

Strengthening Employer Engagement in CTEVT Technical Schools: Some Practices and Initiatives

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Abstract

Developing engagements with private sector at all levels of the training programs facilitates the development of workable solutions for school-to-work transitions. Employer engagement in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system covers a spectrum of cooperation and involves small participation to build the trust required to develop more robust long-term engagement strategies. Engagement of employer is an essential component of overall training programs. It 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 employer has a crucial role to play in the overall training phases of the training programs. TVET programs as suppliers and the employers as customers are so interrelated that the development of both must go forward hand in hand having practical partnership. The need to increase and strengthen the engagement of employers in TVET programs has been felt for many years in the country. However, employer engagement in the TVET programs of the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) is under-explored in Nepal. This article addresses the existing situation, explores issues, and shares some innovative initiations to strengthen the employer engagement in CTEVT technical schools.

Key Words: *Employer engagement, Public Private Partnership, Training Cycles, Industry Institute Linkage, Workplace based Training*

Introduction

In Nepal, a developing country, the need of technical human resources is far more than the human resources with general education for the socio-economic development. The technically skilled human resources are

required not only for earning livelihood to the increasing number of unemployed and under employed people but also for economic development of the country. Throughout the present decade, the Government of Nepal has

become increasingly concerned over the need to produce adequate number of skilled human resources to maintain the demands created by many development activities. Hence, the need to intensify the technical education and vocational training to train and produce more technically skilled resources in various sectors is an urgent call today. The Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) offers full-fledged specialist education and training for 74863 regular students in a year from constituent schools, Technical Education at Community Schools (TECS), institutes under partnership modality, private training providers. (CTEVT Planning Division database 2021). It certifies pre-diploma (previously termed Technical School Leaving Certificate (TSLC) and 3-year Diploma programs, and a variety of short-term training courses. Similarly, Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology also runs technical education stream (Grade 9-12) in the general schools in five different trades: agriculture, civil, electrical, computer, and forestry. At present, there are 484 general schools which run such programs and providing technical education for around 23,124 students (CEHRD database 2021). Employer engagement in the different phases of the education and training programs of these schools/institutes is minimum, and the institutes are facing problems in many areas of the training programs.

The main objective of this short article is to examine the situation of the collaborative approaches and practices of employers and the communities in the TVET programs implemented by CTEVT. The author also explores the issues and challenges of such engagement and highlights some initiations for strengthening employer engagement in CTEVT schools, taking the case of Dakchyata: TVET Practical Partnership Program in Strengthening Employer Engagement in CTEVT Schools.

Practices of Employers' Engagement in CTEVT Technical Schools

In CTEVT, the practices of involving employers in the process of developing curricula started long ago. CTEVT Curriculum Division invites employers and expert workers from the related industries to seek their technical inputs while developing occupational profiles (OP) and the curricula. Similarly, National Skills Testing Board (NSTB)/CTEVT also engages with trade related experts from the related industries to solicit their technical inputs in the developing process of occupational skills standards. Both divisions apply a job analysis approach called DACUM (Developing a Curriculum) approach for developing OPs. In the same way, the NSTB has formed a sector skills committee to validate and endorse National Occupational Skills Standards (NOSS) and occupational profiles.

Most of the CTEVT's Technical Education Courses, such as Pre-Diploma and Diploma

courses have On-the-Job Training provision in the factories, development organizations, and government and non-government offices. The proportional weightage or duration of On-the-Job Training is around 25% of the total duration. During the training, the trainees are familiarized with the working environment. The trainees get a hands-on experience using machinery, equipment, tools and materials in the workplaces. An experienced employee or a supervisor or employer is executing the role of the mentor, who, through written or verbal instructions and demonstrations, are getting knowledge and passing company-specific skills to the trainees. The assessment of the performance of the trainees will be made by employer for this period of instruction which will be added in the overall assessment for the final certification. The provision has been made mandatory, which is clearly specified in the curriculum of CTEVT.

The CTEVT constituted Technical Schools/ Institutes bring guest speaker from industries to deliver the sessions on the real practical situation of the workplaces. Guest speakers expose students to real-world life experiences from the context of the workplace, and students get to experience the insights and perspective of an expert, who is in their field of expertise (Riebe et al., 2013). Research suggests several positive benefits of inviting a guest speaker to the classroom/ lecture as a pedagogical tool. The presence of guest speakers can foster active learning environment. Students are prompted to use critical thinking and will benefit from hearing

how to apply the theoretical concepts to which they are being exposed (Riebe et al., 2013).

The technical schools/institutes under CTEVT are organizing industrial exposure visits to their trainees in order to expose them in the real work of world in 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 on different rules and regulations as well as varieties of industrial practices outside the classroom. It familiarizes with manufacturing, designing, testing and analysis, products, and automation etc.

The CTEVT constituted technical schools/ institutes are practicing joint management committees, which consist of representatives from private and public sectors. In the same way, some technical schools owned by private sectors are also 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 programs to the local employers, especially in the organization of On-the-Job (OJT) Training program for the schools' trainees.

Issues and Challenges of Employers' Engagement in the CTEVT Technical Schools

There are several issues, problems, and challenges in engaging employers in training programs of the technical schools/institutes under CTEVT. Some of them are elaborated below:

Research and Information Division under CTEVT has been conducting labor market survey to assess the emerging needs of technical human resources in the country from time to time (CTEVT: Research and Information Division, October 2016). However, conducting local needs assessment to identify local skills demand by the technical schools/institutes is in minimal practice. Thus, most of the training programs of CTEVT schools has a mismatch between supply and demand of the skilled human resources. The mismatch also occurs in relation to skills taught in the technical schools and skills required by the employers (Shrestha, 2016)

It is observed that the majority of CTEVT instructors have come directly through an academic background from universities rather than industry sectors and consequently, are often unaware of current industry practice, up-to-date industry knowledge and workplace-based experiences. Thus, they instruct the trainees what they have learned during their academic course at university which would be far away from what the students need to learn to satisfy the needs of the employers (Skills for Employment/ADB, 2014).

The CTEVT schools from school management committee and other related committees to develop collaboration and partnership with employers and employer associations. The provision of representation of the employers in these committees are only ceremonial and not mandatory i.e., legal requirement. Their number is minimum, and the voices of the representatives would have no meaning in the decision-making process. Because of lack of legally mandatory provision in the committees, these committees seem to be ineffective and not properly functioning in order to achieve the objectives of the committees (Dakchyata, 2018).

There is considerable lack of coordination between technical schools/institutes of CTEVT and the employers who use the training graduates as skilled workforce. As a result, employments are not as per expected. In the same way, the employers do not get enough skilled workers to meet the industry needs.

Due to the ineffective linkage and network between CTEVT schools and employers, the employers hesitate to provide On-the-Job Training, Apprenticeship Training and Traineeship. Similarly, small and cottage industries do not have adequate resources, such as space, tools and equipment to accommodate the on-the-job training. These industries lack craft persons (supervisors) to provide and instruct appropriate training during on-the-job training. Big industries

are reluctant to accept the trainees of the technical schools/institutes for on-the-job training because of lack of the adequate technical expertise of the trainees and fear of wear and tear of their tools and equipment. Thus, the partnership between CTEVT technical schools and employers become weak.

The provision to provide wages and salary to the trainees is also another challenge facing the CTEVT schools 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 showing different reasons. The solution to this problem is not straightforward. In principle, 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.

Moreover, the CTEVT technical schools have Placement and Counselling Unit (PCU) in their schools to assist graduates in securing job. Post training support is the way to place the training graduates in self-employment and formal employment where they are suitable to perform their skills effectively (Skills for Employment Project, 2008). At present, due to not having adequate resources, including qualified human resources and less giving priorities, these units seem to be weak functionable.

Some Practices and Initiations of Strengthening Employers Engagement

The need to increase and strengthen the engagement of employers in TVET programs of CTEVT schools has been felt for many years. However, employer engagement in TVET programs of CTEVT schools is under-explored. In order to engage and strengthen the engagement of employers in the overall training cycle of the CTEVT schools, Dakchyata: TVET Practical Partnership program has developed a model named, “Strengthening Employers Engagement in CTEVT Schools (SEECs)”. The model has been developed after in-depth studies of the schools, such as self-assessment, field visits, consultation with selected CTEVT schools, local employers and employer association as well as consultation with key CTEVT personnel at central level (Dakchyata, 2019). The study referred and based on the quality standards for TVET institutions developed by Skills Development Project (SDP) under CTEVT (Skills for Employment, 2014). The above in-depth studies revealed that CTEVT schools lack the meaningful role and mechanisms for engagement of employers in the training design and development, training delivery, instructors’ up-to-date industry knowledge, schools’ management, and skills with the schools’ leaderships. The study was being carried out through the 9 identified Dakchyata Support Schools (DSS) across the agriculture, construction, and tourism sectors to strengthen their employer engagement activities in overall cycle of the training programs (project document of

Dakchyata's SEECs-2019). It has four key areas to strengthen the employer engagement in the schools, mentioned below:

Promote Training Relevance, Access, and Quality

At the local level, identifying demand of local skills and customizing learning resources to meet those needs helps to make training more relevant to local enterprises. Constant feedback from employers is the primary inputs to updating curriculum, while graduates can provide inputs on the relevance of their institution learned skills to performance requirements. These practices and initiations are, however, seen minimum in the real ground of CTEVT's technical schools. For these reasons, SEECs intends to engage employers in the pre-training phase. Thus, CTEVT schools develop collaboration and partnership with employers and employer associations to further verify the needs of the skilled human resources before conducting training programs for the same, so that more and more graduates will get employment and self-employed after training. In this connection, the school will also form a team for local market survey and conduct the survey for this purpose. Different approaches, such as rapid market appraisal, local training needs analysis, employer survey and assessment of the needs of local communities will be conducted in this stage to promote market and employers' relevant skills. Assessing the real needs of business, industry, or community is one of the most important tasks for any technical

training organization (Shrestha, 2016). The trainings are only successful if the needs assessors have managed to identify the real demand on the job market. The training programs, which focus on the needs of users, will be more successful (International Labour Organization, 2016: Labour Market Information: Guide to Anticipating and Matching Skills and Jobs Volume 1). Thus, conducting some form of needs assessment is usually the first step when designing a training course. The success of the training depends on the success of training needs assessment. Timely revised curriculum in line with the demand of job market attracts both trainees and employers towards vocational training programs (ILO, 2013). This process not only adds the locally demanded skills preferred by employers but also provides occupational interests of local youths.

Similarly, the schools will revisit the existing curricula developed by the CTEVT central level and revise it by incorporating the need of local employers. This activity will be done by establishing an Employers Information and Counselling Committee (EICC) or operationalizing Enterprise Advisory Partnership Committee (EAPC) at school/institute level where there will be adequate representatives from the private sector. The committee will review and add/delete the essential skills demanded at local level in the curriculum. The inputs from the local labor market survey will be highly considered while adding and deleting the skills of the existing curricula. Then, the school will recommend CTEVT Curriculum Division to approve the revised curricula.

The project supports to develop instructional materials, facilities, and assessment to enhance the quality and relevance of the programs. Instructional materials, also known as teaching/learning materials, are the collection of materials, including animate and inanimate objects and human and non-human resources that a teacher may use in teaching and learning situations to help achieve desired learning objectives (JSTOR, 2018. Instructional materials-news. newspapers. books. scholar). Depending on the learning objectives of the training program, instructional materials may include lesson plans, presentation slides, workbooks, handouts, training manuals, visuals, assignment sheets, project/problem works, computer-based lessons, and audio-visual aids. The EICC or EAPC will also provide industry relevant inputs in developing such materials.

Additionally, selected CTEVT's schools are also implementing public information campaigns to promote the access of training to the needy target group. The schools are working with communities and employers to increase the visibility of TVET programs and their benefits amongst young people, their parents and the wider public to shape positive attitude toward TVET and create awareness, promote TVET programs to the target youths. In this connection, schools organize public awareness programs at school and community level.

Promote Instructors' up-to-date Industry Knowledge and Skills and Involvement of Employers in Training Delivery

It was observed during the study that the majority of CTEVT instructors had come directly through an academic background rather than industry route. As a result, they are often unaware of current industry practice and workplace-based experiences. Thus, the SEECs intends to enhance the quality of program by developing pre- and in-service training that provide instructors' up-to-date industry knowledge and by embedding industry experts' inputs into training program delivery. In the same way, Instructional Skills (IS) training for schools' instructors will be implemented to improve the field, lab, workshop, and classroom instruction for those who need instructional delivery skills.

Training of Trainers (ToT) and instructional skills to improve the training delivery skills will be provided to the instructors from Training Institute for Technical Instruction (TITI). Different series of instructional skills will be provided based on the needs of the instructors. ToT is a program for the development of training delivery skills of those who wish to become trainers in the sector of their preference and aligns them with the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) (National Skill Development Corporation, India, 2018

In the same way, Occupational Skills Upgrading (OSU) training for schools'

instructors at industry workplace will be organized to upgrade their existing occupational skills and knowledge and proficiency by working in their trade specific workplaces like industries, workshops, and firms. For these purposes, skills gap assessment of instructors will be conducted in coordination of Employers Information and Counselling Committee (EICC), school and instructors. The mutually agreed skill upgrading list will be developed among themselves. A customized course will be developed for the selected instructors to equip and enhance with gap competencies. Then, industry placement will be organized for the instructors at the actual workplace in close coordination with EICC. A tripartite agreement along with roles and responsibilities will be made among industry, technical school and the instructors. Placement is made at such industry. A skill upgrading diary will be maintained by the instructor and employer, specifying the skills-one that have been improved and the others which need more practice. A self-assessment of occupational skills will also be maintained by the instructor himself (TITI, 2008). Skill upgrading assessment/evaluation will be done by the employer based on set criteria. OSU training will be like well-known program as “Industrial Attachment for Instructors in TVET Delivery”. According to Bax and Hassan (2003), industrial attachments usually refer to the formal placement of trainees in the workplace to

facilitate the achievement of specific learning outcomes that would potentially lead to their employability upon the completion of the training program. Industrial attachments typically involve training providers and industries (through employers and employer associations) forming partnerships to offer situated teaching-learning opportunities in the workplace so that learners and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) practitioners would have access to authentic experiences that only the workplace-based training can offer (as cited in Choy & Haukka, 2009). Similarly, the schools also invite employers to deliver the sessions and share what industry expects from the graduates. The schools also get feedback from employers on the strengths and weaknesses of employed graduates and recommendations on competencies they need.

Under the support, frequent and regular industrial visit for the students of the technical schools will be organised. Industrial visit is a part of the education, during which students visit companies and get insight on the internal working environment of the company. The industrial visit also provides an insight on how companies work, and the useful information related to the practical aspects of the course, which cannot be visualized in lectures (Rai, 2016). A school bus will be provided to each school to facilitate mobility of trainees and instructors between training institute and workplace, get a peek and be familiarized with the world of work, and build networks with industry/employers.

Promote Employability Skills of the Trainees

Through this model, CTEVT's schools are promoting employability through equitable access, developing employment and self-employment skills, and providing career advice, counselling, and guidance. These activities will be done during the selection of the trainees, training delivery period and at the end of the training. The objectives of counselling at different stages will differ as per the period. The schools conduct public information campaigns to promote the access of the training to the target group. The schools work with communities and employers to increase the visibility of TVET programs and their benefits amongst young people, their parents and the wider public to shape positive attitude toward TVET and create awareness, promote TVET programs to the target youths. This will further enhance awareness, easy access and information on choosing the right career options.

Schools organize job fairs, exhibitions, information campaign and invite employers to participate in the events to promote employability and linkage with employers to the trainees for employment. Job seekers and TVET students seeking Work-Based Learning Experiences attend job fairs to find out relevant openings and career pathways. For employers, job fairs are recruitment opportunities. TVET Colleges or skills training providers get chance to share information about their own program and find out more about developments in their fields (Skills Initiative for Africa, 2021: A manual on innovative skills program).

Similarly, the supports have been also provided to activate or reactivate existing schools' Placement and Counselling Unit (Skills for Employment Project. 2008). An in-house training on Entrepreneurship Development and Career Counselling to the personnel working in the unit will be organised so that they would be able to conduct such training and provide counselling and guidance services to the trainees and graduates of the institute. The institute also invites successful entrepreneurs and TVET graduates to come and share their own experiences and success stories in their work with on-going trainees. Additionally, SEECs also provides support to schools in organizing "Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) training", "Start and Improve Your Business Training (SIYB)" and "Improve Your Business Training" to the out-going trainees and graduates for the self-employment creation and promotion (International Labour Organization, 2014).

Promote School's Governance and Coordination

It is the well-known fact that CTEVT schools' leaders often have limited expertise, autonomy, and confidence in dealing with employers and employer associations. Similarly, CTEVT's schools at local levels have no or little provision for establishing and implementing partnerships with employers and other social partners in surrounding areas. To address the issue, the model is also building school leadership's capacity for effective employer engagement

by embedding employers into school governance structures and leadership development activities. The schools are engaging employers to obtain inputs for quality assurance and assessment, school governance structures and development of leadership skills in engaging the employers in the training programs.

In order to have appropriate structures within the school programs that allows effective partnership with the employers, the schools are reforming and establishing School Management Committee (SMC), Enterprise Advisory and Partnership Committee (EAPC), Employers Information and Counselling Committee (EICC) etc, in order to involve local industry leaders, business people, representatives of District Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) and local community leaders. Such committees will support school in different aspects, including but not limited to development of annual work plans, strategies for coordination and linkage with local communities, provision of on-the-job training (OJT) and workplace-based training, evaluation of trainees' performance, job opportunities for graduates, and identification of new training areas to be applied in the school as per the needs of surrounding local labour market. These committees define various roles that partners will play and ensure that all partners understand and accept these roles. These governance structures also include ground rules so that the diverse individuals and organisations working together towards shared goals would have a way to reach

agreement on difficult issues. SEECS is continuously supporting for regular and active functioning of these governance structures of the school. The amendment of the rules, regulations and provisions of these committees will be also done which suit the local context with close coordination and consultation with the CTEVT main office.

Additionally, SEECS also supports the school leadership in resource mobilization for the TVET programs. In this connection, training on proposal development, resource generation and mobilization for the TVET programs will be provided so that school could tap the resources from development partners, province and local governments.

At present, nine CTEVT constituted Technical Schools are piloting and practicing SEECS programs in order to engage and strengthen the engagement of employers in the overall training cycle of their schools. The schools are capturing and documenting their lessons learnt: what worked and what did not work. Lessons learned from SEECS engaging employers in the overall training cycle from pre-training to post training will provide feedback to the public private partnership approaches in the TVET system so as to explore possibilities of scaling up and replicating sense of the successful public private partnership models. The action will also encourage good practices in the pilots to be replicated in other CTEVT schools of the country. In the same way, these learnings would also be shared with other TVET stakeholders to allow them to learn

from these practices as well as to explore possibilities of scaling up and replication in other industrial sectors of the country.

Conclusions

The need to increase and strengthen the engagement of employers in TVET programs has been a talk of the country in the development of TVET sector. Many efforts and initiations have also been introduced in the TVET sector, but these efforts have not been continued and given the priority. Thus, the concerned body of the TVET sector should have given equal value to the effective engagement of the employers in the TVET programs as given for the extension and delivery of the TVET programs. Successful engagement translates into a partnership or mutual support and understanding between TVET programs and employers. Promoting partnership between TVET providers and employers requires availability of a legal framework that provides a supporting environment for the establishment and enhancement of partnership. The country should have national level policies that guide the engagement of employers and employer associations in TVET programs. Stakeholders' awareness and sensitization on the importance of public private partnerships in TVET system should be enhanced from federal to province and local levels. Similarly, there should be availability of appropriate structures within the TVET system that allows effective partnership at different levels: federal, province, and local level. There should be sector-wise councils,

boards, and committees with legal mandate, representing sizable members from the private sector.

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest

The views expressed in this article are author's own views and does not entitle to the organizations where the author works.

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