



## Article

# Development of Employability Skills through Work-Based Learning

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## Abstract

Employability is the ability to participate in the workforce. It comprises a variety of elements that are required to obtain employment, while the skills needed to get employment are employability skills. These skills are essential for upgrading knowledge, skills, ability, and entrepreneurial enthusiasm of a learner. Work-based Learning (WBL) is an education strategy that increases participation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) because there is support to enhance employability and upgrading skills for a competitive market. The aim of this article is to systematically review published research and explore the employability skills enhanced by WBL through the school-production unit. The finding of the review shows WBL in the school production unit of TVET institute is a positive indicator of employability, and they develop valuable competencies and employability skills. The review further shows that students enhance subject-specific technical skills, generic skills, or soft skills like communication skills, teamwork, problem-solving skills, critical thinking, leadership skills, entrepreneurial skills, and management skills. Likewise, they enhance personal skills like self-confidence, a positive attitude, and ethics. The article concludes that students gained their technical, generic, and personal employability skills from WBL through the school production unit in TVET institutions.

*Keywords:* work-based Learning, TVET, employability, employability skills, school production unit

## Introduction

Enhancing employability of graduates is a primary objective for both students and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) schools. Employability refers to the capacity to engage in work and encompasses a range of factors that are sufficient to secure employment (Yorke, 2010). According to Zegwaard et al. (2017), employability mostly consists of technical skills and general abilities that are necessary for graduates to be deemed employable.

Employability skills refer to the abilities that employers consider necessary for newly hired graduates to effectively perform in the new work setting (Geel, 2017). Employability skills encompass a set of crucial abilities that must be cultivated in each person to establish a productive and competent labor force. These employability skills play a significant role in enhancing the learner's knowledge, skills, abilities, and entrepreneurial passion. These abilities enhance graduates' preparedness for

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work and their ability to excel their chosen professions, thereby benefiting themselves, their teams, the community, and the economy (Kuh, 2008; Robinson, 2000; Yorke & Knight, 2007).

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is a learning process defined as “learning for work, learning at work, and learning through work” (Gray, 2001). WBL is a learning approach that enables students to make informed career decisions, establish connections with possible employers, and develop job-related skills that are applicable to future employment opportunities. Students can augment their personal and professional growth by engaging in work-related activities within a professional environment (Mohamed & Omar, 2010). WBL exemplifies the integration of theory and practice, serving as a foundation for the essential academic and occupational training required for TVET students (Cope, 2005). WBL can also implement student-centered learning, where the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator who aids students in their learning journey by offering necessary support.

The work-based learning programs commonly offered in TVET polytechnic institutions to prepare learners for the transition to work from the classroom include field trips, school-based production units, job shadowing, internships or practicums, clinical experiences (in health-related subjects), cooperative education, and youth apprenticeships (Haruna & Kamin, 2019). Every type of WBL program is a meticulously designed educational opportunity that combines classroom instruction with practical, well-organized work experiences.

The school production unit is an important WBL category, which is a section within a

school's laboratory or practice area where resources and personnel are utilized to produce goods or services. It facilitates student-centered learning and allows the instructor to serve as a tutor, aiding students in their learning process. Students produce goods and services in school production units under the supervision of competent instructors, allowing them to learn in a less restrictive atmosphere with little instructor oversight (Chukwu et al., 2019).

The Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) in Nepal promotes the establishment of school production units in its constituent schools. A constituent school refers to one of the individual schools that is CTEVT's own school. These schools are considered integral parts of the CTEVT and contribute to its overall mission and objectives. This initiative aims to enhance the practicality of education by integrating classroom learning with the application of creativity and innovation in the production of goods and the provision of services to enhance students' employability skills.

This article examines the implementation of a school production unit as work-based learning and explores how this practice enhances employability skills. My current study answers the research question: How does work-based learning through the school production unit develop the employability skills of TVET students?

## Methods

In order to gather answers to the above research question, I conducted a thorough electronic online search of databases, including the Research for Life, Google

Scholar, and ProQuest, using terms such as 'work-based learning', 'school production unit', and 'employability skills'. I limited my search to literature published after 2013. Using quite one form of searching strategy reduces the potential for an incomplete or biased search and improves rigor. Duplicate publications were identified and excluded. I shortened and reviewed the chosen twenty studies for the school production unit, including WBL and employability skills. I summed up the key findings of employability skills from the perspective of work-based learning through the school production unit.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings of this review show that TVET graduates can enhance various types of employability skills through WBL from school production units of technical and vocational institutions. Most of the studies show various employability skills, including soft skills (Asonitou, 2015; Christo- Baker et al., 2017; Orrell, 2018; Robertson, 2018), also known as generic skills (such as communication, organization, and teamwork), technical skills (Keiper et al., 2019) related to specific subjects hard skills and personal skills (Barker, 2014 ; Pescante-Malimas, 2017) such as resilience, self-confidence, and discipline. This article presents the findings based on the following categories of employability skills to provide a clear indication of how to enhance graduates' employability abilities. This classification system categorizes the skills into three distinct skills.

#### ***Technical Skills***

Technical skills refer to the collection of information and skills that are necessary

for proficiently carrying out a certain occupation. Technological competencies refer to the specific knowledge and skills required to efficiently perform specialized tasks utilizing relevant technological equipment and tools (Zaharim et al., 2009). The term "subject-specific skill" pertains to the specialized knowledge and competencies that are exclusive to the execution of a given occupation, such as doctor, chemist, or engineer. Proficiency in a specific field is a prerequisite to many technical occupations, and businesses still highly value this type of specialized knowledge. Employers select individuals for their organizations based on their subject-specific technical knowledge and skills (Bridgstock, 2017). Learners commence their professional work-based practice within the school production unit, engaging in authentic work tasks specific to their technical specialty. These techniques improve learners' technical skills in their respective professions, ultimately enhancing their employability through work-based learning in the school's production unit.

#### ***Generic skills***

Generic skills, sometimes referred to as key competencies and soft skills, encompass the qualities and talents required for success in both professional and personal contexts. Generic skills are also known as core skills, key skills, important skills, basic skills, and workplace expert abilities (Gibb, 2004). These skills are essential for enhancing interpersonal relationships and improving job performance in the workplace (Sharma, 2018). Employers are primarily interested in the proficiency of generic skills that recent graduates should have before joining the workforce (Olivares et al., 2019). WBL

enhances one's ability to think about their career and acts as a valuable tool for career guidance. It helps individuals explore many potential professions and alternative options for education and training that might complement their professional path (Musset & Kurekova, 2018). The school production unit workplaces offer a conducive atmosphere for students to develop valuable transferable skills. The classification of generic skills is divided into the following sub-categories.

#### *Communication Skills*

Communication is the act of transmitting and comprehending information between two or more individuals. It involves a sender conveying meaningful information to a receiver (Bhat & Kumar, 2013). According to Bhat and Kumar (2013), communication is the act of expressing thoughts or transmitting information between individuals, either formally or informally, with the intention of achieving mutual understanding. Graduates must possess the ability to read with precision, contemplation and engagement. Proficiency in persuasive writing and speaking, as well as the ability to provide and take feedback, is essential to students (Horn, 2009). Employers express contentment with the technical proficiency of graduates although they find their communication abilities slow off the mark. WBL enhances students' communication skills as an integral component of their learning methodology. WBL methods enhance communication skills through increased contact during the learning period, enabling individuals to meet industrial needs. This is due to the fact that students who have engaged in work-based learning possess tangible work experience and are familiar with the practical functioning of the

actual world. Consequently, implementing WBL through school productions enhances the communication abilities of pupils.

#### *Teamwork Skills*

WBL enables individuals to acquire teamwork abilities, a crucial soft skill sought after by employers. Employers require competent people with standardized employability skills to enhance the productivity of their organizations. Collaboration is a crucial employability skill for achieving success in the workplace. WBL through school production unit enhances students' levels of involvement, active involvement, and completion rates. Additionally, it can enhance the bond between the educational institution and the local community (Dogara, 2020) and enable students to perceive the practical relevance of their classroom knowledge (Alfeld, 2015). Evidence suggests that WBL enhances students' attendance and punctuality while also fostering their collaborative skills and problem-solving abilities within the classroom. Teamwork is a valuable skill that entails establishing connections and collaborating with others by utilizing essential strengths and routines in WBL. These include working effectively in a team, sharing experiences and feedback, engaging in effective communication, demonstrating a sense of responsibility, adhering to established practices and preferences, and participating in group decision-making (Alghamdi & Bach, 2018).

#### *Problem-solving skills*

Engaging students in school production units through WBL enhances their problem-solving abilities. This is a crucial generic skill that contributes to the enhancement of

employability skills. Problem-solving arises when there is a disparity between the present situation and a desired future situation. Due to significance of problem-solving in professional settings, it is the duty of TVET institutions and teachers to aid students in cultivating their essential abilities through work-based learning. TVET institutions and teachers can achieve this by providing students with opportunities and creating environments that facilitate the acquisition of problem-solving expertise (Daft & Marcic 2014). Problem solving necessitates that a student engages in creative, imaginative, critical, and analytical thinking. Additionally, they must possess the ability to use their acquired knowledge to address various challenges (Acar & Newman, 2003). The utilization of work-based methodologies within the school's production unit facilitates the cultivation of problem-solving abilities among students by providing them with practical experience in the process of reaching a viable solution.

#### *Critical Thinking Skills*

Critical thinking refers to the deliberate and self-regulated process of making decisions. Olivares et al. (2019) demonstrated that engagement in work-related tasks through work-based learning facilitates the cultivation of critical thinking skills. Critical thinking, as a cognitive ability, requires the use of logical and well-organized concepts in order to solve problems (Dwyer et al., 2014). Enhancing one's critical thinking abilities enables learners to construct arguments that are lucid, accurate and impartial. Additionally, they possess the ability to make sound decisions and assess circumstances impartially through the process of analyzing

and evaluating information. Work-based learning encompasses more than just problem-solving, since it also involves acquiring new information, abilities, and facts as well as developing critical analytical skills. These elements finally contribute to sustained learning (Briga et al., 2010). WBL demonstrates several essential talents that employers require, such as maturity and emotional intelligence, as well as abilities in team-building, negotiation, communication, and interpersonal interactions. Engaging in work-based learning inside the school production unit is expected to help young pupils develop critical thinking, creativity, innovation, confidence, tolerance, social awareness, democratic values, and a sense of responsibility.

#### *Leadership Skills*

The student possesses the capacity to exert a positive influence on the activities or behaviors of others towards the attainment of a shared goal. Employers want their staff to possess leadership abilities. The three fundamental components of leadership are capacity, inspiration, and a conducive atmosphere for leaders. Leadership talents consist of four levels of comprehension regarding the fundamental concept of leadership: the aptitude to guide projects, the competence to comprehend, the interchange of duties between the team leader and team members, and the skill to supervise team members (Leithwood et al., 2008). Students can cultivate leadership abilities by engaging in work-based learning, which involves applying creative thinking to generate imaginative conversations and foster transformative change (Passila et al., 2016).

### *Entrepreneurial Skills*

The possession of entrepreneurial talents is the paramount determinant of a nation's economic growth and competitiveness. WBL can offer valuable opportunities to the students from various fields for transformative learning experiences that strengthen their entrepreneurial competence. This approach has good impact on the development of entrepreneurship skills by actively incorporating students in entrepreneurial activities through a school production unit. Acquiring entrepreneurial abilities is crucial for students during their early years of schooling or later stages of college (Ali & Mahmud, 2018). Participants in work-based learning can explore career options, develop a sense of risk awareness, and enhance their ability to think creatively and innovate within the realm of business and work-related tasks through involvement in school production units.

### *Personal Skills*

Personal qualities refer to the positive attitudes and traits that an individual possesses and uses to succeed in his/her profession, including getting, retaining, and achieving success (Zaharim et al., 2009). Employability encompasses a student's ability to actively develop, obtain, adjust, and continuously enhance the skills, knowledge, and personal qualities that enable them to secure and generate financially and personally fulfilling job prospects (Oliver, 2015). WBL improves individual attributes and skills by acquiring expertise in collaboration, effective communication, critical thinking, and analytical proficiency within a production unit based in an educational setting. WBL can develop the following personal skills to enhance employability:

### *Self-confidence*

The school production unit facilitates WBL, giving students the opportunity to develop maturity and confidence through their interactions with various adults who serve as their colleagues (Neyt et al., 2018). When learners are provided with the chance to demonstrate their abilities, successfully tackle tasks, and overcome challenges in a professional setting, WBL can enhance their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Darche et al., 2009). Students who may struggle academically and are perhaps discouraged by the emphasis on theoretical concepts in certain general education courses can find WBL particularly motivating.

### *Positive Attitude*

A positive attitude incorporates traits, such as self-regulation (the ability to control one's reactions to circumstances), self-motivation, adaptability, resilience in the face of work-related stress, accountability for one's actions, and efficient time management. Personal attributes, such as self-assurance, integrity, proactivity, and an optimistic mindset have a greater impact on WBL compared to conventional educational environments, hence enhancing crucial employability skills.

### *Ethics and Moral Skills*

Students demonstrate the capacity to reflect upon, scrutinize, and evaluate ethical dilemmas while also employing moral discernment in situations that pertain to their own self, their occupation or field, and surroundings through experiential learning in the school's production unit. Adhering to both elevated professional and ethical standards is necessary to foster positive social connections and achieve prosperous

professional endeavors. According to Ali and Mahmud (2018), there are three stages involved in the development of professional ethics and moral skills. These stages include: understanding how economic, environmental, and socio-cultural factors influence professional practices; being able to evaluate ethical problems and make informed decisions to solve them; and demonstrating ethical behavior while also recognizing one's social responsibilities. Exhibiting ethical commitment is the capacity to act in accordance with moral principles, especially in the face of potential personal harm. Work-based learning initiatives cultivate this attribute, thereby enhancing one's employment opportunities.

### Conclusion

There are many forms of work-based learning programs, but they are all working towards the same objective, which is to provide students with practical experience in the working world. The school-based production unit is one of the important categories of WBL which is responsible for promoting all three categories of employability skills. These skills are soft skills, also known as generic skills (e.g., teamwork, communication, etc.), discipline-specific technical skills (e.g., the skills of a professional subject), and personal attributes (e.g., self-confidence, ethics), which are relevant to employment and desired by employers in their institutions with the goal of enhancing graduate employability skills. On the basis of the discussion of this study, it can be concluded that the implementation of work-based learning through the school production unit is beneficial for increasing the employability skills of TVET students.

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