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Initiations of Employer Engagement in Training Delivery of TVET Programmes

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Dakchyata: TVET Practical Partnership Programme

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Abstract

Engagement of employers in the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system is needed not only to increase the training capacity but to ensure the TVET is demand-driven, quality oriented, future focused and provides the economy with the skilled workers it needs. Employer engagement in TVET system covers a spectrum of cooperation and involves small participation to build the trust required to develop more robust long-term engagement strategies. Developing engagements with employer and employer's associations at all levels of the training programmes life cycle facilitate the development of workable solutions for training-to-work transitions. The employer has a crucial role to play in the delivery of training programmes. Engagement of employer is an essential component of overall training programmes and leads to developing responsive labour market skill needs, supporting priority economic sectors, training design and development, training delivery and post training support to develop ongoing dialogue with employer and employer associations. The need to increase the engagement of employers in TVET programmes has been known for many years in the country, however, employer engagement in training delivery of TVET programme is under-explored in Nepal. This article addresses the existing situation, explores issues, and share some practicable initiations of employer engagement in the TVET programme.

Keywords: Employer engagement, Industry Institute Linkage, Public Private Partnership, Training Delivery, Workplace based Training

Introduction

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system all over the world have realized that there should be joint efforts between public and private sector to provide technical training programmes. As the private sector is the major employer of TVET graduates, it is essential that employers should have a key role in all stages of training programme. The engagement of private sectors, such as private

companies, employers, employer associations, chambers, professional bodies, and employee unions, can enhance the integration of training delivery in the training cycle and ensure the trainees acquire skills needed by the industry.

In most of the developing countries, the TVET system is hampered by poorly coordinated, outdated curricula as well as traditional training delivery strategies

(Mathew, n.d.). Similarly, instructors generally lack workplace based practical experiences and relevant classroom equipment. TVET managers and instructors often fail to recognize their roles in promoting employment and employability (Blank, William E. (1982): Handbook for developing competency-based Training Programs). This realization resulted in the designing of more relevant and innovative approaches in the delivery of TVET programmes. One of them is to engage employers in the actual delivery of the training programme. The engagement of employers can be made in various areas of the training delivery stage of TVET programme. Some of the possible areas of engagement are on-the-job training (OJT), workplace-based training, industrial field visits, industrial exposure, industrial attachment, industrial immersion, exchange of faculty, industry-based project assignments, production-cum-training centre, participation in training programme evaluation, post training support, joint seminars and conferences, entrepreneurship development etc (Rajput. 2019).

The main objective of this article is to examine the situation of the collaborative approaches and practices of employers and the communities in the training delivery of the Nepali TVET programmes. While doing so, I also explored the issues and challenges of such engagement and highlighted some innovative initiations, taking the case of Dakchyata: TVET Practical Partnership Programme. The programme is led by Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, managed by British Council and funded by European Union (EU) Delegation to Nepal. It is a skills development programme to strengthen and implement a more effective policy in the TVET sector and responsive to labour market needs by engaging the private sector in the TVET programmes. The views expressed in this article are my own and does not entitle to my organizations where I worked. The article is primarily based on review of the current practices and desk review of the country practices on employers' engagement in the training delivery stage.

Theoretical Perspectives of Employers' Engagement in Training Delivery of the TVET Programme

According to UNESCO (2009), Public Private Partnership (PPP) is perceived as a mechanism to shift from a supply-driven to a supply and demand-driven approach that is needed to address youth unemployment. While supply driven training means producing skilled manpower needed for economic development without referring to the employers' needs. Demand driven is customized to respond directly to specific requirements of employers' needs in the labour market and usually leads to employment or self-employment.

PPPs in TVET can be identified as "a formal relationship with shared responsibilities between public and private sector actors in co-operation to achieve mutual goals that may take the form of a joint business venture, a joint education and training agreement, or a social partnership structured around a social agenda" (Kruss, 2017). The key concepts of linkage between industry and institution in the TVET system might be defined as any arrangement between TVET institutions and industries that requires mutual coordination and/or exchange of resources and activities (Khambayat, 2018). In a market economy, public-private partnerships (PPPs) act as bridges to link education and employers. The term is used as shorthand for a range of public policies, funding systems, and curriculum frameworks that have as a shared goal a tightened level of communication among educators and employers (Hawley 2007).

Employer engagement is defined as a range of activities, initiatives and approaches which are best conceptualised as a continuum (Kettle 2018). It includes responsive teaching and learning developments for upskilling and developing people already in work as well as fostering capability and attributes to enhance the employability of students in higher education.

Caves et al. (2016) developed a rubric of the employer

engagement in delivery phase of the TVET system as “no engagement during training phase to irregular non-productive workplace learning without curriculum (i.e., job shadow,) to productive workplace learning (i.e., internships) without curriculum to productive workplace learning with curriculum.

Practices of Employers’ Engagement in Training Delivery in Nepali TVET Programme

At the crossroad of professional careers as a TVET practitioner, I found several practices of employers’ engagement in the delivery of Nepali TVET programme. Some of them are briefly explained below:

Butwal Technical Institute (BTI) has been running the apprenticeship course in some of the industrial trades (Mechanical, Plumber and Electrician) since its establishment in 1963. The trainees receive classroom instruction followed by comprehensive practical and on-the-job training in collaboration with the affiliated private industries. In this training delivery approach, trainees will spend more than 80% of their training period at the workplaces receiving direct instruction from industry professionals. This approach to training delivery has been replicated now by CTEVT in the name of Industrial Apprenticeship Training Program (Nepali Translation: Aaudhogik Prasikshyarthi) from 2019. The 24-month period Apprenticeship training programme is being implemented with financial assistance from the Enhanced Skills for Sustainable Rewarding Employment (ENSSURE) project. The Industrial Trainee Training Apprenticeship Programme is being implemented now in Electrical Engineering, Information Technology, Hotel Management, Automobile Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering.

Considering the importance of Public Private Partnership in skill development for enhancing national productivity and poverty reduction, Government of Nepal and Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) came

up with an idea of establishing the "Elam Parshikshan Kendra (Trade Schools)" in the year 2003. This approach was a realization of the Government and Industry and business sector that mutual collaboration is essential between the two in order to make vocational training programs need responsive and relevant to the needs and requirements of the community and the individual. However, the Government and business communities were not able to continue the partnership agreement after 2009.

Public and Community Technical Schools/institutes have been practicing joint management committees which consist of representatives from private and public sectors. In the same way, some privately owned technical schools have also been involving representatives from the public sector in their school management committee (www.ctevt.org.np). Similarly, some of the CTEVT Technical Schools are also practising Enterprise Advisory and Partnership Committee (EAPC) where more employers and employer associations are members of the committee in order to link the school’s programmes to the local employers specially in the organization of On-the-Job Training programme for the trainees of the schools (Skills for Employment Project 2014).

Private Technical Training Providers in Nepal have been organizing Industrial Exposure Visits for their trainees in order to expose them to the real-world work of the country. Industrial exposure bridges the gap between theoretical training and practical learning and thus helps TVET trainees to apply their technical knowledge in a real-life environment. It broadens the outlook of trainees towards different workforces among various industries by alerting them regarding different rules and regulations as well as varieties of industrial practices outside the classroom environment. It familiarizes trainees with manufacturing, designing, testing and analysis, products and automation etc.

Issues and Challenges of Employers' Engagement in the Training Delivery in Nepali TVET Programmes

There are several issues, problems, and challenges in engaging employers in training delivery in the country. I have captured and elaborated some of them from my practical experiences as below:

The employers also hesitate to provide On-the-Job Training, Apprenticeship Training and Traineeship because of the law and labour act provision. Big industries are reluctant to accept the trainees of the technical training institutes for on-the-job training because the trainees lack adequate technical expertise and are also concerned about the wear and tear of their tools and equipment.

Small and cottage sized industries do not have adequate necessary resources such as space, tools, and equipment to accommodate the on-the-job trainees. Similarly, these industries lack craft persons (supervisors) to provide appropriate training to the trainees.

The main concern associated with an extensive work placement approach to the delivery of TVET is the traditional timetable. There are some schools that would like to confine vocational education and training within the school gates preferring not to acknowledge how on-the-job training brings life to vocational education. The logistics of the school site, particularly concerning the primacy of the traditional school timetable can dictate and restrict which model of learning each student may have access.

The provision to provide wages and salary to the trainees is also another challenge with regards to on-the-job training and apprenticeship. The employers rarely cover such expenses and in worse cases, some employers expect adverse practices in engaging trainees in their workplace citing different reasons. The solution to this problem is not straightforward. Employers are generally willing to take on-the-job trainees and apprentices because they do not have to pay full wages of workers who do not have the

required skills, and they are eligible for monetary incentives.

Butwal Technical Institute started Apprenticeship Training Programme in 1963. Only in recent year, some donors funded TVET projects such as Enhanced Skills for Sustainable and Rewarding Employment (ENSSURE) have replicated Apprenticeship Training Programme in some of the trades.

Initiations of Employers Engagement in the training delivery of training providers taking the case of Dakchyata: TVET Practical Partnership Programme

Employer engagement in TVET, being the missing link, has been one of the major corner stones to be addressed by the EU-funded TVET Practical Partnership Programme. The overall objective of Dakchyata, a project under the above programme, is to spearhead interventions in the TVET Sector of Nepal by finding new and practical ways to engage the private sector specially employers of the concerned occupational sectors in further developments of TVET, thereby strengthening relevance and employability. This is sought achieved by enhancing active, practical, productive, and meaningful engagement of employers and employer associations in the overall cycle of TVET sector: analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation phases of the TVET system.

Here, I have explained in brief some of the practices initiated by Dakchyata: TVET Practical Partnership programme in the areas of employers' engagement in the training delivery of TVET programmes of the country and sources of the information drawn on here are from the Dakchyata documentation system (www.dakchyata-Nepal.org) and my own review of the literature.

Dakchyata has prepared different models where more and more employer's engagement in training is sought through private TVET providers either through private training institutes or employer associations (Pradhan, 2017). In these models, employers are

becoming increasingly involved by actively influencing and making decisions in the design and delivery of the TVET programmes while the training providers are giving space, for this shift to happen. These models have been prepared by reviewing international practices specially in Asia and African countries and moulded through extensive national employers and employer consultations and taking in the context of the development of TVET system in Nepal. At present, ten private TVET providers have started to implement these models in construction, tourism and agriculture sector throughout the country by practical partnership fund. Some of the models are explained briefly below where the role of employers and their engagement increases in the training delivery stage of the TVET programmes.

Training and Market Outlet Model (TMOM)

This model is a hallmark of Singapore skills system which adopts a practice, and application-oriented training approach that combines the learning and working environment from which realistic and relevant learning experiences arise. It is a technical & vocational education and training (TVET) methodology also known as “Teaching Factory Model (TFM)” developed by the Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP) in Singapore which emulates and integrates real-life industrial environment through hands-on and real-life application-oriented project work which is an integral component of the methodology. The Teaching Factory Concept makes learning more effective and efficient for students as it takes place in a realistic work of world environment. It integrates real-life industrial environment with the classroom teaching and learning environment. Students become more practice-oriented and focused on product development and problem-solving approaches. This practice-oriented training also increases the confidence and make them productive immediately upon employment (<https://my.southsouth-galaxy.org/en/solutions/detail/the-teaching-factory-concept>). In the developed model, both theoretical and practical training will be provided inside the premises of the training institute and gives

the trainees an opportunity to work in the actual work setting of the business set-up operated by the institute itself. The trainees will earn while learning when they work in the business outlet or production unit or market outlet or factory operated by the training institute itself. The products or services produced or rendered by the trainees during the training will be sold to the market. There is a learn-earn approach in this model for the trainees. There is on-the-job training in the market outlet and its relation to market relevance is obvious, but the employer’s side plays no direct role in this model. Thus, training institute is the key player in this model. The competency assessment will be conducted while performing the tasks in the market outlet. The final assessment will be conducted on the basic skills standard of the National Skills Testing Board (NSTB/CTEVT). Most of the implementing partners of Dakchyata under hospitality trade are practicing the model and capturing the lessons learnt.

Semi-Apprenticeship and Employment Model

Since large portion of the Nepali economy and employment opportunities are in nonformal and informal sector, developing skilled human resources for these sectors would be much easier by organizing unstructured training delivery modality. Informal and non-formal learning require different pedagogical models from those applied in traditional formal learning environments. Coffield (2000) argues that informal learning is indispensable, as it is how we acquire the everyday knowledge, practices, values and cultural norms required to live in society. As such, lifelong learning must be understood beyond the limited structures of conventional formal learning and the mindset changed to include informal and non-formal learning. The model is developed by reviewing the practices made in southeast Asia and based on the experiences of the national TVET practitioners of the country (Pradhan, 2017).

Thus, under this model, employers and training institutes work together to train the people. Theoretical and foundation trade related practical portion including occupational health and safety

training will be imparted in the training institute which has weightage of 20 percent of the total training period. 80 percent of practical training will be provided in the industry work site as a longer duration On-the-Job training (OJT). The training institute provides instructors who have strong instructional and occupational skills as roving instructors to train and supervise the trainees on the work sites. This model is also applicable for providing further training to existing workers of the employers to upgrade and reskill their skills at the work site of industry. In this model, the role of the training institute at classroom is limited, and the major role would be played by the employers and the roving instructors providing by the institutes. Even so, both the employer and the training institute play key roles in skilling the trainees. Such practices are more applicable where informal sector play a vital role in the economy of the country. Countries like Cambodia, Vietnam, South Asia as well as African countries have been successfully implementing such approaches of training needs analysis and training delivery (Shrestha, R.B. 2016). At present, many Dakchyata's implementing partners are practicing the model of training delivery. For the certification and recognition of learned skills and knowledge, a skill test will be conducted for career path.

Informal Apprenticeship and Employment Model

In this model, more than 90% of the practical training will be imparted within a business or industry by learning by doing and only 10% theoretical sessions will be provided at the training institutes. Informal apprenticeship refers to the system by which a trainee acquires the skills for an occupation in a micro and small enterprises, learning and working side by side with an experienced practitioner. A leading role of the employer is even more outspoken in this model. It is the training system of the informal economy. This model clearly underlines an employer led training approach and trainees will get wages when they work and learn in industry. Informal apprenticeships have been a traditional solution for skills development training in developing countries

like Nepal. In this type of apprenticeship, the arrangements of the training have neither legal status under existing legislation nor fall under the formal institutional regulation of any public sector TVET authorities. The model follows informal rules such as social norms, customs, or cultural values. These informal rules are socially enforced by informal mechanisms such as reputation, reciprocity, social sanctions, religious beliefs and so forth. There will be informal training agreement between training institute and employer/enterprise. It is a cost-effective training system since tools and equipment are already available in the enterprise and do not have to be purchased for training purposes. This model is borrowed from the ILO programme in Tanzania. ILO (2009) stated "Informal apprenticeship refers to the system by which a young apprentice acquires the skills for a trade or craft in a micro or small enterprise learning and working side by side with an experienced practitioner. Apprentice and master craftsman conclude a training agreement that is embedded in local norms and traditions of a society. Apprentices learn technical skills and are inducted into a business culture and network which makes it easier for them to find jobs or start businesses when finishing their apprenticeship" (A resource guide for Africa – upgrading informal apprenticeship).

The competency assessment on product or project or problem or unit will be periodically conducted jointly by the training institute and employer to make the trainee competent for the job. To validate the training, the contents of approved curriculum of CTEVT will be fully followed, and the skill test will be conducted immediately after the completion of the training.

Field based Agriculture Training Model

Under this model, the agriculture training provider collaborates with farmers' association, agricultural cooperatives, agriculture value chain actors for delivering the training. A model farm site is established among the farm of the trainees and practical demonstration of the crop or vegetable life cycle will be demonstrated in the selected model

farm site. A model farm serves as a learning centres for efficient techniques of agriculture, organic farming, and marketing of rural people. All learning takes place through group activity and are field based which empowers farmers to solve their own field problems with the assistance and guidance from experienced instructors. Trainees will further practice the learned skills individually in their own farm site. Training in a real farm along with gaining enterprising skills including product pricing methods and market linkage are critical features of this model. Additional training on entrepreneurial skills, value chain concept including financial and market linkage is also provided. For this model to be successful, trainers work with farmers in the farm environment with only very limited institute-based training for fundamental concepts, principles, and processes. The model encourages partnerships with local organisations to share knowledge and measure the benefits for farmers, families, and communities. It also links farmers and farmers' group with District Agriculture Offices, marketing channel such as wholesaler, collectors, retailers, and agricultural cooperatives.

The model has been prepared based on the Farmer Field School Approach (FFS) developed by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and Partners nearly 25 years ago in Southeast Asia as an alternative to the prevailing top-down extension method of the green revolution (A guidelines of Farmer Field School, Regional office for Asia and Pacific, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2021).

A skills test will be conducted in the cooperation with National Skills Testing Board/CTEVT. Most of the agriculture related grantees are piloting this model and generating lessons learned and good practices.

Space and Training Facilities Sharing model

Another model of partnering between training providers and employers is space and training facilities sharing model where both agencies share

their available spaces and equipment to implement training programmes. The main objective of this model is to make use of the unused or underused training space, tools, and equipment with the training providers. Business and Industry Associations and employers of the enterprises could take benefit of the unused or underused training facility/infrastructure and conduct training under their own management in the premises of the training institute. In the same way, training providers could take benefits of utilizing industry machine and equipment to train their trainees at industry workplace. The model is a cost-effective training system since the unused or underused physical as well as human resources of both the training providers and the employers could be used for the training purposes and save the expensive training cost. This approach mutually benefits both the training providers and employers who are working together by optimally utilizing their available physical and human resources in need of trained workforce. Some of the Dakchyata's grantees are at currently applying this approach (Shrestha, 2021).

At present, ten-private led TVET providers including employer associations are piloting and practicing the above models in their skills development programmes. Dakchyata is capturing and documenting their lessons learnt: what worked and what did not work. Lessons learnt from the implementing partnership pilot models (PP models) by ten private technical training providers would be reported back to the policy makers to explore possibilities of scaling up and replicating the sense of the successful PP models. The action will also encourage good practices to be replicated in other industrial sectors of the country. These lessons would also be shared with other TVET stakeholders so that they can benefit from these practices and explore possibilities of scaling up and replicating them in other industrial sectors across the country.

Conclusions

Employer engagement is not the same as "job placement" nor is it synonymous with "marketing to employers". Successful engagement translates

into a partnership or mutual support and understanding between TVET programmes and employers. Thus, promoting partnership between TVET providers and employers requires the availability of a legal framework that supports the establishment and enhancement of partnership. Engagement of employers and employer associations in TVET programmes should be guided by policies developed at the national level. Stakeholders' awareness and sensitization of the importance of public private partnerships in TVET system should be enhanced from federal to province and local level. There should be availability of appropriate structures within the TVET system that allows effective partnership at different levels: federal, provincial, and local as well as sectors through establishing councils, boards, and committees with representatives from all related stakeholders.

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