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Prospects and Challenges of Executing the Work-Based Learning Approach in Nepal

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Abstract

This study was carried out to scrutinize the prospects and challenges of instigating the work-based learning (WBL) approach in TVET in Nepal. A qualitative methodology was adopted for the study. Face-to-face and virtual in-depth interviews were conducted with purposively identified TVET experts, teachers and employers from Nepal. Altogether, there were 15 participants. Primarily, the study addressed two research questions: (i) What are the prospects and challenges for instigating a work-based learning approach in TVET in Nepal, and (ii) How the challenges are tackled? The findings revealed that stakeholders' readiness and the industry's volume to meet learners' needs are key challenges in instigating work-based learning approaches in Nepal. The findings also revealed that the prevailing legal frameworks and practices do not have significant provisions. This urges for a conducive legal framework that makes employers mandatory for providing work-based learning opportunities to TVET students in their industries. The industry volume needs to be increased and strengthened by creating a conducive environment for private sector and foreign investment. Additionally, awareness needs to be made among the stakeholders, especially the guardians and the students, so that the guardians understand the importance of WBL and encourage their children to join and the students to be ready for learning in work-based settings.

Keywords: technical and vocational education and training, workplace-based learning, world of work

Context and Rationale

According to Brewer and Comyn (2015), skills required for success in today's world of work are (i) foundation skills that are a prerequisite for continuing learning such as literacy and numeracy skills, (ii) vocational or technical skills that are specialized competencies needed to perform occupation specific duties or tasks, (iii) professional/personal skills that are

individual attributes relevant to work, such as honesty, integrity and work ethic, and (iv) core work skills that are the abilities to learn and adapt; to read, write and compute competently, to listen and communicate effectively, to think creatively, to solve problems independently, to work in teams or groups; to handle basic technology and to lead effectively. Now the question arises, whether the presently prevalent

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school-based TVET implementation approach of Nepal, which claims to produce competent graduates for the *world of work* addresses the aforementioned requirements. Nepali employers claim that TVET graduates who graduated from Nepali TVET schools are somehow fine in technical competencies but lack professional/personal skills and core work skills (Sharma & Bhattarai, 2022). This might be because of the TVET implementation approach. It has been found that most of the TVET courses are conducted only in school settings in Nepal. In a school setting, a teacher teaches students using a prescribed curriculum normally in a classroom or workshop setting (Komaariah, 2015) where the students rarely get workplace exposure. On the contrast, according to the Australian National Training Authority (2004), skills for the world of work are best learned and assessed in the workplace. This claim matches with Bandura’s social cognition theory. Bandura (1986) claims that people learn best by observing, associating and copying through the people they associated with. Unlike school-based learning, the work-based learning (WBL), which is an experiential learning approach, learning takes place in a real work environment and is based on industry standards under the guidance of subject matter experts (Komaariah, 2015). WBL provides learners to get acquainted with the employers, who value relevant work experience, and learners who have already spent time in a professional setting can demonstrate their practical skills and commitment to their chosen field.

Then another question arises: what factors are limiting Nepal from shifting the paradigm from a school-based learning (SBL) approach to a WBL approach? This study, therefore, primarily focuses on exploring the prospects and challenges of implementing a WBL approach in TVET of Nepal and the ways to tackle these challenges, by understanding the stakeholders’ viewpoints.

Presently Prevalent TVET Programs and Learning Approaches in Nepal

The Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) is taking a lead role and holds a significant share in developing

the technical and vocational workforce in Nepal. CTEVT caters to the TVET sector with twelfth-class equivalent diploma/certificate level and 10th-class equivalent pre-diploma and apprenticeship programs through 1169 TVET schools that include 66 constituents, 57 partnership institutes, 639 community schools, and 407 private technical schools. The programs are primarily in the agriculture, engineering, health, and hospitality sectors. In addition, there are 1618 affiliated TVET providers across the country for conducting short-term market-responsive vocational and professional training (CTEVT, 2024). Additionally, many other TVET actors organize various skill development activities formally and non-formally in Nepal. Nevertheless, most of the programs are conducted in the school setting and a negligible number of programs such as training with on-the-job (OJT) programs and 24-month Dual Vocational Education and Training (VET) apprenticeship programs are organized in the workplace setting. As a result, most of the graduates rarely get workplace exposure. Additionally, the practice is that almost all programs are led and managed by TVET schools. Employer participation except during the need assessment and design phase of the

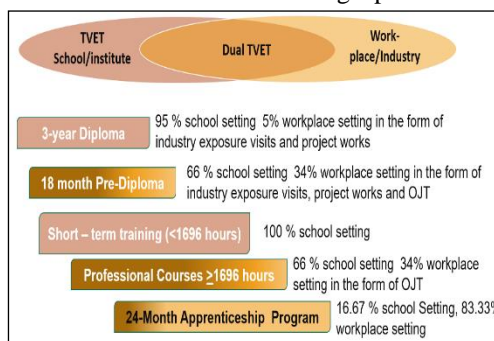


Figure 1: Presently Prevalent TVET Curricula and Learning Approach in Nepal

training cycle is not at all satisfactory. Furthermore, quality is ensured by the government and other TVET agencies rather than employers (Bhattarai, 2019).

Figure 1 depicts the presently prevalent TVET curricula and learning approach in Nepal. While analyzing the content and teaching

methods prescribed in the curricula designed by CTEVT, it is found that on average 95 per cent contents of the 3-year diploma which is equivalent to the 12th grade is taught in schools and only 5 per cent in workplace settings in the form of project work and sometimes as field visits. Similarly, 100 per cent of the short-term non-academic courses of less than 1696 hours are only taught in a school or training institute setting. However, 34 per cent of the pre-diploma level curricula and professional courses are taught in workplace settings through OJT and industry exposure visits. Likewise, in 24-month apprenticeship programs, 83.33 per cent of the contents are learned at workplace setting.

Governing Provisions for Work-Based Learning (WBL) Approach in Nepal

Following are some of the key governing provisions conducive to implementing work-based learning approach in Nepal.

- i. CTEVT Regulations, 1994 (Chapter 4, Rule 13-16): The regulation has made structural and legal arrangements under the chair of the Vice Chairperson of CTEVT to prepare the necessary curricula for basic and skill enhancement training programs conducted by government and non-government industrial establishments, to standardize such training programs and maintain coordination.
- ii. Apprenticeship Training Working Procedure, 2018 (CTEVT): This working procedure mandates the functions, duties and powers of the Industrial Apprentice Training Committee constituted under Section 13 of the CTEVT Act, 1988. Under this, conducting research studies on workforce demand and recommending for making necessary policies for producing such workforce; conducting industrial training in cooperation with industries and their associations and recommending government concessions and facilities for the industries conducting industrial training are the main ones.
- iii. Workplace-based (Apprenticeship) Training Working Procedure, 2019 (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security): To develop a skilled workforce, according to the needs of the domestic industry, there is a provision to conduct employment-oriented training programs for trainee workers in the production and service industry in collaboration with the private sector employers. The provision to employ for a period of at least two years in the same industry/workplace is also stated in the working procedure.
- iv. National Education Policy, 2019: Partnership with private sector employers for the internship, OJT and apprenticeship programs (10.12.5)
- v. School Sector Development Plan 2016/17-2022/23 Partnership with the private sector for OJT and apprenticeship opportunities.
- vi. 15th Five Year Development Plan (2019/20-23/24): The plan emphasized for apprenticeship programs in collaboration with public, cooperative, industries and private sector (Work plan 4.4.6.1)
- vii. The Labour Act, 2017 (Sections 16 and 17): Provisions to enter and learn at the workplace as an intern, apprentice or trainee. The apprentice learns as per the prescribed curricula. However, a person must be 16 years of age to become an apprentice.
- viii. The TVET Sector Strategic Plan (2023-32): To improve the quality and relevance of TVET programs in Nepal, the TSSP intends to increase collaborative programs and activities with schools and industry and their associations for internship, on-the-job training, apprenticeship and Dual TVET system model bring into practice (2.4.5.) and introducing and implementing a dual TVET system with the active, meaningful and collaborative actions of BIAS by the

development of guidelines & policy provisions.

Analyzing these provisions, it can be said that Nepal has made adequate legal and policy arrangements to keep trainee workers for workplace-based learning who have reached the age of 16.

Industry Volume of Nepal

One of the major employers of Nepal is the private sector industries, where the learner as an intern, apprentice or trainee can be placed. However, on the flip side, the present industry volume is not enough to cater for all TVET learners. Only 9085 private sector industries are registered in Nepal till FY 2022/23 by scale and the enrollment capacity in Diploma and Pre-diploma programs for the FY 2022/23 are 57,070 and 29,743 respectively (Annual Report of CTEVT, 2024). Out of 9,085 industries, private sector employers are categorized as small, medium and large industries based on fixed capital as stated in Industrial Enterprise Act, 2020 (Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, 2020). Figure 2 depicts industries in

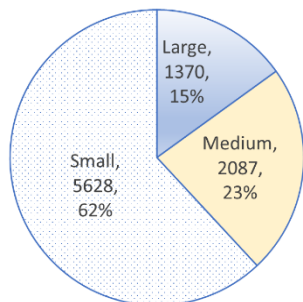


Figure 2: Industries in Nepal on the basis of fixed capital

Nepal by scale based on fixed capital. These industries contribute to generating 680,327 employment opportunities, (Department of Industry, 2023). So far, the government has not made a rule to keep a certain percentage of interns in the industry. Even if the government applies at least

ten per cent (assumption) mandatory provision, each industry will not and cannot cater to more than seven TVET graduates.

Workplace-Based Learning (WBL) Approach: Concept and General Perspective

The WBL approach places students in the workplace or similar situations as depicted in Figure 3. In the school setting, career awareness can be created among the students by providing opportunities like career fairs, industry excursions, guest speakers, etc. Likewise, students can be placed to explore career by applying various career exploration strategies such as by providing them with industry-based projects and problems, by establishing and by applying “*learn and earn*” strategy, by establishing a production unit or the learning factory at school and by placing students in the incubation center. These kinds of work-based learning activities at school settings inspire the students to learn about the future work environment. Komarias (2015) claims that the WBL provides real-life, practical work experiences; as a result, students learn professional/personal skills and core work skills in addition to technical competencies that effectively prepare them for the challenging world of work. Likewise, Comyn and Brewer (2018) also claim that the work-based learning facilitates transitions to decent work. In the workplace setting, some of the widely practiced learning approaches are (i) on-the-job training

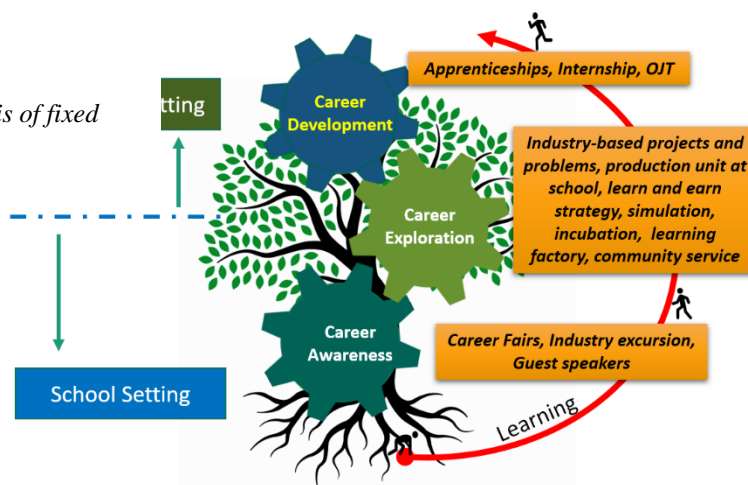


Figure 3: Work-based learning possibilities

(OJT) or internship, and (ii) apprenticeship. Students are sent to the actual workplace for a fixed period as prescribed in the curriculum so that they can get the real work experience required for the world of work. This approach is called internship or OJT or sometimes placement. The internship is usually of a shorter duration than an apprenticeship. In the apprenticeship approach, apprentices or students spend most of their time in the workplace with other employees to acquire technical as well as employability skills. Typically, the apprenticeship program lasts two to four years (European Training Foundation, 2014).

Global Scenario of WBL

WBL practices of Germany and Switzerland are considered as successful WBL systems (European Training Foundation, 2014). Employers are playing a lead role in most of the countries. Three kinds of WBL approaches are practiced in the United States: (i) Time-based: in this kind, an apprentice's program is measured by the number of hours spent in on-the-job training, (ii) Competency-based: in which the apprentice's program is measured by his/her demonstration ability to apply the necessary competencies, and (iii) Hybrid: a combination of (i) and (ii) (International Labour Organization, 2020). There are three modes of WBL according to the leading role in the United States. These are (i) Union apprenticeships, in which the labour unions offer WBL programs, (ii) Employers sponsored WBL programs and (iii) intermediaries, in which a third party works with both employers and apprentices to provide WBL (Darche, Nayar, & Bracco, 2009). Likewise, employers play a leading role in Germany and Switzerland. Dual VET and apprenticeship programs are kinds of WBL practiced in Germany and Switzerland where off-the-job learning occurs in school and on-the-job learning occurs in the industry. For the quality assurance and assessment, chambers take care in Germany and the State Government takes care of it in Switzerland (International Labour Organization, 2020).

Likewise, South Korea is practicing both employer-led and school-led WBL programs

(Ryu, 2017). In employer-led programs, they independently develop the programs and provide both on-the-job and off-the-job learning opportunities to the apprentices. For quality assurance and assessment, both the State Government and private sector employers are responsible (ILO, 2020).

Various empirical studies have also been conducted on prospects and challenges for executing a work-based learning approach. Denso and Osei (2021) conducted a descriptive survey with 1200 respondents titled *The Factors Contributing to the Challenges with Apprenticeship in Ghana: Trainees' Perspective* and found that the major factors contributing to the challenges with an apprenticeship are (i) Aid-related factors, (ii) Recognition related factors, (iii) Funding related factors, (iv) Training structure-related factors, (v) Contemporary technological-related factors, and (vi) Perception related factors.

Zureada et al. (2019) conducted qualitative research titled *Key Challenges of Work-Based Learning Application in Teaching and Learning Strategies for Accounting Programs* and identified challenges related to acceptance by academics and industries, operationalization and talent.

Likewise, a report prepared by Bolli et al. (2019) found two major challenges to implementing dual VET apprenticeship programs in Nepal. According to their report, the two challenges were (i) encouraging private sector employers to accommodate apprentices and support for the dual VET apprenticeship program and (ii) motivating students to enroll in such programmes.

Methodology

This study was carried out using one of the techniques of qualitative research i.e., in-depth interviews with TVET experts, teachers who are teaching in TVET schools and private sector employers who are catering to TVET students during apprenticeship or OJT, to elicit insightful information regarding the prospects and challenges for instigating WBL approach in Nepal. The participants were selected purposely following Creswell (2011) who says

that in qualitative research, the researcher selects or identifies the sites and the participants purposely, which helps a researcher to understand the research problem in the best way. The researcher selected five respondents from each group.

For in-depth understanding, the researcher framed the following questions: (i) What are the prospects and challenges of instigating a workplace-based learning approach in TVET in Nepal? and, (ii) How can these challenges be tackled? These questions were sent in advance to the participants.

The researcher facilitated the in-depth interview with each respondent separately and took notes simultaneously. The interview began with rapport building with the participant followed by an explanation of the purpose of the study. After ensuring that the participants had a good understanding of the concept, the aforementioned questions along with some clarifying and exploratory unstructured questions were asked by the researcher. The discussion ranged in duration from 20 minutes to half an hour. The in-depth interview helped the researchers to get a deeper understanding of the phenomena.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis was done concurrently while collecting information. The first question asked to the respondents was “What are the prospects and challenges of instigating a workplace-based learning approach in TVET in Nepal?” and the second question asked to the respondents was “How can these challenges be tackled?” After scrutinizing the respondents' understanding, the following points were extracted.

Prospects of Implementing Work-Based Learning Approach in Nepal

Private sector employers were initially reluctant and skeptical to accommodate apprentices. Likewise, initially, students were also reluctant to enroll as apprentices in WBL programs. The ground realities of the Nepali context expressed by the respondents are consistent with the findings of studies conducted by Zureada et al. (2019) and Bolli et al. (2019).

According to the respondents, the employers are

now expressing their willingness to be actively engaged in TVET. Likewise, now the students also have started realizing that the WBL provides them the opportunity to experience the day-to-day challenges of a real job and gain practical skills and insights that can enhance their career prospects and prepares themselves for the world of work. Additionally, the policy makers and other stakeholders of TVET in Nepal now started realizing that the work-based learning approach effectively helps to make the curricula relevant to industry needs and thus learners acquire the relevant competencies including hands-on experience and employability skills required for the world of work. As a result, Nepal has started resuming, planning and prioritizing expansion of WBL programs.

Challenges of Implementing Work-Based Learning Approach in Nepal

One of the major challenges is the social stigma or the perception (Denso & Osei, 2021) towards TVET. Joining TVET and more specifically WBL is seen as a second option. However, TVET stakeholders, including students and employers, have started to participate in WBL after realizing its benefits.

The effort and commitment for building strong ties with industries for WBL have not reached enough level. Likewise, there is no adequate workplace infrastructure, resources and industry's volume required for effective WBL, as a result, consistent quality assurance across diverse workplaces is questionable.

Another major challenge of WBL is the high dropout rate. This is due to the uncertainty of career progression prospects, learner's economic condition, apathy demonstrated by policy makers, schools and industries, trade union obstruction during the placement of apprentices and the possibility of finding job before the completion of the study. Additionally, tight schedule of the learner is another challenge.

Apprentices of the dual VET program currently underway are practicing the “one day back at school” strategy. Due to the geographical condition of the country and the distance between the school and the industry/workplace, it is difficult for the apprentices to come back to school for one day in a week and return to the

workplace next day. This and similar unpractical procedural decisions have become additional challenges for the effective implementation of WBL. Additionally, the existing legal provisions are not enough and even those that exist are not conducive to effective implementation of WBL in Nepal. This is another challenge according to the respondents.

Ways to Cope with the Challenges

One of the major challenges is the social stigma towards TVET. Awareness programs are needed to remove this social stigma so that society starts respecting dignity of labor and TVET, more specifically the WBL.

To cope with the challenges of inconsistent learning outcomes, inadequate workplace infrastructure and resources and the concern of employers for productivity and profit; the government and the policy makers need to provide a conducive environment to employers so that they can provide structured training and mentorship. It urges for establishing regulatory provisions, clear guidelines and standards with subsidy.

Due to the compulsion to come to school one day a week, the effort and time of the students is wasted. To solve this problem, instead of implementing a “One day back at school” strategy, implement a “School at industry/workplace” strategy. The instructor visits the apprentices as a roaming instructor.

Another challenge is the tight schedule of the learner. To address this challenge, the curriculum needs to be designed in such a way that it balances learning time with work responsibilities and provides flexible and self-paced learning opportunity with credit transfer and multiple entry and exit provisions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, as per the understanding of the TVET experts, teachers and private sector employers, the TVET stakeholders especially the policymakers, curriculum developers, implementers and employers of Nepal acknowledge the inevitability of WBL. These stakeholders understand that the WBL is the only way to effectively equip the youth with the competencies required to acquire, sustain and

succeed in the world of work. Despite, having the aforementioned understanding among the stakeholders, the readiness of two key stakeholders, i.e., students and employers, and the volume of the industry to cater to the needs of all TVET students/trainees as per the prescribed curricula, are the two major challenges in implementing work-based learning approach in Nepal. Likewise, it is also found that there is a need for a conducive legal framework that makes employers mandatorily provide work-based learning opportunities to TVET students in their industries. Furthermore, the industry volume needs to be increased and strengthened. Extensive expansion of industry is necessary for which the government needs to create a conducive environment for private sector investment and even for foreign investment. Moreover, awareness needs to be created among the stakeholders, especially the guardians and the students, so that the guardians understand the importance of WBL and send their wards, and the students to be ready for learning in work-based settings. This way, by transforming the practice of TVET from a traditional school-based learning approach to a work-based learning approach, it can be believed that Nepal can effectively equip its workforce with the competencies needed to cope with the challenges of the 21st century.

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