationship, analyzed in Lister's study (2000), prompt a closer look at the formality of interaction between the partners. The manner the two partners referred to each other has partly exposed a sign of their relationship, implying an equitable partnership instead of falling into donor-recipient framework criticised by many authors (e.g. Fowler, 1998; Lister, 2000; Ahmad,2006; Ishengoma, 2016).

Responding to the assessment of the reliability of their partner, both Finnish staff expressed their common thoughts of having trust in their partner. Over the past time, they learnt to know each other with same goals and joint work to do

and they also caught sight of the on-going development and the impacts taking place, due to both sides' commitments and mutual interests in the project. Additionally, Nepalese staff invoked planning early and following the plan as the focal point in establishing the reliability. Nonetheless, certain issues concerning trust also arose, according to one Finnish staff:

> sometimes in the project, we sent emails without getting answers… don't know what is going on and raise questions mark in mind

> some questions in mind about something happened behind us, if they have to pay for someone to attend this training…we can't be inside because the cooperation might not happen

These responses seemingly entail uncertainties and questions towards the mutual trust between both sides of the institutional partnership.

The road to constructing an authentic partnership requires building trust and respect, as implied by the studies of Harris (2008) and Holmarsdottir et al. (2013). The results of data analysis provide a typical example of how to establish trust between partners. On the one hand, the Finnish staff elaborated:

> We have had many planning phases, discussion in persons. We are not the ones to come and order, but come and hear their opinions, gain common understanding, and use our partner's knowledge to implement activities. We value what our partner has, shared interests and goals. It needs time to have discussions to create trusts.

The importance of know-how to be involved in effective and comprehensive dialogues whereby all partners are willing to listen to each other is also stressed in the research by Holmarsdottir et al. (2013). On the other hand, Nepal's side highlighted the significance of "transparency, clarity, commitment" and suggested that the project should always be based on the needs of the country due to executing baseline study which is necessary to identify the actual needs within the specific local setting.

As regards to the role of partnership in addressing the teacher participants' needs, the project staff' viewpoints demonstrate the positive impacts of the framework. The Finnish staff found partnership useful, as the working

relationship enabled them to hear from people from different campuses and obtain grass-roots level of information. Due to the institutional partnership, they were able to grasp needs, challenges, and essential information on developing ODL program. Furthermore, the Finnish respondent underscored that it was not enough to get information from only documents or from visiting the destinations. According to the Nepalese staff, her role in the project turned her a bridge of reaching information, as she was genuinely willing to deliver information to the Finnish team. Also, the Finnish institution can always contact individuals from the Nepalese institution for further information if necessary. Likewise, she also found the partnership framework supportive to embrace the beneficiaries' voices in many phases of the project, such as decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

In addition, another Finnish staff came to a conclusion that partnership was plausible, as the framework could reinforce efficient communications with their partner and particularly reach the beneficiaries' needs through various channels. She mentioned that the Finnish team discussed with certain leaders of the partner institution and many teachers regarding the specific needs under ODL programme. Besides, the team held discussions with Embassy of Finland in Nepal to get the overall picture of the context and School Sector Development Program, which promoted similar targets in different levels. Without a doubt, the useful sources of information led to the idea that the project provided trainings in different campuses in Nepal, instead of solely the main campus in the capital area, and also training in Finland; both of which were critical parts of the capacity building project.

The accounts of the project staff, all of whom had extensive experience in working in North-South partnership provide valuable lessons regarding how the partnership can be strengthened via practical ways. One Finnish staff brought up this important viewpoint as follows:

> …doing something together is very important, only words or communication is not enough…when they started to work on the project, the collaboration brings more practical information, important to identify and understand the needs.

In addition, it was recommended that building the trust between the partners requires the following practices:

> speaking with people, respecting them, listening to their ideas, being open minded and look far to the future; and being aware that we all make mistakes, so be mercy to yourself and your partner, and importantly trust in the future.

Nepalese staff also suggested that working in a partnership require "thinking from different sides; focusing more on competency, thinking more holistically both in quantity and quality". Indeed, the characteristics of an authentic and equal partnership, as many researchers (e.g. Fowler,1998; Holmarsdottir et al. 2013; Banks et al., 2015; Carbonnier and Kontinen, 2015; Ho and Lee, 2016) have manifested in a North-South cooperation, comprise shared decision-making, common goals and interests, mutual respect and shared responsibilities. Furthermore, working together and discussing openly have been found indispensable to ensure the equal partnership in the long run.

6.1.4   Influential Factors on Partnership and Challenges in the Framework

Among the visible factors influencing the cooperation, the replacement of the project personnel is one of the noticeable issues. The Nepalese staff claimed that the personnel change should not entail any problems, as the new person will follow the program and get training and consultation from her to be ready for the position. Likewise, the Finnish staff justified that it was not a big issue anymore because there were several people knowing the project well due to a long cooperation. It was added that the staff replacement had happened before, thus they always placed it in the risk analysis in advance to avoid an adverse impact, as mentioned below:

> …If the project is only in the hand of one or a few people, the project might lead to failure. In the project plan, we need to analyse the risk factors, and key people is one of the main risks.
>
> … Some important positions can influence the continuation of the project. Sometimes they get new committed people in the project, otherwise they might get some opposite, who don't support the project….

However, it was affirmed that the personnel replacement was likely to affect the cooperation. For instance, when there was a replacement of the senior or executive positions of the partner institution, the newly appointed needed to learn about international cooperation to make the partnership run smoothly. To certain extent, the enthusiasm and efficiency of the new ones might have an effect on the institutional partnership, as the Finnish staff brought up.

Alluding to the role of donor (MFA of Finland), the Finnish staff considered it crucial to follow the guidelines and the focus areas for development cooperation from MFA and its principles for development projects, as they were getting stronger, clearer and more regulated. The Finnish team needed to study all necessary documents thoroughly and reflected on how the project could bring about sustainable impacts. Yet, several challenges were also invoked as follows:

> In the beginning, it was challenging when they changed the questions from year to year, how they want to get information, how the report is structured…involves big work to do annual report… not only activities and progress but also the results and outcomes, and outputs of the project… all are indicated in written report... Application phase was challenging because the information from MFA was quite late… yet we could start application period late, and we don't follow academic year.

It seems that the main challenges emerged in the application and reporting phases when discussing the role of the donor in the project.

In terms of the limitations prompted by geographical features in Nepal and the distance between Finland and Nepal, both sides did not regard it as problematic, as these days communications make it possible without much difficulty. However, cultural differences in working manner might lead to major concerns, as in the following statement:

> …In the beginning of cooperation, we were not so aware how we communicate to make things go forward. In Finland, everything is straightforward… sometimes we can't get answers as we need, something we don't realize, happen time to time with Nepalese university… we are not inside the institute, so it is challenging to get the information. It takes lots of time to understand the cultural issue and act accordingly, we tend to use our way of working, which might be not correct, we might have different approaches or strategies. Hierarchy or working styles are different and more complicated… we have no means to get access to that kind of knowledge.

Nepalese staff justified, "Nepalese people always trying to be helpful"; but in practice "Finnish try to make everything clear and transparent". On the other hand, Finnish staff commented on the discrepancy in working cultures, especially in administration and planning. The bureaucracy in Nepal often caused obstacles for direct-minded Finnish to handle, as it resulted in unnecessary waste of time and effort in sending documents to too many offices. The Finnish staff recommended that Nepalese institution should consider tackling this issue to facilitate the implementation of the project more effectively.

The findings regarding the cultural divergences between the two institutions are worth considering, as they uncover other problems deriving from this barrier. The Finnish accounts gave several instances when the partnership did not go smoothly. Firstly, "Nepal's education system is fragile and there are so many agencies and different actors, so it is not easy to handle". The dilemma turned more complicated, as "so many different interests, needs, groups, hundreds of campuses" existed. Another impediment related to the reality that the Finnish institution was ODL provider; and if the participants were asked about their opinions, they would be inclined to say "good or yes" to every aspect as a result of their cultural influence. This might lead to an incomplete insight into the actual needs of the participants. Concerning the cultural effects on the participants' responses to the Finnish team, the collected data from the teacher participants might raise such a different view to look at the issue. Though many general comments saying "good or yes" were noted down in the participant evaluation, there were also many critical and deep thoughts for the purposes of

improving the current and future trainings and contributing to reaching the goals of the project.

Other obstacles emerging in the institutional partnership were also brought up by the project staff. The Nepalese staff underlined lack of access to technology that their institution could not afford to make investment. Also, she raised the concern about how the current infrastructure, especially the unstable internet connection, undermined the outcomes of the project; and Finnish policies had limitations on this matter. Thus, she hoped that Finland would be able to invest more budget to sustain the project; yet, she could not provide clear answers towards what area urgently needed investing. She further added that the issue had been discussed together before, yet not resulting in more financial support. However, the Nepalese staff concluded, "infrastructure development is necessary but not enough for greater success". Concerning lack of infrastructure, Finnish staff brought up that the Nepalese institution had invested in certain facilities, but did not seem to understand the importance of maintenance.

Responding to financial issues, one Finnish staff found it sometimes difficult to discuss, but most of the time it was quite clear based on the plan as project needed to stick to the plan of budgets. It was further suggested, "it is necessary to have written documents for justification on how the money will be used for cost, and they will decide based on that, as only request is not enough". In relation to financial management in a development cooperation project, Kontinen et al. (2015) draw attention to the clear procedures from the very beginning phase of the partnership including budget planning, consideration and approval by the project board including representatives of all partners, and reporting after every activity to monitor spending, which is attributed to efficient mechanism of collaborative financial management of a development cooperation project.

One of the mentioned challenges, from the Nepalese staff's perspective, can be high expectations from Finnish side which sometimes make it difficult to coordinate. Meanwhile, Finnish staff evoked the lack of information that might

cause harm to trust establishment between the two partners, as in the following statements:

> They have different types of support, other development projects funding or investing in the university. There should be clear strategies from development organizations that how different development actions contribute to the same ideas…it seems so that Faculty or members of the institution don't want to tell enough information what other development activities are going on, then we can't create signatory between different projects and actions.

> …Individual interests of some key people in the partner institution are difficult to deal with, people might have something in their mind… We don't get the whole picture, only piece of information. Institutional strategies are not clear, lack of institutional development.

This is found opposing to the essential qualities of an authentic partnership that has been brought up in the previous section pertaining to transparency and clarity.

For a smoother cooperation in the long-term project, the Finnish staff put forward that their partner institution should enhance cooperation inside themselves, develop organizational structures, improve strategies on human resources management and leadership, and pay attention to maintaining necessary facilities. However, as several Nepalese participants pointed out in the participant evaluation that they needed to enhance more skills in applying ICT platforms into administration area, it has raised a question as to whether the Finnish side should consider providing more trainings on human resources management and leadership skills, which undeniably address the needs of the beneficiaries and the gaps they realized in the project. Furthermore, the Finnish side recommended that the teacher participants should be more involved in discussions surrounding pedagogical ideas and enrich skills of guidance and counselling, instead of only being teacher oriented. As underlined in the interview, they had discussed and brought up these suggestions many times before, but it took time for their partner to improve these areas.

Even though there is a differentiation in opinions from both institutions regarding challenges in the partnership, it is significant to learn that both sides

have opened shortcomings and concerns with each other and straightforwardly brought up recommendations for their partners. Therefore, the open dialogue on accountability and possible tensions should be maintained in the framework, as it serves to not only implement the project efficiently towards the shared goals but also contributes to finding the solutions whenever challenges arise.

6.2 Participants' Critical Reflections on Implementation of the Training

6.2.1 Affirmation of Fulfilment of Expectations

The results of the participant evaluation indicate that 23 of 27 felt satisfied, and 4 of 27 felt highly satisfied with the training. Among the activities implemented in the training, question session after every presentation, group discussions, and practice designing lessons on Moodle were seen as the most important ones, with 25 of 27 participants choosing important or very important. This result appears to be logical, as it was clearly seen through my observation that participants enthusiastically raised questions even challenging ones to Finnish trainers, and got actively engaged in group discussion in all training sessions.

The summary of the comparison between expectations and learning experience from the training proves the accuracy of the participants' satisfaction (see Table 7).

TABLE 7. Comparison between participants' expectations and learning experience.

Expectation	Learning experience	Key learning
Exposure to customs, culture, Finland education system	Yes	Experiencing Finnish culture
Guidance and counselling (G&C)	Yes	G& C via online mode
Pedagogy-driven tools and applications	Yes	the same attention to ICT tools as pedagogy
ICT, Moodle, E-learning platform	Yes	Moodle applied in ODL
Knowledge and idea sharing in teaching	Yes	School and institution visits, discussions
Competence in subject teaching	Content and competence-based, subject-based assessment	Competence-based more than Content-based
Monitoring, evaluating, administrating on IT infrastructure	*Not mentioned*	
Tools handling and implementing ODL classes	Yes	Moodle applied in ODL
Design and manage courses on online platforms	Yes	Online learning tools and platforms
Knowledge transfer from one institution to another	Yes	Sharing information and discussions
Working and teaching culture	Yes	School and institution visits
Implications of social media in teaching and learning	Yes	Tools
Monitoring, evaluating, administrating in library	Yes	E-library
Learning management system	Yes	
	Controlling dropout rates at campus	Engaging students by different techniques
	Collaborative learning	Collaborative tools

In the Table 7, "yes" shows that skills or knowledge the participants expected to learn were addressed in the training. The table also indicates that the participants received more than they had expected, as they noted down extra skills or tools they attained due to the training program. Also, most of the meaningful things learnt from the training were related to their expectations. This specifies that almost all expectations were fulfilled in the training, except for monitoring, evaluating, and administrating on ICT infrastructure. Particularly, one participant noted down, "I have also expected to learn some skills to use Moodle platform from administrative perspective", as some participants worked in the field of administration in addition to being teachers.

However, when being interviewed, only two participants (of the eight interviewed) mentioned that they were asked about their expectations in a form of seminar evaluation in Kick-off program. Another one claimed that "some were selected to fill the form of evaluation in kick-off seminar". It was also mentioned that the board of the project from the Nepalese institution had discussed with the Finnish team about how to arrange and organize the training program. This implies that the project team put effort in understanding the expectations of the participants, but it did not reach all participants prior to the training.

In addition to addressing the expectations, the implications of the training should be taken into account. All interviewed participants assured that they could apply the knowledge and experience from the training to their own teaching context. However, they also stirred up the challenges, covering the gaps in infrastructure, teachnology, the effect of power issues and the adverse impacts of natural disasters (see Table 8).

TABLE 8. Hindering factors to the application of the training into the local context

Challenges	Participants' comments
Infrastructure and technology	…but because having less knowledge and skill in ICT, we have shortcomings, and it takes time to overcome weaknesses and need more practice… …yet have problems with internet access, we try to manage that first by asking for maintenance …still long-term learning, still challenging with infrastructure, not able to do now, but at least try, transform some of these things into teaching… We have learnt so many things during the training, but there are yet to be applied in our context; some social network sites are so modern that in our context it may take time to learn perfectly.
Power issue	Due to social system, decision in not in our hands, but we can try to use similar tools and try to make the best results.
Others factors	It is challenging because of the economy and technology…lack of available resources, even disasters, not enough access due to disasters causing interruption of electricity.

Nonetheless, these difficulties did not discourage the training participants' motivations and aspirations to apply the training knowledge and skills into their own educational setting, as demonstared in the following opinions:

> The key point is that we can start utilizing ODL program, not the same way like in Finland, students might not get it right away in classrooms, but may be somewhere else when accessible.

> …can't apply completely and involve all of the students yet, but aim to access to as many students as possible.

> Facilities are totally different, but we aim to learn how to maintain teacher-student relationship.

> I don't completely think impossible to apply… but one concern in my campus are mainly the beginners, we are not sure if Dean office allows to start from the beginning or not. If like that, we do not have the chance to implement. …Infrastructure and social contexts are not the only barriers, not a big impact. Yet infrastructure is needed to reach students, not just only teachers.

Indeed, their responses have proven their perceptions of the sustainable impacts of the training program in a long term, and the importance of pedagogical skills instead of technological support. The findings from the participant evaluation point out that the expectations were fulfilled and the participants found what they obtained from the training experience applicable to their own context. Nonetheless, many challenges were brought up, namely infrastructure, technology-related issues, teacher participants' capacity to implement the program, barriers within the local context and the influence of the power holders in their institution, which were likely to restrain the achievement of the project goals. After all, the objective of the training was to create visible impacts in the country the development project was targeted at.

6.2.2 Contributions to Implications of the Training

Though all participants were generally content with the training, it did not mean that they found every aspect satisfactory. In the questionnaires and interviews, they were willing to express their viewpoints and suggestions for improving the subsequent trainings. In the questions 4, 6, and 7 of the participant feedback, in addition to positive comments such as "good, perfect, useful, fruitful, satisfactory, rewarding", the training participants provided reflective feedback concerning different aspects of the training. Likewise, the interviewees, when being directly asked about comments and suggestions for the training, also put forward significant standpoints.

The feedback regarding the presentations held by the Finnish trainers was noted down. In particular, there should be brief introduction before every topic, clearer instructions to the participants during sessions, and more straightforward feedback after trainers' presentation. Also, language and speed of the trainers' presentations should be considered to enhance understanding. Furthermore, some feedback referred to organizing training sessions; for instance, delivery of handout, user manual or e-copies of each ICT tool should also be available, and more specific topics should be given in the training schedule instead of general

information. Though the trainers in the training were from the Finnish institution, the critical feedback pointed out that the participants were unafraid to give their straightforward opinions on the implementation of the training sessions.

The content of the training received the most attention from the participants, as many comments touched on this matter. One of the noticeable opinions was that numerous contents were covered in a short period of time, thus they encountered difficulties in managing to do all given assignments and some participants were not able to follow due to their poor skills in technology. Another suggestion was generating relevant contents which should be appropriate for participants' level and importantly more applicable and practical in terms of Nepal's context.

Concerning the working and learning methods during the training, the respondents provided detailed information and further recommendations for the subsequent trainings. These included arranging smaller groups, providing the reading article earlier before training sessions, allowing participants to get more engaged in practical tasks, providing various applications, giving more articles to read as knowledge empowers teachers, and increasing more project work with a clearer role given to each participant in a group. These comments from the participants' perspectives indeed raised significant suggestions for the capacity building project to improve further trainings. Also, the training participants reflected on certain shortcomings of the training due to lack of efficient monitoring, as an efficient mechanism of monitoring and supervising can generate more engagement in the activities of the training and thus result in the better outcomes of the implementation of the trainings. The critical feedback was given as follows:

> I experience that some of the participants cannot upload a single file in the Moodle because he ignores, as this training has no any credit in the professional career in the future… there should be the compulsion of presentation for everybody and providing a certificate of certain credit hours in the future to make all the participants will be equally participated in the programs. And this should be announced in the beginning.

> Training is alright, but it needs monitoring or supervising to see how the participants work well. Suggest that one focused person will make the report, supposing some don't focus on the training, and not necessarily to point out the name, but can be noted down, the training sessions need supervision.

These recommendations are highly useful for the training implementers to heighten the effectiveness of the training execution. Concerning the cases of the participants who were indifferent to the training activities, the question arises as to whether the cause solely lies in the absence of monitoring and supervising during training sessions. Responding to this issue, one Finnish staff justified that they could not apply the approach of tight monitoring into the training participants, as it was inconsistent with Finnish educational approach promoting independent learning style and freedom of choice. Hoppers (2009) and Ishengoma (2016) have drawn on the mismatch between the provision of training from Northern institutions and the actual needs from Southern ones. Hence, the issues evoked by the beneficiaries lead to wondering to what extent the actual needs have been addressed in a capacity building training, and by what means fair decisions on reaching the target beneficiaries can be made.

Utilizing participant evaluation, Riitaoja, Posti-Ahokas, and Janhonen-Abruquah (in print) point out that the funding instrument is likely to be a contributing factor to the participants' uncritical feedback due to their indebtedness for the financial support for the training participation or their concerns about future funding for their institution. Nevertheless, the results of the participant feedback and in-depth interviews have identified the dynamic standpoints of the training participants, implying that they were not passive beneficiaries of the project, but instead they desire to be heard when suggesting the project team "looking at the feedback of the participants to improve the training better". One of the participants proposed involving more people holding power in their institution when mentioning that "such kind of training should be continued for the tutors and other engaged men in power". It was further

justified that with the involvement of power holders, the implementation of the activities in Nepal could be more beneficial to the Nepal' educational context, and thus it can result in the accomplishment of the project's objectives.

6.2.3   Contradictory Stances on Location of the Training

At the time of data gathering, there was only one training arranged in Finland during the project. The extended question on the location of the training has drawn out divergent perspectives among the teacher participants. The following opinions demonstrate the participants' preferences for the organization of the training in Northern institution, with which most of the teacher participants agreed.

> This type of training is necessary, some Nepali experts are also used for language conversation helps improving professional skill development, practice in profession.

> The training in Nepal and Finland are almost the same, but here teachers attend more regularly…they should organize it as some courses and give credits to participants

> All of the campuses have to launch ODL by ourselves, so we need exposure to how ODL can be implemented, experience of the real situation, if it's in Nepal, we might get distractions, so here we are supposed to be more dedicated, we have got training from Finnish system whose education is popular in the world, which added values.

As opposed to the previous viewpoints, a critical reflection on this issue which provokes considerations among decision-makers was raised as follows:

> …training should be conducted online if possible. It is quite expensive to bring many participants for face to face training, it will be more economic to provide training through online mode for all this participants for further development.

The nonconformity on the subject among the project beneficiaries indicates that they are inclined to express their sincere opinions with the attempts to contribute to the project's development, rather than worry about their personal benefits. Addressing the issue, the Finnish side elaborated on the logical reasons for deciding on the organization of the training in Finland.

> Some Nepali can be the trainers in the regions in Nepal, capable of training others, get the training in their campuses in Nepal, they might be involved in other work at the same time. One of the ideas was that as they come here from different campuses, they don't have such opportunities to gather in one place without leaving other work. The ideas of exchanging and sharing the knowledge, so organizing space, time is important.

> The other thing is the developed structure and infrastructure, create the touch to the system in Finland, like how things are organized…library service, student service… help developing their visions. Also, they got some experience to bring back home by exposure to Finnish culture and working style…

This idea of implementing training in Northern site is in fact similarly implied in the studies by Kontinen et al. (2015) and Bastien et al. (2013), as it highlights the significance of sharing knowledge and expertise between North and South institutions by offering the opportunities for Southern representatives to visit or attend training programs in Northern institutions, which brings more exposure to how the North operates their educational program and advantageous environment to enhance capacity. However, a close examination of the cost effectiveness and the necessity of the training arrangement should not be ignored, as reflected by one of the participants.

6.2.4   Emerging Questions on Selection of the Training Participants

According to the teacher participants, the selection process of the training candidates were based on a set of criteria, involving the needs of running ODL program and the needs of regional campuses, for instance subject-based, particularly Science Education. Also, the chiefs of the regional campuses played an important part in recommending the candidates to the executives of the Nepalese institution. However, according to the interviews, six of the respondents affirmed that the decisions were primarily made by the senior executives of their institution.

One Nepalese respondent elaborated that Finnish experts were able to influence the appointment through suggesting the competent participants to the executives of Nepalese institution. It was also mentioned that the five people in

the project board within Nepalese institution contributed to the selection process, but final decision belonged to the leader of Faculty of Education in their institution. The details of the criteria were given as follows:

> …recommendation from committee… based on subjects and efficiency of sending these participants to run pedagogy ODL courses… 7 campuses for ODL program, campus chief is mainly responsible for selecting the participants, then forward to the committee …considering motivation, dedication, and also subject-based person…then the committee discussed and forward to Dean.

These sources of information indicates the detailed criteria in selection of participants aiming to pursue the objectives of the project and the needs of the regional campuses. Nonetheless, the findings show a sign of power-related influences when the participants claimed that the decisions mainly belonged to the executives in their institution. Simultaneously, when being requested on this subject, the Finnish staff thought that "decisions are mainly made on the level of Faculty, in some levels; we can have some suggestions", but in fact they primarily belonged to the executives of Faculty of Education in Nepalese institution. On the accounts of the Nepalese staff, decisions were subject-based concerning three main subjects (maths, science education, and social studies). Notably, there was an acute shortage of science education teachers in rural areas. Also, there was a demand for reinforcing pedagogical skills for teachers' profession.

However, the Finnish staff stirred up this very intersting viewpoint, which are simultaneously reflected in Rappleye (2011), Pherali (2013) and Witenstein and Palmer (2013) concerning politicial influence on education sector in Nepal's society.

> Decisions of selection of participants mainly are made by Dean of Faculty of Education. Nepal's side needs to take responsibility of that, and they also take responsibility of development of their institution, it is not in our hands… We discussed the criteria with Nepalese coordinator, but I know that some people do not fulfil the criteria.

> I am aware that politics influence their institution, and all selections which might be affected by not only development goals but also political decisions… for example, Deans or high officers' nomination are based on their political base… The realities of how politics somehow influence higher education. We don't have responsibility of the internal matters, because we don't have internal expertise. Political factor is just one of

the features there, even without political game, the decisions belong to higher education institutes, not any of external parts.

Even though the criteria as abovementioned were clearly set, the fact that power was held within certain hands leads to a provoking thought as to how the power issues influence the selection of the target groups that the training aims to benefit. Also, it raises a debate on whether there should be more efficient strategies for both partners to ensure that the project could only achieve its objectives when embracing the right targets.

On the subject of addressing the beneficiaries, one Finnish staff raised her grave concerns about the fairness of how the project aimed to bring benefits to the targeted beneficiaries, as follows:

> …when thinking about development project, benefits need to go to whom needs most. In this level where we work with university, it definitely shows that those who are most advanced or capable of working also need to participate this kind of project and they get the most of benefits. I am thinking of those in local schools who desire or new students who desire ODL, but still we work on central level not to reach these people yet…in the future to think about how this program will work out for them and what kind of benefits they could get. Even though we work with different campuses, it does not mean that all the benefits also go in reality to teachers who work in remote areas… The reality is that Nepalese institution cannot start ODL without starting with centred people or core people.

This arouses a further discussion concerning how the institutional partnership is relevant for reaching the beneficiaries who are in genuine need of capacity enhancement, and by what means this framework could maximize the embrace of the beneficiaries' voices in a North-South cooperation.

Noticeably, it was observed that there was a high gender disparity in the training participation, among which were merely 3 female ones of all 28 participants. Addressing the issue, most of the interviewed training participants confirmed that there still existed a teacher gender-gap in higher education, implying a clear majority of male teachers in all campuses of the university in Nepal, as a consequence of social impacts in the past when women lacked access to higher education. It was added that the disproportion of female to male

teachers in remote regions was even higher. According to two informants, due to "political and social factors, not many female teachers have got the chance yet, though they also want to learn something new". Two others also invoked the cultural factors as "to some extent, it concerns social security in some communities" which affects women's choice to leave family and go abroad for the training. One also claimed that though the selection of participants was based on expertise in subjects and teachers' experience, the high number of male senior leaders exerted influence on selection decisions. These reflections on the hindering factors to gender parity in higher education have been found consistent with the studies by Lohani et al. (2010) and Witenstein and Palmer (2013). However, this gap in gender among the training participants is in fact not aligned with MFA's development focus areas. Referring to gender inequality, the Finnish staff claimed that the proportion of the female participants compared to their male colleagues in the training in Finland was the same as the on-site trainings in Nepal. Yet, their difficulty to pursue MFA's development strategy in addressing gender equality in education sector was due to the following reality:

> …there are female teachers in Nepal, but not so many who could work in this project with ICT skill for many reasons… because they have minor roles at their campuses, or in some cases they can't attend this training in Finland… During the last decades, they had mainly male students at higher education, and currently professors are mainly male.

Responding to this issue, one Finnish staff clarified that the Finnish team was not able to put emphasis to that strategy area with the current situation; and importantly, participants needed to meet the demands of the program to bring about the best outcomes. This prompts a question as to how thoroughly the accomplishment of the strategy areas set by the donor is taken into account during the planning phase of the project.

7 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

7.1 Summary of Findings

Due to the participant evaluation through mostly open-ended questionnaire and the in-depth interviews with the project staff and beneficiaries, this research has acquired a profound insight into the dynamics of a North and South institutional partnership and practical implications of the findings for the trainings aimed at enhancing capacity. Also, it should be highlighted that the research has managed to cover multiple perspectives of the project participants, not only the project staff from both institutions but also the beneficiaries of the project, who are mostly teachers from the higher education institution in Nepal. From a wide array of perspectives from the Nepalese teacher participants, the research has succeeded in countering the common assumption that the project beneficiaries are likely to be afraid or indifferent to expressing their critical thoughts to the decision makers of the project. The contrastive analysis is intentionally employed for the purpose of incorporating a diversity of standpoints from different levels of involvement in the project into a certain unit of analysis, which indeed serves to understand multi-facets of an issue and draw out reliable conclusions.

In sum, the current study has supplemented the previous research on North South institutional partnership, but in a specific case of capacity building program with a training organized in the North. The study has discovered that the partnership could contribute to reaching the beneficiaries' needs when it is strong and authentic. The narratives of the project stakeholders have provided the essential factors of building a sturdy and equal institutional partnership which requires mutual interests, shared goals, joint decision-making and prominently adequate time and effort in planning phase to understand their partners and seek the plausible approach to work together. Moreover, it has been found out that the most of the training participants' expectations were fulfilled,

but they were also willing to provide constructive feedback and valuable recommendations to improve the subsequent trainings. In addition, the comparison in responses between the project staff and beneficiaries gives different angles of evaluating the institutional partnership. In particular, the project beneficiaries were more likely to concern about the implications of the training, which contributes to achieving the outcomes of the project. Meanwhile, the project staff considered different phases of planning, implementing, evaluating and reporting to assess the authenticity of the institutional partnership. Nonetheless, challenges such as the divergence in working cultures and the question of the complete trust in the partners have also emerged in the framework. Last but not least, the controversial issues on the selection of the training participants and the gender gap among the selected ones will be further discussed in the next section 7.2.

7.2   Institutional Partnership Contributing to Addressing Beneficiaries' Needs

As the study aims to explore how the partnership contributes to ensuring the goals of reaching the target group's needs, the discussion of the findings should be concentrated on two core areas of the research problem, covering how the needs have been addressed within the framework and how the dynamics of the partnership is attributed to serving that purpose.

Due to the results of the data analysis, most of the participants' expectations were affirmed to reach their fulfilment through the training organized in the Northern institution. However, according to the interviews with the selected informants, only a minority of them had been asked about what they would expect prior to the training. It appears that the project coordinators consulted with several representatives of the training participants via direct interaction, electronic or questionnaire form. Yet, a different approach should be taken into account to help the training organizers better grasp the participants' expectations

insightfully, as the project seeks to run development intervention in the South. Another noticeable matter is the lack of infrastructure and technology that Nepal's side brought up. As the project aims to implement ODL program, the reality leads to wonder how the gaps in Southern institution should be amply addressed. Desai (2013) has drawn on a view that the Southern institutions should not regard themselves as only beneficiaries but instead as active partners who are able to make their own contributions to the project. Also, Harris (2008) underscores a dilemma in a North-South partnership where little attention is paid to the local situations and needs. In a similar view, Cassidy (2010) puts emphasis on the insights of the local settings that is crucial for developing quality of education; yet the unbalanced power in educational decisions in the relationship prompts a negligence to the contextual reality. This is also mirrored as a limitation in an equal partnership whereby mutual relationship should be beneficial to both institutions, and the Southern partner can thus ascertain their ownership, self-analysis, and freedom to steer the collaboration in line with their national contexts and needs (Hoppers, 2009). Hence, the first-hand knowledge of the teacher participants ought to be highly valued, as they are the core hands to implement all programs of the project and apply what they learn from the training into their own educational setting. It also indicates that the key way to achieve the project goals is due to how the beneficiaries' expectations and needs are addressed in the North South partnership. It could be either superficially included as one of the protocol of the current development cooperation trends, or profoundly addressed to acquire the actual needs and make the focal point of them in the objectives of the project.

Yet, the question arises as to how to ensure that the voices of the beneficiaries can be embraced throughout all phases of a project, as regularly it is limited to the period of conducting baseline studies. The results have identified divergent perspectives on the inclusion of the beneficiaries' viewpoints on the implementation of the training program. One the one hand, the Finnish staff supposed that the beneficiaries might not be willing to express their genuine

opinions because of their cultural barriers with the Finnish trainers or staff. One the other hand, the analysis of the participant feedback has provided a comprehensive gathering of information from the beneficiaries who wished to be heard and to improve the training in a sense that it serves the beneficiaries' needs and Nepal's higher education setting. Though the implementation of the training was recognized to be applicable to the Nepalese context by most of the training participants, they were unafraid to point out the weaknesses and hindrances. These uncover the gaps in certain skills among the participants that could hinder the progress of the training on a whole; the suggestions for improving the training concerning trainers' efficiency and knowledge sharing; the challenges in their local contexts concerning the technological issues; and the influence of the power holders within their own institution. These critical thoughts underline the significance of the beneficiary engagement in a development cooperation project, which not only contributes to the achievement of the project goals, but also prepares for risk management with the awareness of the hindering factors in the target country.

Following the guidelines towards essential elements of an authentic partnership in higher education suggested by Nossum (2016), the results of the data analysis have reflected the dynamics of the institutional partnership as in Table 9, including both examples of good practices and constraints emerged in the relationship.

TABLE 9. Reflections on the dynamics of the institutional partnership

Elements of an authentic partnership	Indications of good practices	Constraints emerging
Mutuality	shared interests and goals, fair decision-making, based on partners' needs, joint performance through working together	partner's high demand, lack of infrastructure to sustain the project
Trust	authentic and open discussions, effective interactions and communications through different channels to understand the context, realistic negotiations on problems and tensions, straightforward recommendations for partners	lack of information resulting in doubts, power-related issues, limited mechanisms to ensure common decisions on selection of training participants
Respect	attempt to understand partners, listening to each other, exchange of knowledge and expertise, thinking from different sides	differences in working culture
Transparency and Clarity	clear budget plan, agreed procedures of implementation, agreed key roles and responsibility, proposals and requests with justifications	demand without adequate justification, inadequate strategies of monitoring in training

The narratives of the project participants from both Northern and Southern institutions have proven that both partners have put effort in yielding an equal partnership which requires a long time to obtain. Emphatically, this research on institutional partnership has not only found out the similar factors of an authentic partnership as presented in the previous studies, but it also aims to promote the good practices contributing to the success of an institutional partnership. One of the discernible points is that the partnership should be based on both partners' needs and meet each other's requirements. Both partners have highlighted the necessity of putting sufficient time and effort in the planning phase, which involves that Northern team visits the South to seek understanding of the beneficiaries' needs and local contexts and also that the Southern partner visits

the Northern institution to get engaged in planning phase and making joint decisions. As Carbonier and Kontinen (2015) evoke, Southern partners in many cases of collaboration could not get involved in planning phase due to their lack of capabilities in understanding the guidelines and principals of the North. However, Hoppers (2009, p.60) argues that the lack of capability might not be the underlying problem, but instead "the inadequate and sometimes contradictory frames of engagement" between Northern and Southern institutions. Therefore, the dynamics of the institutional partnership demonstrated in this study has inferred that the Southern institution needs to have a fair chance to be involved in the very beginning phase of the project. Furthermore, Nossum (2016) and Fowler (1998) have put emphasis on the motives of collaboration that should be demand-driven, partner-based, or impact-oriented. The path to the Finnish Nepalese institutional partnership has illustrated a mutuality of interests and goals as one of the core factors leading to a sturdy partnership. Within this framework, the Northern partner can offer what their counterpart needs rather than what they own; and the Southern one can make a decision on the collaboration based on their own demand, instead of prioritizing the financial support. Another noteworthy practice concerns a fair proportion of representatives from both partners in decision-making that give rise to the Southern partner's active standpoint. This in fact should be paid enough attention throughout the project, as the project staff pointed out that not a single decision should be made without mutual agreement.

In terms of enhancing the sustainability in an institutional partnership, Bastien et al. (2013) highlight the significance of bi-directional exchange of knowledge and skills instead of one-way transfer, with a strategy that junior researchers from both North and South could be given opportunities to form working relations that may lead to the continuity of the collaborative efforts in the long run. The results of this study have relatedly caught on the important role of sharing and exchanging knowledge and experience from a professional perspective in the institutional partnership. However, the process of exchange

does not end at establishing working relations, but develops further once the beneficiaries get empowered to become internal change facilitators within their own local setting (see Ho and Lee, 2016). The Finnish Nepalese institutional partnership is thus highly regarded as a sustainable framework, as it creates opportunities for Nepalese teachers to hold key positions as trainers together with Finnish trainers. In brief, this possibility contributes to the goal of enhancing capacity of the Southern partner, as well as serves to sustain the impacts of the development project.

The findings of this study have indicated several constraints and challenges in the institutional partnership, as demonstrated in Table 9. One of the main concerns is the power issue pertaining to the influence of the key personnel in the project and the two institutions. Lister (2000) puts forward that partnership could be sustainable when there are various channels through which the organizations get connected. Yet, the author also alerts that "if all relationships are simply managed by organizational leaders, the partnership is vulnerable to changes in individuals and patterns of organizational leadership" (ibid., p. 236). The findings in section 6.2.4 have revealed that certain executives of the Nepalese institution might hold major power in the selection of the training participants, and the individual interests of the core personnel in the institution might cause obstacles in acquiring the accurate information. This is in fact attention grabbing when comparing with the following discoveries: the Finnish staff saw several participants not fulfilling the criteria; the training participants claimed that some of their colleagues do not get actively engaged in the training; and the gender gap among the participants that should be closed following the strategy areas of MFA was also evident. In fact, the political, cultural and social impacts on education equity Pherali (2013) and Witenstein and Palmer (2013) have addressed in their studies were also pointed out by the respondents, as they highly affect the gender parity in higher education. It is inferred from Pherali (2013) that the Northern institution should delve into the influential factors of the local educational contexts, particularly when it is profoundly rooted in an

inequitable social and political system; instead of merely focusing on global development issues. In fact, the project is targeted at upgrading secondary teachers' qualification through ODL model, which hails from the needs of Nepal's education sector. Nevertheless, it is critical for decision makers of the project to take notice of gender disparity visible among the training participants. Also, Cassidy (2010, p. 513) has invoked "lack of transparency, authoritarian rule and international commitments" prompted by a political context as the hindering factors on the progress of an educational collaboration. The Finnish staff underlined that they found it impossible to intervene in the internal issues of the Nepalese institution. However, the consequences of the dilemma that the targeted beneficiaries of the project could not get access to the training program possibly due to the adverse effects of an unfair system raise an alarm towards the authentic impacts of a capacity building project. This also leads to a practical question as to whether Northern and Southern institutions should collectively generate a mechanism that allows for partner scrutiny on decision-making processes, as Fowler (1998) has implied.

One of the visible concerns is the divergence in working cultures between Northern and Southern institutions. Overcoming the challenge requires mutual understanding, respect and efforts to work towards the shared goals and interests. Otherwise, the cultural differences might result in the hidden contradictions between both sides and the potential to turn the collaboration into a nightmare or a disaster. Dissimilarity in administrative culture tends to prevail in a North-South institutional partnership (Jamil & Haque, 2016). The Southern institution is inclined to stick to hierarchical and rule-based working approach; whereas the Northern one follows the results or outcomes-based method (ibid.). This description of the variation in working cultures has similarly been found during data analysis. As it is regarded as one of the underlying challenges in an institutional partnership, the recommendations from the experienced professionals will be indeed beneficial for those who are interested in building an authentic North-South institutional partnership. In a research collaboration,

Jamil and Haque (2016) propose that Northern partners should nurture a more cooperative approach to knowledge production with a focus on embracing local knowledge from the South. Meanwhile, methodological skills should be improved in the South, along with maintaining the local cultural differences (ibid.). However, the experience gained from the Finnish Nepalese partnership has suggested that willingness to listen and discuss openly with partners on even nuanced matters is crucial. For instance, the Nepalese institution found their lack of infrastructure a major problem in running the project, thus they put forward a demand in technological investment. Meanwhile, the Finnish partner stressed the importance of maintaining infrastructure and raised their concerns on the needs of enhancing human resources and leadership skills. In fact, both partners can work together to tackle the shortcomings of their own after demonstrating their expectations and recommendations straightforwardly. Therefore, the productive characteristic of open dialogues between the partners does not only help finding suitable solutions whenever a conflict appears throughout the project, but also contributes to shortening the cultural gaps through a profound sense of understanding, heightening the mutual trust, and nourishing respect for each other in a long-term project.

7.3   Limitations of the Study

It was noted that not all informants can handle English well to respond to the interview questions. Though the researcher made attempts to clarify the questions, it appeared that not all given information was adequately comprehensible. This thesis seeks to explore the phenomenon of institutional partnership in one specific project. However, many informative details of the project have to be covered for the purpose of minimizing the possibility of causing harm to the research subjects. Though the study intends to bring practical implications for the project itself through the voices of the project participants, the strict conformity to the anonymity requires generalizing some of the given

information and limiting a full exposure of the participants' characteristics (male or female) and their side of opinions (Finnish or Nepalese institution) on certain matters. These limitations might result in barriers to gaining a deeper perception into the phenomenon within the context.

As I could only manage to conduct the questionnaires and interviews with the Nepalese project staff and the training participants coming to Finland, the current study might be lacking in reaching multifaceted perspectives from other project stakeholders, such as other core staff from the Nepalese institution and the other teacher participants from regional campuses. Furthermore, during the transcript, I realized that some questions could have been clarified in a better way so that the respondents were able to address the issues more comprehensively. Also, further questions concerning the dynamics of the institutional partnership between the two partners should have been created when interviewing the teacher participants of the training program to acquire more understanding of the phenomenon from their perspectives.

7.4   Suggestions for Further Research

The current study has provided insight into the dynamics of a North-South institutional partnership in a capacity building project, with a more focus on the planning and implementation phases, as the researcher approached the project when it is at the midpoint of the project schedule. Thus, further research on the similar issue should be undertaken to pay more attention to how the institutional partnership contributes to reaching the desired outcomes of a capacity building project in a longer term. Furthermore, many previous studies have manifested the significance of trust building in an institutional partnership (Hoppers, 2009; Carbonnier and Kontinen, 2015; Nossum, 2016). However, it should be further examined regarding what effects trust building have on developing an institutional partnership and through what means trust can be measured in the framework. Another perceptible issue from this study concerns the gap in

working cultures between the two institutions. In fact, the research on how this differentiation is addressed in a North-South institutional partnership is entirely needed; particularly when the divergence sparkles tensions and conflicts, and might even lead to the termination of the relationship. Last of all, gender inequality in higher education emerging in this study, which has been raised by many researchers (Lohani et al, 2010; Witenstein and Palmer, 2013), is found as a consequence of various factors, including social, cultural, and political influences. Thus, a research addressing gender gap rooted in a complex setting with existence of these factors in a case study of North South institutional partnership is indeed of critical importance.

8   CONCLUSIONS

This research has caught on that the voices of the beneficiaries in a capacity building project should be highly valued, as the knowledge of the local educational context they provide will enable the project to reach the right target groups' needs. The fairer chance they have to get actively involved in the partnership, the more they are able to contribute to the achievement of the project objectives and subsequently bring about the sustainable impacts of the development goals. Yet, it should be underlined what measures or mechanisms allows their voices to be heard in a North-South institutional partnership throughout the project. Also, it is critical to ensure that raising their actual opinions do not cause harm to their own benefits.

The current study has found out that a sturdy and authentic partnership definitely contributes to addressing the beneficiaries' needs in a capacity building project. Yet, the road to an authentic institutional partnership requires a good practice of these essential factors: mutual interests based on the actual needs with sufficient time and effort put in planning phase, shared goals towards the desired outcomes of reaching the common target groups, joint decision-making with a suggestion of partner scrutiny on every matter such as the selection of the training participants, respect with listening attitudes and mutual exchange and sharing knowledge and expertise between both institutions, trust building through open dialogue and transparency in financial area. Moreover, the beneficiary engagement in all phases of the project should be taken into consideration. Specifically, this study highlights the presence of the Southern trainers with their insightful understanding of the local educational setting to sustain the capacity building program. Challenges are inevitable in the partnership, prominently the differences in working cultures, yet the study implies that a sense of understanding and an attempt to establish trust are crucial for overcoming the cultural barriers.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix 1: Letter of Request

To whom it may concern

This letter is to certify, that **Phuong Do-Salenius** (⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛) is a student in the Masters Programme in Development and International Co-operation, at the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä.

The programme is an international, multi-faculty programme educating future development professionals. The medium of tuition is English. As one of the multi-faculty students, Do-Salenius majors in education.
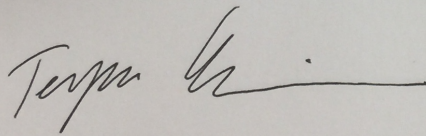
A very crucial part of the programme is completing the Master's Thesis. The thesis is a research contribution meeting high academic standards. We encourage our students to plan the research setting in an international environment, if circumstances allow.

Do-Salenius has expressed an interest in collecting her data in Nepal, which we view very positively. This is especially the case, as Finland and Nepal have a long history of co-operation in the field of education.

In this spirit, it is our hope that she will be met with encouragement also in Nepal, in the process of finding local teachers to be interviewed for the purposes of her thesis.

I wish to take the opportunity also to point out, that all our students receive tuition not only in research methods but also in research ethics. Our university in general takes a rigorous position in ethical matters.

Please feel free to contact me in case of any questions.

Teppo Eskelinen
Senior lecturer, Acting head of programme
Development and International Co-operation
University of Jyväskylä
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Appendix 2: Informed Consent

Contact information of researchers
Supervisor: Hanna Posti-Ahokas, Senior Researcher, University of Jyväskylä
~~hanna.posti-ahokas@jyu.fi~~

Researcher: Phuong Do-Salenius, student of Master Program in Development
and International Cooperation with specialization in Education
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The significance of the research
The research serves as the thesis to complete the overall study in Master's Program. It examines the dynamics of an institutional partnership in a Finnish Nepalese higher education capacity building project. Through participant evaluation and in-depth interviews with the teachers and project coordinators engaged in the project, the study seeks to explore how the institutional partnership contributes to ensuring the goals of reaching the target group's needs.
For the training participants: The study aims to embrace beneficiaries' voices in planning, implementation and evaluation phases of the capacity building project. The findings are expected to provide important information and useful feedback that can address the needs of beneficiaries.
For the staff involved in the project: The study aims to understand the dynamics of the cooperation between Finnish and Nepalese institutions through staff's perspectives. The findings are expected to provide important information and unbiased viewpoints that can serve the goals of pursuing the desired results of the project.

Use of research data and results
The research data and results will be used only for Master's thesis and for the purpose of evaluation of the project itself.

Rights of the research subjects
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate in it, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The research and the reporting of its findings will be done so that your identity is treated as confidential information. No personal information that is collected during the research will be disclosed to anyone else beside you and the researcher. When the results of the research are published, no information that reveal your identity will be included. At any point, you will have the right to receive further information about the research from the researcher.

Consent to participate in research
I have been informed of the purpose and content of the research and the use of its research materials. I hereby agree to participate in the study in accordance with the instructions given by the researcher. I give my consent to the use of my written and oral responses in such a way that it is impossible to identify me as a person.

_____
  Date   Signature of the research participant

_____
  Date   Signature of the researcher

Appendix 3: Participant Evaluation

Participant Feedback
(*)
Gender:_____
Campus: _____
Subject: _____
Years of teaching experience: _____

Please fill in the participant feedback and send it to the researcher's email: ~~huong thi le~~
~~...@student.jyu.fi~~

1. What did you expect to learn from the training program?
(write your answer below)

2. What are the new knowledge and experience you have received from the training?
(write your answer below)

3. What were the most meaningful things learnt from the training program?
 (write your answer below)

4. How do you comment on the training in terms of theme, content, structure, schedule, organization, and travel arrangement?
(write your answer below)

Theme & content:

Structure:

Schedule, organization, travel arrangement:

5. How did the different elements of the training and the assignment contribute to your learning process? *(Please put an X in the most accurate option)*

	Unimportant	Slightly important	Moderately important	Important	Very important
Reading of articles					
Preparing questions for presenters					
Listening to presentations					
Question sessions after each presentation					
Group discussions					

Role play (Drama experience)					
Completing given assignments					
Practice designing courses on Moodle					

(*) Others:

6. Overall how did the training fulfil your expectations? *(Please put an X in the most accurate option)*

Not satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied

Please explain your answer.
(write your answer below)

7. Please share your ideas, wishes, expectations and recommendations for the next training in the project.

(write your answer below)

(*): not compulsory

Thank you for your cooperation and please contact phuongtkde-ealwiue@student.jyu.fi
if you have any further questions.

Appendix 4: Interview Questions

Semi-structured interview for participants in the training
1. How do you get involved in the training? /How do you become a participant of the training?
2. When did you start to participate in this project?
3. What is your area of teaching (subject)? How many years of teaching experience do you have?
4. Do you have any other responsibilities in addition to being a teacher? (e.g. campus coordinator)
5. What information do you know about the project (objectives, beneficiaries, meaning, implementation, etc.)?
6. Were you asked about your own expectations of the training?
7. How will you apply the knowledge, lessons, and experience from the training into your own teaching context?
8. What are your suggestions for improvement of the training?
9. How do you evaluate cooperation between your institution and the partner institution in terms of training organization and arrangement in the project?
10. Do you have any idea why there are only three female participants in the training? What are the reasons for that?

Semi-structured interview questions for project staff
Background Information

1. When did you start working for this project? What is your position? What kind of background do you have in development cooperation or experience about the country of your partner institute before starting working? How many are there working for the project from both institutes?
2. How did the collaboration start in the first place?
3. How was the decision about collaboration made? Why was this institution chosen?
4. How would you describe your collaboration with your partner? What kinds of words do you use? (e.g. partnership, collaboration, development alliance, aid, etc.)
5. What kind of contract/agreement have you made with your partner, if any?

Dynamics of Partnership

1. Describe the roles of your institute and your partner institute in your collaboration. What are the responsibilities of each institute?
2. What kind of a decision-making process do you have with your partner institute? Where are most of the decisions about the project activities made? Do you have examples of when you did not understand why such a decision was made by your partner?
3. How do the following factors affect your collaboration?
- Personnel/coordinators in your institution and your partner institution (How would the collaboration change if the personnel were different?)

- Role of the donor (Ministry for Foreign Affairs): timetable, project cycle, reporting →How do you assess the role of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs? (for Finnish side)
- Geographical distance between institutes
- Cultural differences: time, hierarchy, values, work ethics, working style, etc.

4. How would you evaluate your partner's reliability (consistency between words and action)? How do you define the concept of partnership? What qualities of the partnership contribute to success?

5. What do you think are the qualities of good communication with your partner? How do you share information and how frequently, and involving which staff? (frequency of emails, face-to-face, casual meet-ups, meetings, phone calls, etc.)

6. How have you and your partner built trust before and during the project?

7. What kinds of challenges do you face in your collaboration? What bother you with your partner institution? Are there any areas in which you feel your partner should improve its performance? Are there any issues that are sensitive to talk about with your partner?

8. What processes/procedures do you and your partner have for monitoring and evaluation of your projects?

9. In what extent does the collaboration contribute to addressing teachers' needs? Were teachers' needs seen important in the project? (For Nepalese side)/ Was the collaboration useful for getting information about teachers' needs? (Finnish side)

10. If you were asked for advice on how to build a strong partnership for a project, what recommendations would you give?