

# Employer Engagement in Curriculum Making Process in Nepal: Meaningful or Cosmetic?

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## Abstract

The engagement of employers in the education system is interpreted on the assumption that it enables a student to enhance the knowledge according to the market demand. This helps to furnish students with skills and knowledge directly relevant to generating employment, familiarize the workplace environment, and reduce the constraints in transitioning from learning to work. The partaking of employers in curriculum preparation not only supports to increase the involvement of employers but also helps to prepare the market-based curriculum. More so, stakeholder participation in TVET curriculum preparation is crucial. However, employer engagement in the curriculum making process, in general, has been a neglected agenda. Against this backdrop, we examined the level of employer engagement in TVET curriculum making process in Nepal. We interviewed 79 individual national employers asking their level of participation in curriculum making process. Among the participants, four were further interacted to understand the reason for minimum participation. The employers, on the one hand, shared that their participation is just for participation to fulfil the requirement provisioned by law. On the other hand, they also said their inputs rarely incorporated in the process even if they had involved in the curriculum design phase. In this sense, the participation of the employer in the curriculum-making process has become cosmetic in practice rather than desired and meaningful.

**Keywords:** *Employer, curriculum design phase, cosmetic participation*

## Introduction

Education and employment are often understood complementary to each other. In the one hand, education enhances skills that usually accounted as a tool for better

employment opportunities, better earning, thus quality life. On the other hand, employment consumes the skilled human resources and provides a space for both

using learned skills and earn for themselves. Moreover, education with occupational skills prepares individual for employment in the job market (Ekpo & Onweh, 2012). Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is considered an effective means to equip one with necessary knowledge and skills which supports youth integrate into the world of work. More specifically, TVET prepares skilled graduates who are able to enter the world of work with skills and knowledge that the job market demands (Papakitsos, 2016).

TVET primarily stresses on fostering employment and enhancing the productivity for that the graduates are expected to possess specific job-related skills according to the need of the industry. These skills and competencies desired to the employers are generally met through developing a relevant curriculum. The trainees are enhanced on the basis of the TVET curriculum which also strengthens the TVET system (Schnarr et al., 2008). In this regard, the quality of TVET system, thus, largely depends upon curriculum development which prepares the graduates considering the demand of existing employment.

The curriculum also bridges the skills providers with consumer of acquired competencies. The graduates of TVET or the output of the technical school is the input for the industries. The competencies enhanced in the technical school should therefore reflect the demand and competencies of the market and the employers. This is likely to achieve when competencies and

skills are transformed on the basis of the market demand curriculum. Additionally, a sound alignment of TVET curriculum with demands of labour market results in a good curriculum quality and success of TVET. The quality and relevance of a TVET system is largely determined by the industry partners (Heinz, 2008) as they are the key drivers of the system who work in collaboration with the operators. That is why industry is regarded as the primary consumer of TVET graduates.

In this context, this paper explored and interpreted the involvement of employers in curriculum development process in TVET sector of Nepal. Doing so, it unboxes the employers' participation in the curriculum designing process and the ways they contribute to the process of curriculum development which contributes to the enhancement of the TVET system in the country.

### **Employers' Engagement in TVET Curriculum Making Process**

Employers' involvement in curriculum making process indicates their active and meaningful participation in designing, implementing, and feedback phase (Renold, et.al, 2015). Their engagement in all these phases includes providing the input about the skills, and their training requirements that contributes ensuring relevancy and quality of TVET system. Further, they also provide the On the Job Training (OJT), placement to the graduates, and opportunities for apprenticeship (Ma, 2011). Laguador and

Ramos (2014) argue that the participation of multi- stakeholders like academician, graduates, alumni as well as the industry is essential, however, the contribution of the industry people is more significant to the TVET curriculum development as their requirement in the curriculum meets the demand of the labour market.

In Nepal, TVET programmes are provided on the basis of the curriculum, however, there has been weak linkage between the acquired competencies and the demand of the job market (Sharma, 2015). Caves and Renold (2018) highlight that employment is a key of TVET, and the quality of the TVET can be ensured through education-employment linkage. This linkage can be best reflected through the curriculum where employers involve in designing, implementing, and revising process of the curriculum development in TVET. This supports to the trainees learn competencies that are relevant to the labour market. Therefore, to meet the requirement of the market, the involvement of the employers in curriculum making process (Caves & Renold, 2018) is essential.

The term curriculum is interpreted by many scholars (e.g. Brown, 2006; Silva, 2009) in different ways in accordance with their uses in different situations. Curriculum is a written description of the planned learning process (Tyler, 1957). Normally, it should include objectives and necessary means to achieve them. The scholars who have defined curriculum, have not defined the involvement of the industry sector in the

developing process and because of that the involvement of the industry sector during the process of the curriculum development is in the shade.

The curriculum is the constitution of TVET system. It is a systematic and scientific process of designing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing the program. Quality and relevancy of any TVET program lies on the curriculum of the training. TVET curriculum designs are suggested separately from most objectives to most subjective views such as occupational research, Develop A Curriculum (DACUM) process, Delphi technique, critical incident, function approach, personal introspection and philosophical basis respectively. By viewing these strategies, Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), an apex body for TVET in Nepal, has been employing DACUM process/ competency-based design to develop its curricula and develops the TVET curriculum through different processes like need assessment, identifications of client group and content, preparation of data, job analysis, conduct DACUM process, task analysis, compilation of first draft, present the curriculum in technical committee/subcommittee, and curriculum dissemination, implementation, evaluation/feedback and revision (CTEVT, Curriculum Bylaw, 1988). The TVET institutions under or affiliated to CTEVT are mandatory to follow the approved curricula. It reveals the concept of curriculum, the curriculum development practices being

carried out in CTEVT and provides some mitigation measures of the present issues and challenges of the curricula for preparing the quality workforce as demanded by labour market (Badal, 2011).

The study conducted by Thapa (2018) in Nepal found low participation of industry people in curriculum development and delivery process. The employers, more specifically, industry people were not involved in the input of core competencies and there was no any opportunity given to them in the competencies development phase. Instead, the content was developed by the instructors and academicians and the industry stakeholders were involved at the end for the acknowledgement. Nonetheless, these involvements were for short time and the number of involvements considerably low. The curriculum development process of TVET in Nepal demands an intensive participation employers and provisions to follow a standard content-based method, whereby individual faculty member is assigned to coordinate and develop courses considering the curriculum in consultation of relevant stakeholders. In other word, this also implies that the importance of employers is overlooked and low participation of employer has been a roadblocks enhancing the relevancy of TVET in Nepal.

### **Employer engagement in TVET widely demanded relationship**

The engagement of employers in the skill development process is widely discussed. The relationship between TVET providers

and employers has been a subject of immense interest in the recent decades including Nepal. The involvement and the cooperation with shared responsibilities have been also one of the priorities of educational reform (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology [MOEST], 2019a). The engagement is also anticipated as a remedy to reduce mismatch between education and workplace. With such relation, TVET providers and employers can align more closely and support youth with preparation for work (Hordern 2018). However, the expected engagements of employers in TVET system are often interpreted as weak and are low due to knowledge constrain about each other's aptitude and supportive roles within the TVET system (Bolli et al., 2020). The participation with their autonomy and respect establishes a harmony and esteems TVET system.

The engagement of employers in TVET system have become a crucial issue for the study. The engagement is perceived with ultimate goal of employability and productivity (Lamsal, 2015). Employment is assured by the competencies enhanced as per the TVET curriculum and curriculum needs to reflect competencies demanded by the employers. In this regard, a need of the employers' involvement in the TVET curriculum development is curial. Curriculum of any program must be periodically revised and ensured its relevance as per the need of the market and industry to meet the changes of the technology to reduce the mismatch of the competencies required by the employers

(Teijeiro et al., 2013). In a study carried out by Raihan (2014) in Bangladesh also found the importance of collaboration of the industry and TVET institute, as TVET systematically needs to link with the labour market. One of the ways explored in the study was minimizing the gap between industry and TVET institute by ensuring the participation of industry in the curriculum development process. Similarly, Balasubramani (2014) also highlighted the participation of the industries is instrumental in curriculum design to prepare the students according to demand for industry and employment.

### **Methodology**

The study followed descriptive design under quantitative approach. The survey method was used employing structured questionnaire to understand employer involvement in the curriculum making process. However, we also interacted with the respondents once the survey result was derived. The total 79 employers were interviewed in the survey opting probability sampling as Muijs (2004) suggests this tool in survey to neutralize the researchers' value. The structured questionnaire was developed and used as an assessment tool to collect the data. The collected data were measured with the help of five-point Likert scale as *Never (1)*, *Rarely (2)*, *Sometimes (3)*, *Often (4)* and *Usually (5)* which also measured the different levels of involvement.

The questions were both close-ended and open-ended however, open ended answers were further quantified and analyzed.

Once, the survey data were interpreted, the researchers also conducted in depth interviews with curriculum development process expert, employers, and curriculum division official the employers to understand the result in detail. This helped the researchers to pursue the reasons of the level of involvement in the curriculum development.

The respondents were those who running the industry in Kathmandu Valley. In this study, the industries are those organizations which employ the graduates of CTEVT. The researchers requested respondents for their voluntarily participation and were ensured the confidentiality of the information they provided. The aliases were used maintain anonymity of the respondents who participated in the interview.

### **Result of the Survey**

The study assessed the involvement of the employers in the TVET curriculum development. The computation was based on the mean value of the indicators across public and private industries. In the study, 79 employers who were respondents represented both public and private industries. Among the respondents, most of them (81%) were from the private organizations, the public organization constituted only (11.4%), and 7.6% represented others. Likewise, small enterprises industries represented (22.8%), the medium (39.2%) and large enterprises were (38.0 %).

The involvement of employers in curriculum development, presented in table 1, was found minimal across all types of industry.

Table 1.

*Involvement of the Employers in the Curriculum Development by types of Industries*

| Type of Enterprises | Mean | N  | Std. Deviation |
|---------------------|------|----|----------------|
| Small               | 2.13 | 18 | .93            |
| Medium              | 2.10 | 31 | .93            |
| Large               | 1.97 | 30 | 1.05           |
| Average/Total       | 2.06 | 79 | .97            |

*Low (mean 1.00 to 2.33), Moderate (mean 2.34 to 3.67) & High (mean 3.68 to 5.00) (Best, 2007)*

Overall, the involvement of the employers in the curriculum development was assessed low with the mean of 2.06 and SD 0.97. Among the small, medium and large

Further, the survey result showed the level of involvement of employers in the different processes of curriculum development was also low.

The result shows minimal level of the involvement of the employers in the above stated processes irrespective of the size of the industries. In overall, their involvement was relatively lower in the written request for the training need analysis (TNA) and in regular board advisory meetings with the average score of 1.51 and 1.53 respectively. With regards to large sized enterprises, their involvement in written request of TNA and in regular advisory board meetings were among the lowest with the mean value of 1.51 and 1.53. However, their involvement

Table 2

*Level of Involvement of the Employers in the Different Processes of the Curriculum Development by types of industries*

| Indicators of Involvement       | Small Enterprises |    | Medium Enterprises |    | Large Enterprises |    | Total |    |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|----|--------------------|----|-------------------|----|-------|----|
|                                 | Mean              | N  | Mean               | N  | Mean              | N  | Mean  | N  |
| Written request of TNA          | 1.39              | 18 | 1.58               | 31 | 1.5               | 30 | 1.51  | 79 |
| Job analysis workshop           | 1.94              | 18 | 1.94               | 31 | 1.73              | 30 | 1.86  | 79 |
| DACUM workshop                  | 1.78              | 18 | 1.77               | 31 | 1.9               | 30 | 1.82  | 79 |
| Regular advisory board meetings | 1.39              | 18 | 1.61               | 31 | 1.53              | 30 | 1.53  | 79 |
| Technical committee meeting     | 1.94              | 18 | 1.68               | 31 | 1.77              | 30 | 1.77  | 79 |

enterprises, large enterprises had the least involvement with the mean 1.97 while small had slightly high 2.13.

in job analysis workshop was relatively higher for all enterprises.

Considering the survey result that shows nominal participation of employers in the curriculum development process, the researchers further explored the reasons for low participation with the relevant stakeholders who were involved in the process in the past. According to participants the fundamental principle of selecting the participants in the TVET curriculum development was 33% participation from the employers, 33% from the academic sector and 33% from the association, however, it was revised with 50% from the employers and 30% from the academic sector and 20% from the occupation association (CTEVT, 2020).

The participants of the interview shared that the relevant skilled experts are not recommended for the curriculum

development by the employers because the industries are affected in the production work as these skilled experts are engaged for 3-5 days during the workshop. Further, it was also argued that the employers yet to awareness that of benefit they would receive in a long run. However, the employers viewed it differently and complained that they are not involved meaningfully but just a cosmetic participant in the curriculum development process. The participant shared that they were informed to meet the quota for the curriculum development workshop. Likewise, the participants underpinned that they were informed informally and few hours before the curriculum development workshop. And it was on the basis of the personal contact. The employers are involved for the sake of formality as the competencies recommended are not incorporated. The

Table 3  
*Tabulation of interview summary of the participants*

| <b>Participants</b>                  | <b>Provision for participation</b>                                    | <b>Practice of participation</b>  | <b>View on current practice</b>   |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Curriculum Experts</b>            | Existing CTEVT law provides space to the employers                    | Very few relevant experts participate in the process                        | Employer hardly see the benefit of participation in curriculum designing process                  |
| <b>Curriculum Division Officials</b> | There is a guideline ensuing employer's participation                 | Proportion of employers is increased from 33% to 50%                        | The representative sent by employers are very less contribute in the curriculum designing process |
| <b>Employers</b>                     | Either individual or representative of employer's association invited | Send representative since the regular work in the company cannot be disturb | Not heard and invited just to fulfill the requirement   |

participants from the industry were not aware of the terminology and the process like DACUM. The employers underscored that to release for the few days for the curriculum is difficult in industry as it hampers the production work of the organization.

### **Employer Engagement is Cosmetic rather than Meaningful**

The involvement of employers in curriculum development and delivery at institutions is much essential to prepare the trainees for employment. This will bridge the gap between the industry and institutions and will enable the trainees to become industry ready (Balasubramani, 2014). Nevertheless, this research showed that the involvement of employers is low in the TVET curriculum development. Further, interaction with the relevant TVET stakeholders revealed that the reasons for the low participation was lack of formal approach for corresponding the employer. This study also corroborates the findings of Thapa (2018) that the employers' engagement in TVET system of Nepal is low. In the curriculum value chain framework Renold et al., (2015) posits the argument that the linkage between education and employment, in other word, the optimum engagement of employers in the curriculum development is possible when the decision-making power is shared among the stakeholders. Nevertheless, this study affirms that there is lack of power sharing in the curriculum making process. The employers in the interaction shared they had only a cosmetic participation that

was they were invited to meet the legal provision however rarely contributed into the process. While concerned authorities claimed that employer do not participate with contributing purpose if they were invited and send the representative who would not be able to contribute. One of the process experts shared the fact to cancel the scheduled curriculum development workshop because employers did not send the occupation expert when corresponded through the formal channel. If the experts were recommended from the employers, they sent the non-occupational experts like finance officer or the administration officer.

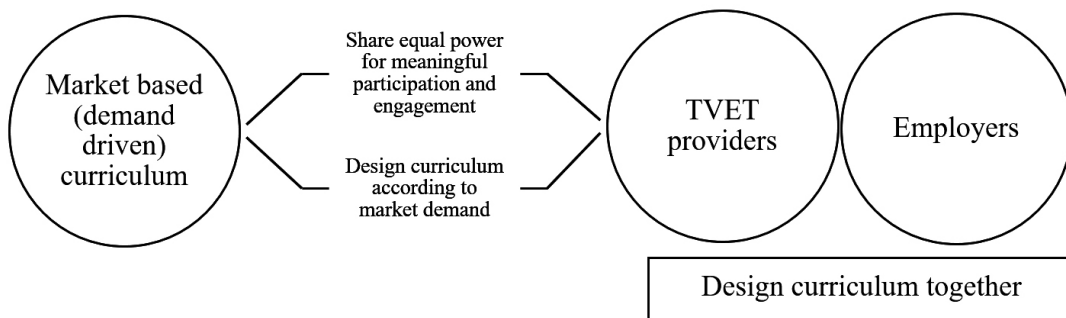
This study also revealed that employer of a small scale industries likely to participate more than the employer belonging to a large type. According to Badawi (2013) employers have different demand and TVET should meet the need of the market. A study conducted by Tien (2009) in Vietnam also found TVET providers had not met the requirement of employers who were seeking for high skilled workers and their curriculum was too general to meet the need. The participants in the study, particularly employers, expressed their concern on the relevancy of the curriculum in their specific job. In this regard, they do not find their participation meaningful as they have to prepare the worker at their own. Scesa and Williams (2008) argue that the low involvement might be seen due to the lack of interest, lack of understanding, lack of awareness, and lack of ability through time and work pressures on the part of employers,



and the vocabulary and language used during the process. However, in the context of this study, the fact that there are relatively more curriculum developed associated to small scale of enterprises than large one. This might be also a reason the employers from small scale industries engagement measured higher.

This study also found that employers had low engagement across all the stages of curriculum designing phase. The employers' perception for the low involvement in all these stages are that they were not treated in the respectful manner as curriculum division does not disseminate information in timely manner. They were invited at basis of personal contact and when it comes to the informal process, they do not take it as important to participate. Likewise,

Figure 1  
A model for preparing market-based curriculum



participants also agreed that they were not much familiar with these all the processes of curriculum development. This result is corroborated with the findings of Tien (2009) who found that TVET providers and employers were not very well networked

with each other. Further, the scholar found employers were not entertained to take part in some stages of such as identifying the right jobs for training, designing curriculum, coordinating practices for trainees, etc.

Thus, the ultimate goal of TVET is the employment and productivity; therefore, the employment and productivity need to be linked with the market demand. The curriculum can bridge the linkage, in this sense, the quality of the curriculum and market demanded curriculum is assured when the linkage of education and employment system is strong in the TVET system.

### Conclusion

The engagement of employers in TVET system is crucial as they are key stakeholders who consume the output of the TVET providers. Besides, the employers are also a collaborator who can contribute in the

different stages of TVET development. One such crucial is their participation in curriculum development process. The skills requirement by the market can be addressed through the means of curriculum. The curriculum mirrors the training needs

of global market. To reflect the market need, the involvement of the employers in TVET curriculum development is found essential. It is because despite high rates of unemployment, research indicates that employers are having a difficult time finding workers who have the knowledge and skills needed for available jobs which indicates that present curriculum does not reflect the demand of the employers. However, this study showed that the involvement of the employers in the TVET curriculum development is low and it is in the alarming situation. This clearly indicates that the involvement is not adequate, although TVET curriculum working procedure guides that 33% of employers' involvement is mandatory. There were many reasons such as power sharing, lack of formal communication, and disinterest towards the process. However, it is obvious that employers have a major role in the framing of competencies and ensure the relevancy and quality of TVET. Therefore, curriculum needs to be linked with industry to address technical and work readiness skills demanded by the employers. The curriculum developed with the involvement of the employers may also support to reduce the mismatch of the skills and enhance graduates' employment opportunity.

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