



Article

Strengthening TVET through Private Sector Engagement in Nepal

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to scrutinize existing legislative frameworks, policies, and the present scenario of private sector engagement in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Nepal to understand their roles in developing a competitive technical and vocational workforce equipped with 21st century skills for employability. Utilizing qualitative research, the study reviews TVET-related legislative and policy documents as well as current implementation practices. Additionally, it uses Nepal as a case study to explore the tripartite relationship among the government, TVET providers, and private sector employers. It also reviews policies and plans, including the TVET Sector Strategic Plan (2023-32) and the 16th Periodic Plan, which emphasize collaboration between the government, academia and industry to create the skilled workforce. Despite efforts, the current state of TVET in Nepal, which is largely managed by CTEVT, shows minimal involvement from private sector employers compared to the government and TVET providers. Such insufficient industry engagement results in adverse impacts on graduates' employability. The study concludes urgency of effective collaboration among government, TVET providers, and private sector employers and calls for reform in legal and policy frameworks and the adoption of strategies to encourage meaningful private sector engagement in TVET. These strategies include apprenticeships, internships, and dual VET systems. This approach will not only help Nepal maintain a balanced relationship among key stakeholders but also enhance quality and relevance of TVET programs, leading to better employment opportunities for graduates and a more competitive national economy.

Keywords: TVET, private sector employers, work-based learning

Background

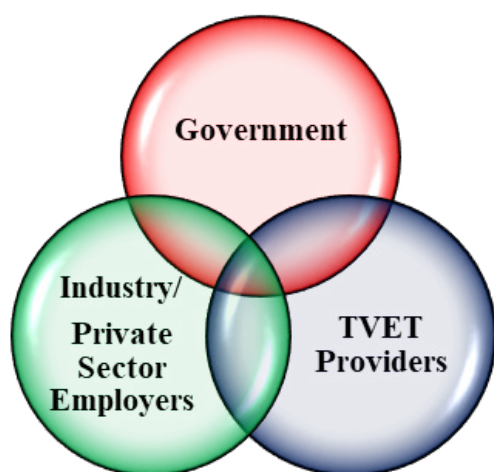
A balanced collaboration among the government, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) providers, and the private sector employers/industry, as depicted in Figure 1, ensures that the TVET system aligns with labor market needs.

In Nepal, it's frequently argued that the relationship among these three entities is imbalanced with a notable lack of meaningful engagement of the private sector employers.

This imbalanced relationship might be

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Figure 1: *Trilateral Relationship between Government, TVET Providers and Industry/Private Sector Employers*



the reason behind Nepal's struggle to cost-effectively develop a competitive workforce that can enter, sustain, and succeed in the labor market, and confidently meet the challenges of 21st century domestic and global needs. Therefore, to maintain a balanced relationship among these three entities and meaningfully engage private sector employers in TVET, it is essential to identify the root causes through an in-depth analysis of existing legal and policy frameworks, organizational arrangements, and practices.

In this connection, this study scrutinizes existing legislative frameworks, policies, and the present scenario of private sector engagement in TVET in Nepal to understand their roles in developing a competitive technical and vocational workforce equipped with 21st century skills for employability. Utilizing a qualitative research, the study reviews TVET-related legislative and policy

documents as well as current implementation practices. Additionally, it uses Nepal as a case study to explore the tripartite relationship among the government, TVET providers and industry.

Governing Frameworks Related to the TVET System of Nepal

The existing governing frameworks detailing the provisions, defined roles, responsibilities, and gravity of participation of the Government of Nepal, TVET providers, and private sector employers within Nepal's TVET ecosystem are analyzed below. However, the analysis primarily focuses on the provisions explicitly and implicitly emphasized in these frameworks concerning the involvement of private sector employers.

Statutory Provisions

The Constitution of Nepal aims to develop competent, competitive, ethical and dedicated human resources for the national interest. It seeks to make education scientific, technical, vocational, empirical, employment-oriented, and people-centered (Article 4.51-Ja-1). The Constitution of Nepal implicitly highlights the importance of meaningful engagement of private sector employers. Without their involvement, education can be made technical, scientific, and empirical, but it is challenging to make it professional, employment-oriented, and aligned with societal needs.

The Education Act (1971) mandates a technical stream in secondary education

(Grades 9-12) with an added one-year on-the-job training (OJT). This stream aims to prepare students for higher education or immediate employment. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) runs the 9-12 technical stream through the Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) in limited subjects such as civil engineering, electrical engineering, computer engineering, animal science, plant science, and music. However, this stream is facing several challenges, including OJT placement and limited private-sector employers' engagement.

The CTEVT Act, 1988 mandates the Council to provide technical and vocational education, set skill standards, and certify to produce a TVET workforce. Similarly, the CTEVT Regulations (1994) include provisions (Chapter 4, Rule 13-16) on industrial apprentices and the committee for facilitating the programs. The committee, comprising 36 percent industry representation, is responsible for developing and implementing curricula for the industrial apprenticeship training. The committee also focuses on improving the quality of training and ensures coordination among the stakeholders.

The Labour Act (2017) includes provisions (Sections 16 and 17) for entering and learning at the workplace as an intern, apprentice, or trainee, with apprentices learning as per prescribed curriculum. This law paves the way for collaboration with industry to foster learning in a particular trade or profession.

In this context, concerning the aforementioned

provisions, it can be asserted that key statutory frameworks, including the Constitution of Nepal, the Education Act (1971), the CTEVT Act (1988) and Regulations (1994), and the Labour Act (2017), are conducive to private sector employers' engagement in TVET in Nepal.

Policies and Plans

From the onset of its development initiatives, Nepal has prioritized TVET. Some plans have focused on expansion, while others have aimed at improving quality and creating jobs. The Ninth Periodic Plan marked the entry of the private sector into TVET, and its contributions continue. However, at this time, the entry of the private sector was not as industrialists providing work-based learning, but only as TVET institution operators. Since the implementation of the Tenth Periodic Plan, Nepal has concentrated on expanding access, ensuring inclusion, enhancing relevance and quality, and securing sustainable financing to develop the workforce through TVET, thereby driving socio-economic development.

Likewise, the TVET Sector Strategic Plan (2023-32) aims to enhance the quality, relevance, and access to TVET to meet the evolving needs of the labor market. The plan emphasizes the importance of collaboration among the government, academia, and industry to create the skilled workforce that can contribute to the country's economic growth and development. It envisions making Business and Industry Associations' (BIAs) engagement productive and all the

qualifications respond to the employment market.

In line with the TVET Sector Strategic Plan (2023-32), the current 16th Periodic Plan (FY 2024/25-2028/29) of Nepal aims to promote good governance, social justice and prosperity. A significant focus within this plan is on enhancing the TVET sector to meet labor market demands and support economic growth. Key objectives related to TVET in the plan include: (i) improving access and equity, (ii) enhancing the quality and relevance of TVET programs to align with industry standards and labor market needs, (iii) strengthening governance and management, and (iv) promoting public-private partnerships by ensuring balanced collaboration among the government, private sector employers, and educational/TVET institutions.

The TVET Sector Strategic Plan and the 16th Periodic Plan are both aligned with the National Education Policy 2019. The National Education Policy 2019 aims to develop a workforce that is competitive, well-organized, technologically adept, productive and employable to drive the country's progress. This will be achieved through inclusive, equitable, and affordable employer-led market-responsive TVET. One of the key strategies is to secure sustainable investment and encourage active participation of stakeholders in the TVET sector.

In this context, referring to the aforementioned plans and policies, it can be

asserted that key documents, including the periodic plans, the TVET Sector Strategic Plan (2023-32), and the National Education Policy 2019, significantly underline the engagement of private sector employers in Nepal's TVET system. This emphasis is made without undermining the roles and responsibilities of the two other entities, namely the government and TVET providers.

Organizational Arrangement of TVET in Nepal

In addition to the 9-12 technical stream governed by the MoEST, the Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) in six specific subjects through its 537 schools, the majority of TVET is overseen by the CTEVT. The CTEVT Act, 1988 mandates the Council to provide technical and vocational education, set skill standards, and certify to produce a TVET workforce. CTEVT strives to manage and ensure the affordable access and quality of TVET in coordination with other TVET stakeholders. As the apex body of TVET, CTEVT caters to 18-month pre-diploma and 24-month apprenticeship programs equivalent to the tenth grade and diploma/proficiency certificate level programs equivalent to the 12th grade through 1,169 technical schools and polytechnics. This includes 66 constituent institutions, 57 partnership, 639 community schools, and 407 private technical schools and polytechnics with a focus on agriculture, engineering, health, and hospitality sectors. The Office of the Controller of Examinations (OCE) tests and certifies graduates. Additionally, as many

as 1621 affiliated private training providers nationwide offer short-term and professional vocational courses (CTEVT, 2024).

The National Skill Testing Board (NSTB) tests and certifies both formally and non-formally acquired skills. NSTB has 50 percent representation from the private sector employers on its board. Additionally, six Sector Skill Committees (SCCs) have been formed with 10 out of 11 members from among the private sector employers. There are also 27 Technical Sub-Committees (TSCs) led by private-sector employers. Similarly, private-sector employers are involved in the curriculum design phase. CTEVT, Curriculum Development and Equivalence By-law 2023 (By-law 15) permits stakeholders, including private sector employers to design short-term TVET curricula.

Despite this, all the aforementioned TVET schools are on par with other general education schools in Nepal. These technical schools and training centers are solely established as TVET providers and lack direct connections to the industry or private sector employers. Consequently, the participation of private sector employers in TVET implementation is minimal except for a few apprenticeship programs.

TVET Programs and Implementation Modality in Nepal

TVET programs in Nepal range from short-term vocational courses to comprehensive professional and diploma (equivalent to +2 level) programs across various sectors, mainly in agriculture, health, engineering and tourism. Table 1 depicts the TVET programs and implementation modality in Nepal.

Table 1 : TVET Programs and Implementation Modality in Nepal

SN	Program	Modality	Governed by	Managed by	Certification
1	9-12 Technical Stream	School-based	MoEST/ CEHRD	School	National Examination Board
2	Diploma/Proficiency Certificate Level	School-based	CTEVT	Technical School/ Polytechnic	CTEVT Office of the Controller of the Examination (OCE)
3	Pre-Diploma (18 months)	School-based	CTEVT	Technical School	OCE
4	Pre-Diploma (24 months)	Work-place based	CTEVT	Technical School	OCE
5	Professional Course (1,696 hours)	Training Institute based	CTEVT	Training Institute	Skill Testing NSTB
6	Short-term training programs	Training Institute based	Different actors	Training Institute	NSTB
7	4 (2+2) Year Vocational Program (Apprenticeship Course)	Workplace-based	Butwal Technical Institute (BTI)	BTI	BTI

Apart from the 9-12 technical stream and Diploma/Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL) courses, other courses such as Pre-Diploma, Professional, and short-term training programs are non-academic. There is no credit transfer mechanism for these courses. As a result, graduates of these non-academic courses face barriers to vertical upward mobility.

Most of the programs except the apprenticeship mentioned, are school-based with minimal involvement from industries/private sector employers except during the design phase of the TVET system (Bhattarai, 2019). As a result, students rarely get the world of work exposure/the relevant skills needed for the workplace/job market. TVET institutions produce graduates focusing only on technical competencies while overlooking employability skills (Sharma & Bhattarai, 2022a).

Even in the 24-month pre-diploma (dual VET) program, schools take the lead with industries or the private sector employers only supporting the work-based learning component of the curriculum. Therefore, it can be said that industry participation in TVET implementation in Nepal is not satisfactory.

Challenges and Key Strategies for Collaboration

Work-based learning approaches such as apprenticeships, internships, and dual VET systems are crucial frameworks that can substantially enhance the meaningful

engagement of private sector employers in TVET, ensuring that the system aligns with labor market demands.

However, engaging the private sector employers in TVET presents several challenges. Private sector employers' primary business is not supporting or providing workplaces for learning. Additionally, ensuring that the TVET program aligns with current industry demands can be difficult, as the industry needs rapid development. Securing adequate funding and resources from the private sector to support TVET initiatives can also be challenging. Hence, a conducive environment needs to be created for their meaningful engagement in the TVET system through legislation, tax exemptions or subsidies, or public-private partnerships (PPPs) to establish joint committees to oversee competency standards and curricula design, development, and execution of training programs and resource allocation. By sharing the benefits, PPPs harness the strengths of both sectors, enabling the effective sharing of resources, expertise, and practical experience.

In today's fast-changing landscape, balanced collaboration among government, schools, and industry might function as a crucial strategy for enhancing learning outcomes and preparing students to meet the present day workforce demands . For this:

- The government plays a crucial role in facilitating the relationship between schools and industry/private sector employers by implementing appropriate

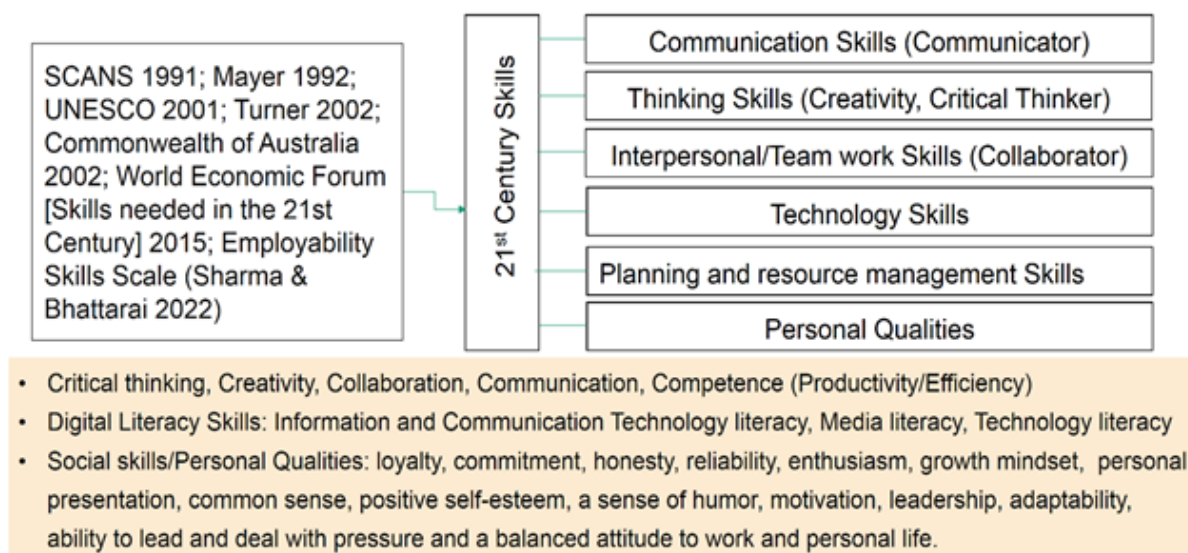
policies, plans, regulations, strategies, and quality assurance mechanisms.

- Skill mapping exercises can be conducted jointly to identify the skills required in various industries. The information and insights gathered must be utilized during the competency standards and curricula design to ensure the TVET curricula align with job market demands.
- The industry takes the lead while designing standards and curricula. It gets support from other stakeholders while designing and updating curricula.
- The industry operates as the locus to produce TVET workforce.
- The school as a source of the production of a competent and relevant workforce collaborates by providing the learner with real-life cases and problems, problem-

based learning, work-based learning as per needs specified by the partners from the industry. The learner gets adequate opportunities to strengthen employability skills.

- The industry supports academia/TVET providers in providing professional development opportunities for TVET teachers so that they would keep abreast of industry trends and technological advancements.
- Effectiveness of collaborative programs can be monitored jointly to ensure continuous improvement and adaptation to changing industry needs.
- Currently, most TVET programs except a small number of apprenticeship (Dual VET) programs are conducted in a school-based modality. Therefore, a strategy

Figure 2 : Trilateral Relationship between Government, TVET Providers and Industry/Private Sector Employers



should be implemented to gradually transition from school-based learning to work-based learning, considering the scale of the industry.

Role of Private Sector Employers in Enhancing Employability Skills of TVET Graduates

In addition to the technical or vocational skills, individuals need to develop other competencies to secure employment, excel in their roles, and achieve career success. These competencies, often referred to as the 21st century skills, are also known as employability skills, soft skills, and job readiness skills. Figure 2 depicts these skills.

This brings up the question: Are these competencies included in Nepal's TVET curricula? Neupane and Pradhan (2014) argue that the TVET curricula in Nepal fail to include critical employability skills, resulting in graduates' dearth of skills to apply in the workplace. This claim remains valid because the curriculum development process has not changed.

Without work-based learning, even if these subjects are included in the designed curricula, learners cannot develop the competencies needed to secure, sustain and succeed in the job market. Bhurtel (2012) claims that apprenticeship programs could enhance employability skills among graduates. Likewise, TVET teachers and private sector employers in Nepal believe that work-based learning opportunities significantly enhance the employability skills of TVET graduates

(Sharma & Bhattarai, 2022b). This aligns with Bandura's social learning theories (1977), which state that individuals learn best by observing, associating and emulating those around them.

However, it is not necessary that the work-based learning experiences have to be occurred exclusively in the workplace. In Nepal, where the industry cannot fully accommodate all TVET students in collaboration with employers, most of the work-based learning experiences can be provided to students at school, too. It primarily relies on the methods and approaches employed. The methods and approaches such as case studies, project, and problem-solving activities, group work, industry excursions, management of industry experts as guest speakers for session delivery, and learning factory (production unit) at school can be applied to provide work-based experiences to the learners at school (Sharma & Bhattarai, 2022b)

Conclusion

Effective collaboration among government, academia/TVET providers, and industry/private sector employers is imperative to prepare a workforce equipped with the competencies required for the 21st century labor market, and address the contemporary challenges. However, the current imbalance, particularly the limited involvement of private-sector employers, hinders the effectiveness of the TVET system in meeting labor market demands.

It is essential to analyze and reform existing legal and policy frameworks and organizational arrangements. Additionally, it is equally necessary to adopt approaches that promote apprenticeships, internships, and dual VET systems. By doing so, Nepal can enhance the quality and relevance of its TVET programs as envisioned in the TVET Sector Strategic Plan (2023-32). This will ultimately lead to better employment opportunities for graduates and a more competitive national economy.

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