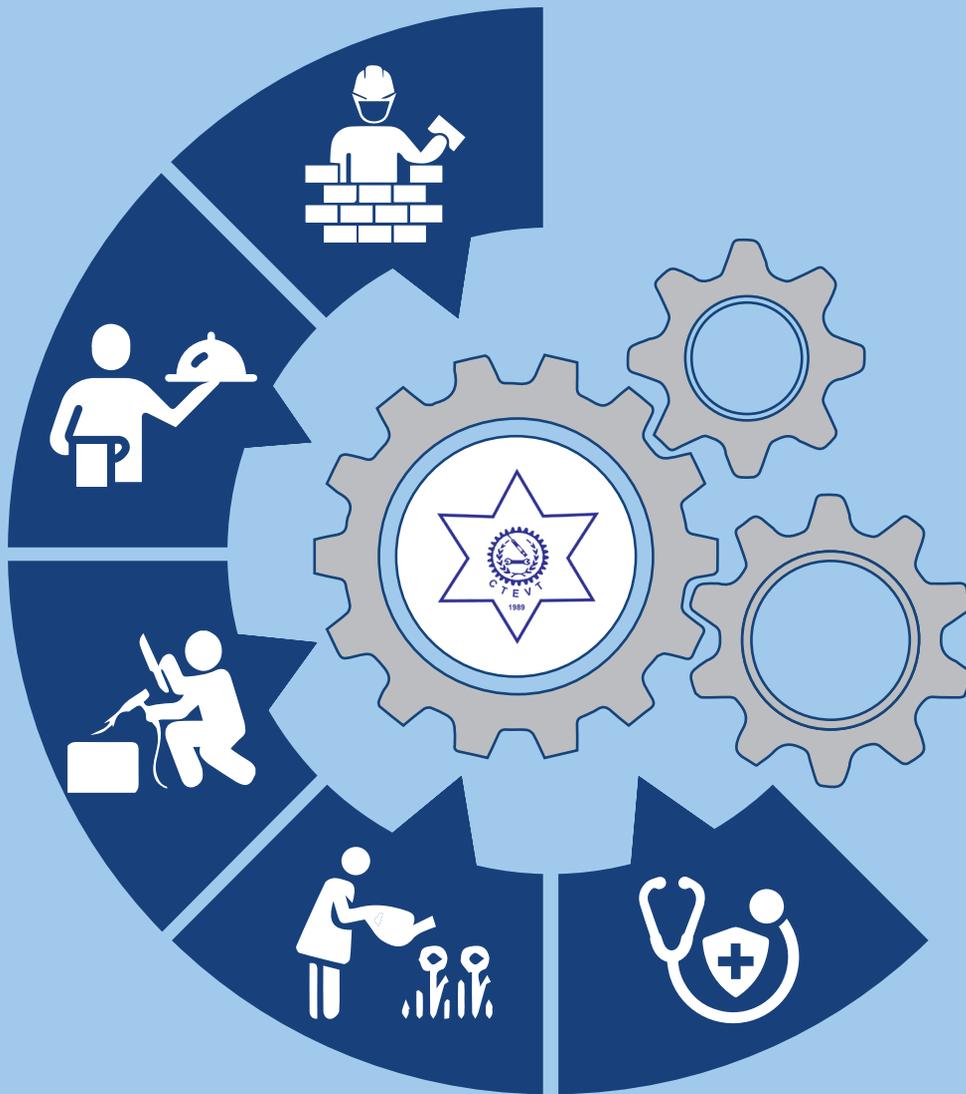


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**2026**



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## Editorial

# TVET for Developing Workforce Competency

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Since its establishment in 1989, the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), has been working untiringly to produce basic and middle level skilled human resources. It has so far trained thousands of workforces, which are employed in various sectors in the country and abroad as well. As an apex body of the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Nepal, its role is instrumental in producing the basic and middle level workforces in agriculture, engineering, health and hospitality, among others.

Undoubtedly, the skilled and competent workforce is inevitable for the economic development and national prosperity. However, the TVET graduates' active engagement in entrepreneurship and contribution to labor market are prerequisites to this end. A strong linkage of TVET institutes with the industries run across the country can foster equally vital role to spur employment opportunities, and to launch and expand entrepreneurship among youths.

The law and policy levels are responsible for bringing timely reform. Once the flaws in legal, policy, structural and procedural levels are corrected on time and the concerned

students, instructors and industries made aware accordingly, it builds the atmosphere further conducive to ensure quality training and education under CTEVT.

In addition to its pivotal role in TVET, CTEVT runs, involves in and facilitates the discussions and dialogues on the pertinent issues surrounding TVET so that it chips in reform initiatives. Similarly, creation and dissemination of information and knowledge on TVET is further extended through the academic work - the publication TVET journal. Publication of the journal has therefore been given continuation.

This time, the journal has incorporated seven articles on the issues, spanning dropout problem to theatrical technicians, agribusiness and innovation, occupational health and safety, experiences of women instructors and the significance of cultural hospitality. These topics underline the urgency of boosting quality of TEVT along with policy reform.

Theater workforce, which is often shadowed in the mainstream study, is explored in the article, "*Learning Pathways and Motivations of Becoming a Theater Technician: A*

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*Thematic Synthesis of South Asian Context".* The theater technicians, irrespective of being instrumental in successful execution of the performance, are under-documented, the co-authors Ms. Aakankshya GC Bhujel and Dr. Prakash Kumar Paudel argued, adding that recognition of the dominant informal pathways of learning remains scarce in the performing arts sector. They have floated the idea of an integrative and innovative educational ecology that would be helpful in balancing the benefits offered by informal community-based learning with vocational certification to enhance professionalism.

In her article, *"Gendered Challenges in Nepal's TVET Sector: A Narrative Inquiry of Women Instructors"*, Ms. Dipika Sharma, found that irrespective of male dominance, gender bias and limited institutional support, the women TVET instructors show strong leadership, adaptability and commitment to quality education. However, the instructors' experiences, as the author brought to light, demand participatory leadership, self-reflection, content expertise and culturally responsive teaching.

Similarly, *"Understanding Dropout Dynamics of TVET Students: A Case of Apprenticeship Model in Nepal"*, penned by Ms. Rakshya Acharya, dwells on drop out problem among the apprentices. Adopting chiefly the qualitative approach, the article is based on the information received from in-depth interviews with five dropouts and two FGDs with current apprentices. The author concluded with three major findings:

the dropout phenomenon starts right from the selection process of apprentices; the apprentices consider the TVET program as a scheme to pursue their short-term interest; and the mismatch between apprentices' expectation and field realities. The article laid emphasis on wiping out the drop out problem.

Authored by Mr. Ramesh Bhandari, *"Agribusiness Innovation through TVET: Role of Business Incubation in Nepal"*, underscores the urgency of promoting business incubation for an agricultural innovation where TVET plays a key role. Assessing agricultural policies, innovation methods and incubation models, the article asserts business incubation can be a mechanism to link skills for enterprise development. It further advocates for a robust agricultural value chain to stimulate development and inclusive economic growth.

Need of cultural hospitality is given emphasis in the hospitality education. In view of diversity in culture, integration of cultural hospitality into education bears much significance in Nepal, author Mr. Bikash Bajagain asserts in his article, *"Exploring Students' Understanding and Practices of Cultural Hospitality: A Thematic Review of Global and Nepali Perspectives"*.

*"Occupational Health and Safety at Workplace: A Reflective Review of Nepal's TVET Sector"*, finds gaps in occupational and health service awareness, training and practical implementation in TVET sector.

The author of this article, Ms. Chandu Rana, points out the necessity of sufficient infrastructures, adequate occupation-specific PPE and OHS hands-on practical processes in training curricula and structured monitoring systems in place so that working conditions could be made safe along with workers' preparedness.

Inclusiveness in vocational training is a dominant theme in the article, "*Making Vocational Training Effective for Employability*" penned by Mr. Nickesh Kumar Sah. The article suggests incorporating more number of women and marginalized community in the vocational training for their employment and empowerment. Underemployment and skill mismatch are also other problems, he

said, adding that fair and balanced approach helps in creating equal opportunities and supporting long-term growth in countries like Nepal.

The editorial team expresses gratitude to all writers and scholars for their contributions and cooperation, thereby helping to give continuity to this academic initiative. The editorial team would be grateful to the readers, researchers and scholars once they provide feedback to this academic work. The feedback helps the team improve publication further in the days ahead.

The research articles solely represent the opinions of the respective authors, not of the CTEVT. The team wishes you a happy reading!





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**Article**

# **Learning Pathways and Motivations of Becoming a Theatre Technician: A Thematic Synthesis of South Asian Context**

Aakankshya GC Bhujel\* and Prakash Kumar Paudel  
Kathmandu University School of Education, Nepal

## **Abstract**

Theatre technicians are an important yet under-documented workforce in the Nepali performing arts sector, where recognition of informal learning pathways by the formal TVET system is yet to be acknowledged. This gap limits insights into professional development and implications for productive TVET. So, this study employed a thematic literature review of 14 peer-reviewed articles, reports, and institutional sources from global, South Asian, and Nepali contexts, along with contextual practitioner knowledge. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, the study identified a blend of institution-based and informal community-based or led learning pathways. The study identified strong intrinsic motivational factors like satisfaction from problem-solving, community belonging, etc., tempered by the extrinsic limitations like weak institutional support and lack of a formal system for developing professionalization. The findings revealed that learners' unique competencies develop in situated production environments despite barriers. Finally, this paper proposes an integrative and innovative ecology in the Nepali performing arts sector that balances the benefits offered by informal community-based learning with vocational certification for gainful employment.

*Keywords:* theatre technicians, learning pathways, motivational factors, professionalization, TVET

## **Background**

Research on vocational pedagogy and workplace learning (e.g., Billet, 2011; Lucas, Spencer & Claxton, 2012) shows that guided practice, observation, and community participation gradually build occupational competence. Lucas et al. (2012) mention theatre for explaining concepts like “arena” and “lecture theatre”, and in emphasizing the

value of explicitly naming and integrating wider skills with ‘teaching a theatre craft to the performing arts students so that they learn about skills of collaboration for teamwork’. Similarly, Billet (2011) briefly mentions ‘theatre costumes’ while discussing how occupational knowledge is applied in different ways in employment. In

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this case, performing arts, on the one hand, is learning specialized theatre skills, and on the other hand, developing professional skills. Despite their critical contribution to theatre, individuals who work in this sector are often overlooked in reviews, and their skills remain under-discussed (Sangroula, 2024). Nepal is not an exception. Davis (2019) documents the development of the Nepali theatre scene and highlights writers, directors, and organizers of theatre productions, but scarcely records individuals who constructed proscenium theatres, operated lights, or built sets. Sunuwar (2026) argues that practitioners working as technicians or designers in Nepali theatre can not yet accept these roles as their formal professions.

Technical theatre education in Nepal shows that, compared to the general educational pathways of the directors or artists, technical human resources follow unstructured, experience-based routes grounded in informal apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and mentoring. In Nepal, entry into technical theatre occurs through participation in productions where new artists or crew assist senior technicians. Payment is usually project-based and not linked to certified qualifications, as the employers require specialized skills rather than formal credentials. Competences are verified over time through demonstration and trust. These patterns indicate an occupational learning system that operates outside of a formal setting, aloof from the formal TVET system.

The work of theatre technicians overlaps with the trades such as electrical, carpentry, construction, etc. These trades have

competency-based training and short-term skill certification mechanisms. However, such comparable pathways do not exist for theatre technicians within Nepali TVET system. To imagine a qualification framework of South Asian context and streamline theatre technicians' learning and growth journey within the formal TVET system, this study addresses two questions: (a) How do theatre technicians build their competence through informal learning pathways, and (b) How do they aspire to develop professional identity?

## **Methodology**

This paper has been developed using a thematic literature review retrieved from academic sources and contextualized along with practitioner knowledge. Academic databases, relevant organizational websites and reports, and key journal articles from open-access repositories were searched. Some keywords used were “technical/vocational education”, “apprenticeship/mentorship”, “motivation”, “learning theories”, “learning and confidence building”, “efficacy among theatre technicians”, “technical theatre”, “theatre technicians' learning”, “technical theatre apprenticeship”, “formal and informal theatre education”, “Nepal, South Asian and Global theatre training”. Altogether, 14 core sources have been included for thematic synthesis based on conceptual saturation surrounding two guiding questions. These sources also balanced sources from the globe (mainly Europe, North America, and Australia), South Asia (India, Bangladesh, and regional), and from Nepal.

The inclusion criteria for literature selection were a. sources that discussed theatre technicians or backstage technical roles in performing arts, b. studies or reports that addressed learning pathways in creative or TVET contexts, and c. materials from global, South Asian, or Nepali settings relevant to technical theatre or creative trades to make sense of the global south context. The exclusion criteria were a. sources on performers, directors, or audiences in theatre without mention of technical labor, b. theoretical work with no link to learning, work, or motivation in creative or vocational practice, and c. South Asian and Nepali grey literature that is not readily available online, or the undocumented local practices.

For real-world creative or vocational practice, websites of institutions providing technical theatre education or jobs to technicians, along with definitions of technical theatre or roles, have been examined. This approach enabled an in-depth synthesis of experiential learning and motivational patterns grounded in real-world creative and vocational practice in response to the Nepali technical theatre scene, where formal empirical studies are scarce, but practitioner accounts are available.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase Thematic Analysis Framework was adapted to review literature. We (a) familiarized ourselves by repeated reading of the 14 texts and taking reflexive notes, (b) generated initial codes inductively, (c) collated the related codes into potential themes, (d) reviewed themes

for coherence and merging overlaps, (e) developed meaning from the themes, and (f) selected extracts from literature for narrative synthesis. Data-driven (open) coding was used to generate categories. Theory-driven (closed) coding served as lenses.

One of the authors is a practitioner-researcher in Nepali theatre and the education field. So, the author maintained bracketing through initial reflexive notes on assumptions like "precarious experiences" and revisiting the notes at each phase of analysis. With peer discussion and disagreements, text patterns were prioritized over prior experiences, and interpretive decisions were tracked. This helped balance insider insight with transparency for the credibility of this study.

However, the limitations of the study include low generalizability and peer-reviewed rigor, which primary empirical work can offer. In the dearth of formal academic papers on theatre in the South Asian context, the grounded insights drawn from practitioners, voices appearing in interaction with relevant individuals, and reflections on observations represent strengths of illuminating undocumented informal practices.

### **Blended Learning Pathways**

The theatre technicians across the globe figure out their professional learning pathways through a mix of formal training, experience-based on production practices, and apprenticeship with the masters (Farthing, 2012; Morey, 2014). Technical theatre can be understood as production

work behind the scenes, backstage, or offstage. Such technical roles and tasks require technical expertise and teamwork (Brooks School Summer Programs [BSSP], 2022). Theatre technicians need a variety of competencies, including backstage craftsmanship and supportive creative storytelling with their inputs. Figure 1 below is adapted to interpret how technical theatre, as a subset of performing arts in this model, sits at approximate equidistance from all three media of learning. Theatre technicians learn with the physical materials while they make sets, work with lights, etc. They also learn the use of symbols like sound cues, light design briefs, and drawings. And they

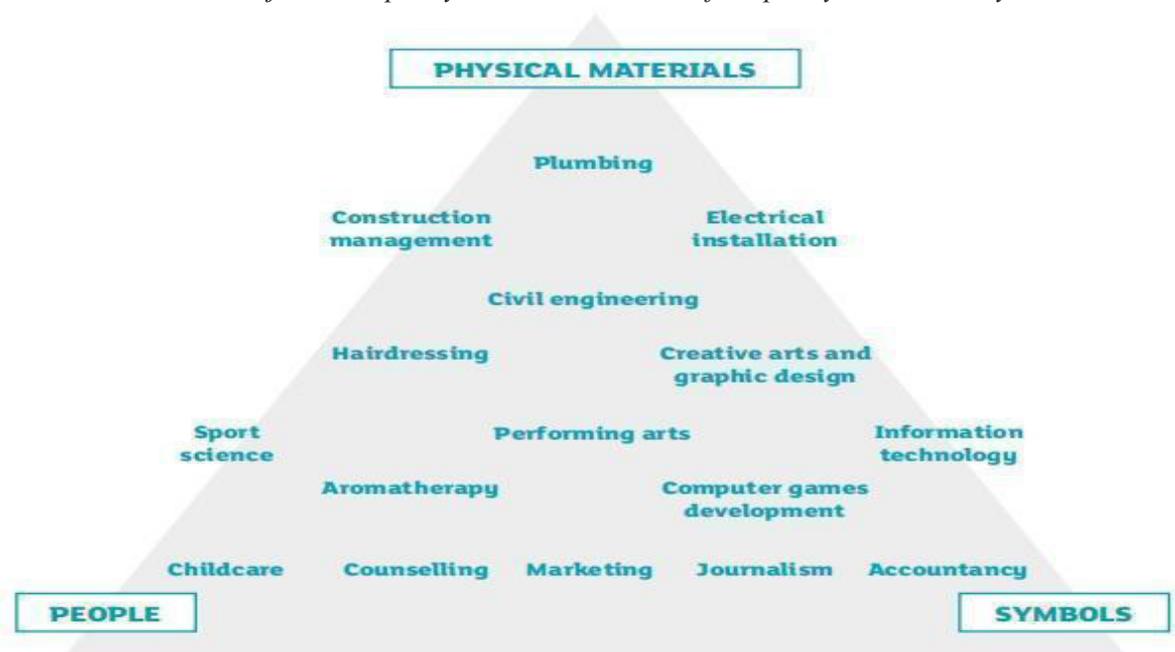
collaborate with people like the directors, performers, and crews in the context of productions. Technical theatre also borrows from multiple creative art forms like playing music, tailoring, make-up, etc. This implies how these trades combine technical know-how, people skills, and creating tangible and intangible things to tell stories to the audience through the medium of theatre.

### Institution-based Training

Formal institution-based training consists of workshops, coursework, and production tasks (SkillsFuture Singapore & National Arts Council [SSNAC], 2024). They balance theoretical knowledge, practical application,

**Figure 1**

*Further Education Subjects Grouped by Predominant Media of People, Symbols, and Physical Materials*



(Source: Lucas, 2015)

and experience. Day (2021) argues that technical theatre serves as a bridge between academic knowledge (theory) and vocational skills (experiential learning) and holds value in teaching performance technologies as a part of theatre courses, workshops, exchanges, and productions. It also provides apprenticeship and workforce development programs combined with hands-on immersion and professional mentorship. Sometimes these companies offer a blend of paid professional work and on-the-job experience as they also complete technical coursework. This enables the participants to learn as they earn. Some companies focusing on the backstage work with apprenticeships provide pathways for equitable access and inclusion of people who have historically been excluded from attending formal training pathways.

In Nepal, institutional training services in technical theatre are limited to being offered technical sessions as a part of the ‘drama workshop’ and ‘workshop production’. For instance, theatre training and workshops are often short-term and production-oriented. They do not sustain formal technical education programs, although that can happen informally. A review of Cultural Institution Art Training Procedure-2081 (Sanskritik Sansthan [SS], 2025) shows that the government-funded cultural institution also provides acting training but does not specify specialist technical theatre training. The formal theatre or drama education offered in the universities is academic in nature, with a focus on genre and criticism of

written and sometimes performed texts, and is devoid of practical training. The duration, depth, and scope of the theatre short courses offered by independent theatre companies, except for the ones like the Mandala Theatre, which provided one year long fellowship, and Shilpee Theatre, which provided a residential fellowship, are limited. They overlap mostly with morning classes or day classes for people who are also enrolled in other formal academic programs. At times, international organizations, international theatre companies, or visiting artists offer short community theatre training or workshops, which often been catalysts for some, but in terms of impact, they are limited, with trainees or workshop participants hardly finding ways to implement the learning in productions.

### **Community-based or Led Training**

Generally, technical human resources grow their competence in the theatre industry through informal learning approaches. Artists in Nepal do not get opportunities within the country to pursue formal academic training, and those that are available abroad are limited and expensive (Mottin, 2022). The theatre training available in Nepal and India is dominated by the teaching and practise of acting (Sangroula, 2023). So, they engage in receiving mentorship in production(s), participating in and performing or helping with organizing community workshops, and benefiting from collaborative agreements within a course, fellowship, or scholarship with private but community-oriented theatre

companies. These companies thus support skills diversification of theatre technicians and provide them with creative agency. Creative agencies can become one of the negotiating tools for demanding higher compensation and better working conditions when transitioning to the professional work environment. As Sengupta (2014) iterates in the South Asian context, technicians commonly take up the paths of on-the-job learning and peer mentoring, which happens continuously over time and helps them improve their technical crafts. Those theatre technicians who have already been introduced or inducted into theatre and are working there acquire skills by immersing themselves in the practical scenarios.

When theatre technicians engage in work-based learning, they work under professionals or colleagues in real production settings and acquire and refine their skills. Working in such an environment also means being trained to meet the current needs of the industry. At the same time, they get to learn different roles or trades, be technically literate, and develop their problem-solving abilities because the technicians are commonly moved around different departments, giving them the necessary cross-disciplinary exposure. Such exposure and experiences prepare them to approach theatre-making holistically. So, apprenticeship and mentorship remain vital approaches in technical and vocational education in the performing arts. Besides this, the theatre technicians also take up different non-formal learning routes that are available to them at different times and stages of their

careers. Such non-formal routes are national, regional, and international workshops, exchanges, and projects of a collaborative nature (Farthing, 2012; Kušnírová, 2023; Morey, 2014). Furthermore, in the South Asian context, technicians may also get opportunities by engaging in community theatre work and creating or partaking in collaborative performance scenarios (Roy Chowdhury & Khan, 2023). This helps develop technical competence and the ability to adapt to various real-life situations.

### **Motivations for Working in the Theatre Sector**

Motivation among theatre technicians encompasses intrinsic and extrinsic factors for working in theatre as technical human resources or performing the roles of theatre technicians. The intrinsic factors could be satisfaction derived from personal growth, competence, and community engagement, and the extrinsic factors or challenges could be income opportunity, job security, and recognition (Li et al., 2025). In the following sub-sections, we describe these drivers in detail.

#### ***Internal Satisfaction, Community Belonging, and Recognition***

Technical crew, who often work backstage/ behind-the-scenes, need to bring out the artistic vision of the creatives while meeting the technical needs. Striking that balance while delivering with precision and excellence, which is vital for any production to make an impact on the viewers, becomes

a source of pride for these technical human resources. Bongaerts (2019) found technicians sharing that they derive internal satisfaction when they successfully master the creative systems they work in, which is often complex. Getting a chance to witness a magical transformation brought about by their technical contribution in any production becomes another motivational factor for them. They are often indirectly or have limited visibility on stage, and perhaps, their work too, in isolation. Their recognition and contribution are less noticeable than that of the performers. But their work makes things happen and contributes to bringing things together. This gives theatre technicians a strong sense of belonging within production teams. Deci and Ryan (2000), in their self-determination theory, elucidate lucrative forces behind an individual's work as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. People in creative professions continue their engagement owing to the fulfillment of their intrinsic motivation and psychological needs. In the case of technicians, they work with autonomy in their specific field and on their craft, make creative decisions on what materials to use, and the like, exercise departure or creative difference in briefs by the director, designer, or manager based on the implementability, etc. They master their technical skills on a daily basis with each engagement and derive satisfaction from solving problems. And they collaborate with other members of the team and situate the contribution of their work in the larger scheme of things, with contributions of other parts of the production and creative, technical,

and professional contributors/ crews to the production, and this is the relatedness aspect of the theory. These sources of motivation are in line with what Bongaerts (2019) and Kušnířová (2023) found the technicians reporting, viz., creative independence, pride based on skills, and collaborative belonging. So, this balance is drawn from a strong sense of belonging in relation to personal satisfaction and collective initiative that strengthens and sustains emotional engagement and commitment.

### ***Professional Identity and Challenges***

In the South Asian context, motivation is more connected with collective identity than with the individual's creative identity. Their passion for theatre is their dedication to preserving culture and adapting to contemporary theatre expressions, and complimented is their recognition within the theatre community by appreciation from the audience (Davis, 2019; Sengupta, 2014). Such appreciations also give a unique flavor of motivation to the theatre technicians. Technical professionals in South Asian theatre want to draw from cultural values and also satisfy the modern audiences (Davis, 2019). So, they find themselves building and adapting their craft and navigating their voice, while also carving a unique identity in the global scene. In these ways, the motivation of theatre technicians stemming from internal satisfaction also relates to a sense of collaborative camaraderie, and recognition of their technical work by themselves, their peers, and the cultural community. And these dimensions are responsible for

making productions a success. Such a sense of belonging and collaboration within teams during production furthers the intrinsic motivation of the theatre technicians and their professional identity.

Further, Rijal (2024) argues for professionalization, institutional support, and job security of the Nepali theatre professionals in light of unstable employment and unstructured recognition of careers in theatre. Bhandari (2025) expresses ideas on institutional weakness, insecure employment, and career motivation, which can be compared to the Nepali theatre context. So, recognition, income, and career opportunity dimensions of the extrinsic motivation have important implications, but there is a clear lack of institutional support and an unstable theatre industry that limits these motivators. Thus, internal collective fulfillment is stronger in the Nepali as well as the South Asian scenario, where external incentives are relatively weak.

Janamohan et al. (2021) posit that positive actions are important to ensure inclusion and empowerment. Despite their undeniable existence, integral contribution, and value, the professional identity of the theatre technicians is often invisible and marred with inconsistent job security, resulting in continuing workforce instability (Morey, 2014). Sometimes, a lack of terms to denote technical roles also acts as a disadvantage in securing fair pay or decent working conditions. The upside of this fluidity, however, is that mentors or employers can

place and support the growth of certain doers in certain trades over time with referrals and more aligned working opportunities/exposure. Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) also offers a lens for understanding the models of apprenticeship and mentorship as they function as social spaces for technicians to develop their identities through participation and a sense of belonging. The theatre technicians have a gradual evolution of their identities in such settings. And this evolving identity indicates the significance of continued innovation and preservation of the cultural learning or working environment. Baral (2022) found that informal trades are places where workers learn through experience. The workers also connect their day-to-day work with the process of identity formation. Baral (2022) further says that motivation is linked to how workers derive personal satisfaction from mastery. He simultaneously links motivation with identity transformation and social mobility, as learners perceive visible improvements in livelihood, dignity, and recognition through skill acquisition. But the downside of the informality in South Asia is that the lack of standard technical training and unequal access to resources affect their creative artistry and employability (Roy Chowdhury & Khan, 2023). This holds true for over-reliance on referrals, and moving from one freelance job to another, one project to another, without long-term security and without full employment can mean inequitable, discontinuous, and sometimes frustrating chances of learning, getting jobs, staying motivated, and bearing

a professional identity in the industry and society. Bhandari (2025) also critiques unstructured career pathways and the lack of institutional coordination in the Nepali TVET sector. Implying this for the South Asian theatre technicians' context, sustainability and career growth issues can arise among them.

## Discussion

The two themes in the findings section represent two analytical dimensions which emerged across the sources, viz. a. mechanisms of acquiring skills, and b. aspiration that sustains their participation.

Learning occurs 'within a community of practice,' and that learning does not occur in isolation; it occurs in social interaction in the form of 'peripheral participation' (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The theatre technicians start as novices with limited or no training. They slowly observe and engage in the working environment during the process of production with expert practitioners. They learn through participation. Theatre educators also advocate for situated learning amidst limited resources (Goble, 2020), which resonates with challenges also faced by other technical and vocational education and training programs in Nepal.

In the South Asian informal creative industry, what would have been a structured curriculum takes the form of informal mentoring. Such mentoring continues through continued local theatre practices and the sense of community. And so, learning happens in

the workplace and performance context or production environment, over time, learning elements and processes complementing one another. The peripheral participation of the theatre technicians in production work, social immersion, and mentorship helps them transform themselves from novices to skilled contributors. This is similar but not recognized as formal vocational training practice, combining mentorship, practice, and collaboration in the global scene.

The learning environments also help fulfill the core needs of individuals, driving towards mastery of skills, and securing more autonomy in making creative decisions, and relatedness through a sense of belonging to the team (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In the lack of institutional pathways, these technicians adapt and persist with their participation, reflecting their organic learning motivation. So, effective vocational education is important for the overall well-being and competence of people as they identify with their occupations (Billet, 2011). From the perspective of holistic human resource development with theatre as a workplace, i.e., life happens and is enriched with and beyond learning and working. In the collaborative environment, the practitioners not only acquire skills but also construct meaning of their work, take ownership, situate themselves in the process and ecosystem, interact with others to grow, learn, and collaborate, and build confidence as professionals.

Despite the essential role of theatre technicians, they are excluded from formal academic credentials and career pathways.

This means limited access to resources, workplace safety, job security, and social recognition. Concentration of recognition and rewards on visible artistic roles in the creative industries causes technical workers to stay in precarious working conditions of exploitation and self-exploitation (Hesmondhalgh, 2010).

Formal technical theatre education could provide structured entry and support to newcomers interested in the field, regardless of age or artistic background. But, effective vocational programs are contextual and developed over time through regular conversations among stakeholders, that is, with a relational model rather than the restrictive demand-supply model (Fuller et al., 2015). The existing non-formal learning systems resemble global technical theatre models. So, as technical theatre education and profession becomes institutionalized, it is essential not to replace the informal systems but to consider how to create an integrative education ecology. Institutionalization can also professionalize mentorship, so access is not limited to a few.

Nevertheless, Rixon et al. (2024) argue that cutting the government funding for apprenticeship causing individuals to pay for training and getting the mandatory certifications, is one of the factors behind skill shortage in production. This also supports the argument for the integration of successful community-based practices that share the training costs and pressures. Also, in several countries, industry bodies

formally recognize workplace learning through certification, safety training, and apprenticeship pathways. So, this calls for acknowledging the learning that occurs in production environments in countries like Nepal.

## Conclusion

In the South Asian context, informal community-based learning processes have evolved as a sign of persistence and the resilience of theatre technicians overcoming the lack of formal technical theatre education opportunities. But theatre technicians have remained an invisible labor force, unrecognized by the mainstream education. They need recognition and understanding of the academic community, besides the recognition among peers, and the cultural community they already enjoy, because recognition in this domain could support better learning environments and working conditions for them. The invisibility of technical theatre roles in the academic milieu in Nepal reflects how societies in the South Asia emphasize academic and artistic studies and professional job positions rather than on manual, technical, and vocational forms of expertise. The resilience and creativity developed by theatre technicians in figuring out their paths in the lack of institutional support for their learning and motivation indicates toward society's encouragement of informality. Recognizing learning and professional identity of learners and workers in non-formal and informal settings is an issue of dignity, and sustainability of

creative technical workers, their jobs, and the industry, not out of fear or choicelessness but out of joy and choice.

This study, conducted with thematic synthesis of limited existing literature and practitioner accounts rather than empirical data, prevents generalizability but offers a foundation for future studies on the under-researched field of technical theatre in the South Asian context. The TVET policymakers could integrate community-based learning into TVET certification. The theatre companies, which also function as educators, can professionalize the mentorships they offer by blending them into the courses and contribute to equitable access.

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## Article

# Gendered Challenges in Nepal's TVET Sector: A Narrative Inquiry of Women Instructors

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## Abstract

In spite of increasing research on gender and education in Nepal, there is a meager literature on how women instructors in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector narrate their lived professional experiences. This paper explores the lived experiences of four women instructors working in the TVET institutions in Nepal. The study focuses on how these four instructors share the personal account and make sense of their professional journeys, including the challenges they face, the strategies they use to overcome barriers, and the opportunities they create within their institutions. Using a narrative inquiry as the research method and working within an interpretive research paradigm, the study draws on in-depth interviews and field notes from four women instructors. The feminist theory and cultural capital theory are applied to explain how gender roles and cultural experiences influence teaching practices and leadership development. The findings reveal that each woman's story is shaped by her unique socio-cultural background, psychological resilience and professional growth. Despite facing male dominance, gender bias, and limited institutional support, the instructors show strong leadership, adaptability and commitment to quality education. Their experiences highlight the importance of participatory leadership, self-reflection, content expertise and culturally responsive teaching. The study concludes that women instructors play a vital role in shaping inclusive and productive learning environments and their voices must be recognized for the betterment of TVET in Nepal.

*Keywords:* instructors, TVET, gender equality, workplace challenges, professional development

## Introduction

This article aims to explore the lived experiences of women instructors from the TVET sector, focusing on the challenges they face, their job satisfaction, behavior, and the social constraints they navigate daily. Despite significant contributions, women's roles in technical education

are often marginalized due to prevailing gender stereotypes, male dominance in the workplace and at TVET institutions, and the lack of institutional support. The participation of women in the TVET sector in Nepal has increased over recent years, but their professional experiences continue to

be shaped by systemic barriers and societal expectations.

The motivation for this research stems from my personal and professional experience working as an Administrative Officer Third and Second Level at the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), the apex body of TVET in Nepal. Over ten years, I visited multiple institutions across the country and interviewed women instructors, who often face challenges not only within the classroom but also in the institutional and societal structures. These experiences inspired me to further investigate the realities of women instructors in Nepal's TVET system.

Women constitute nearly half of Nepal's population and play a vital role in every dimension of national development, including education, economy and family (Paudel, 2019). However, their participation in the technical fields has traditionally been limited due to the perception that such fields are more suited to men (Bhandari, 2013). Technical and engineering programs were once centered around physically demanding jobs in industrial sectors, which discouraged women from participating (Lamichhane, 2011). Today, advancements in technology have made these roles more inclusive and less physically intensive, opening doors for more women to enter the sector (Mustapha, 2016). Despite these developments, societal norms continue to dictate gender roles, discouraging women from pursuing careers in engineering, construction and other technical areas that require fieldwork. In this

context, I attempted to explore how women instructors narrated their experiences as instructors in the TVET sector.

### **Women as Employees in Nepal**

Women in Nepal, as in many parts of the world, shoulder a triple burden of caregiving, household work, and paid employment (Upadhyay-Dhungel & Dhungel, 2013). Despite contributing significantly to household and economic activities, caregiving and domestic work are not recognized as productive labor. This often results in women spending more hours on household tasks than that of men, limiting their opportunities for full-time formal employment. Furthermore, entrenched patriarchal attitudes impede women's empowerment, thus restricting their access to better economic opportunities and contributing to a low participation rate in the formal economy. Women in Nepal are therefore more likely to be found in informal employment as shown by Baidya et al. (2003), who noted that women face significant barriers to entering the formal labor force.

According to the Labor Force Survey (2019), the overall employment rate for women in Nepal is 22.9%, with 32.3% employed in the informal sector and 32.9% in the formal sector. Despite having a higher working-age population, for every 100 employed men, only 59 women are employed (Ministry of Finance [MOF], 2019). The gender disparity is also evident in the education sector, where 43.7% of women work as primary

school instructors, while only 19.8% work at the secondary school level. In the CTEVT institutions, women account for only 9% of technical instructors, which further exposes the underrepresentation of women in higher-paying and skilled positions.

The societal views on women's roles remain deeply rooted in traditional norms. Women are often seen as subordinate to men and their primary responsibility is considered to be family care (Acharya, 2004). Even educated and employed women are expected to prioritize family over career, and their decisions are frequently made by male family members (Acharya et al., 2010). This is compounded by the fact that a woman's role in the household and society is largely dictated by male authority. Acharya and Robinson-Pant (2019) argue that irrespective of higher education, women's positions in society remain largely unchanged. They are still expected to submit to the traditional family roles, regardless of their professional success. This lack of economic independence and societal support often leaves women without the autonomy to make important life decisions.

Moreover, cultural practices further exacerbate gender inequality. Bhusal (2008) highlights how societal roles and status are assigned based on gender, with women expected to fulfill roles prescribed by men. This is also reflected in practices like eating from the same plate after it is used by their husbands, a symbolic act reinforcing subordination (Thapa, 2007). These cultural

expectations create significant barriers to women's education and participation in the workforce.

Despite these challenges, Nepal has made strides toward promoting women's rights and employment. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) guarantees equal employment rights for all citizens, irrespective of gender, and prohibits discrimination based on gender (Articles 33, 34, and 38). However, Armstrong (2017) points out that various structural barriers, such as regional and gender discrimination, hinder women from fully benefiting from these legal provisions. Furthermore, the government of Nepal has recognized the importance of women's education and employment as key components of economic development. The National Employment Policy (2014) emphasizes the need for productive employment to reduce poverty and unemployment, while the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5, a focus on achieving gender equality and women's empowerment (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2017).

In recent years, there is an increasing focus on promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and social inclusion in Nepal's national development plans. The 16th Plan (2024/25-2028/29) of Nepal prioritizes these issues, and the National Educational Policy (2019) highlights the need for capacity building of women instructors in TVET. These policies aim to enhance women's participation in the workforce and promote their professional development.

Although significant progress is witnessed, the condition of women in Nepal remains far from ideal. Violence, discrimination, and inequality persist, making it clear that substantial work is needed to achieve true gender equality in employment and beyond (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2025).

### **Research Method**

Data collection involved conducting in-depth interviews with four women instructors, two from CTEVT constituted institution and two others from affiliated institutions in the Kathmandu Valley. The Kathmandu Valley was chosen for easy accessibility and institutional concentration. The participants were from engineering stream and chosen purposively, with a focus on those having more than five years of professional experience in the TVET sector. Fieldwork included multiple interviews and the taking of field notes, which were later transcribed, translated and coded. The research also took into account Creswell's (2013) guidelines for narrative inquiry, ensuring that the data were analyzed for the unfolding events, turning points and the participants' critical insight.

Quality standards in qualitative research were carefully maintained throughout the study. These included ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement and member checking with the participants, while dependability was ensured by using an open-ended inquiry process.

Transferability was addressed by providing a detailed description of the research context, and conformability was maintained by ensuring that the findings were grounded in the participants' stories and experiences.

Ethical considerations were an essential aspect of the study, with a strong emphasis on maintaining confidentiality and respecting the privacy of participants. To ensure confidentiality and protect the identities of participants, all instructors' names presented in this study are pseudonyms. Additionally, the research was conducted in accordance with the cultural norms and values of the participants, taking into account gender, caste and ethnicity to avoid misinterpretation or harm (Warusznski, 2002).

### **Thematic Findings**

#### ***Theme 1: Gendered Responsibilities and Dual Burdens***

One of the most recurring and significant themes that emerged from the narratives of all four women instructors is the gendered responsibility placed upon them and the dual burden of balancing professional duties with household expectations. Despite their achievements and commitment to teaching, each instructor shared the emotional and physical toll of managing both spheres in a society where traditional gender roles are deeply rooted.

Sabitra reflected on her struggles by highlighting how societal expectations made her journey as a working woman more complex. *“Even with a supportive family,*

*I found it difficult to balance home duties with work,*” she said, illustrating the heavy load placed on women by cultural norms. She emphasized that women must prove themselves constantly in environments where male dominance is normalized. Yet, she stayed determined, believing that women have unique strengths like dedication, passion and cooperation.

Similarly, Mamata shared the emotional burden of working under societal pressure and stereotypes *“Women are often underestimated, and our leadership is not fully accepted”* she said. The dual expectations placed on her as an instructor and as a woman in society created ongoing challenges. Despite this, she continued, *“Teaching is not just a job for me; it’s about mentoring and guiding”* which shows her deep commitment to her role despite systemic barriers.

Puja too felt the impact of gender roles, especially within institutional settings. *“Teaching is manageable”* she said, *“but I struggle with team dynamics and administrative tasks where women are often excluded.”* Her experience reflects how institutional structures can compound the pressure women face, as they juggle both professional aspirations and the responsibilities society assigns to them at home. She advocated for a better environment, stating, *“A woman-friendly institution is essential for true success.”*

Diksha’s narrative was especially powerful in describing the emotional and social toll

of the dual burden. *“Teaching was initially a compulsion,”* she admitted, *“but over time, it became an opportunity for growth.”* However, this growth came at a cost. She added, *“The demanding dual responsibilities of work and household chores make it difficult, yet I strive to improve education in my institution.”* Diksha also highlighted the emotional pressure, saying, *“Societal norms and psychological stress make it hard to be seen and heard as a woman instructor.”*

Together, these narratives portray how gendered roles and the dual burdens of work and home present persistent challenges for women instructors. Their voices echo a collective struggle - yet also reflect resilience, commitment and a desire to lead and transform the TVET landscape in Nepal. Their strength lies not just in enduring these dual responsibilities but in turning them into sources of motivation for institutional and personal growth.

### ***Theme 2: Institutional Discrimination and Lack of Representation***

Another prominent theme that emerged from the stories of all four instructors is the institutional discrimination they faced and the underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision-making roles. Despite their qualifications, commitment and experience, these women instructors have often found themselves sidelined in the institutional structures dominated by men.

Sabitra expressed frustration with the male-centric environment of her institution. *“I faced challenges, especially due to male*

*dominance and gender bias*” she recalled. Her journey reflects how deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes within institutions hinder women’s professional visibility. She added, *“Women can be as successful as men if given equal opportunities”* indicating that it is not a matter of capability but of access and fairness.

Mamata also encountered resistance in asserting her role, *“Women instructors are often underestimated, and their leadership is not fully accepted”* she stated, pointing to the subtle and overt ways in which institutions reinforce male superiority. She further explained, *“Even when women contribute meaningfully, we are not always given space at the decision-making table.”* Her voice stresses the urgency of recognizing women’s potential and not just their presence.

Puja, despite her nine years of experience, continued to feel left out of important processes within her institution. *“Women are often excluded from decision-making”* she said bluntly. Her experience highlighted how formal policies might appear gender-neutral, but practices often remain biased. Puja believed strongly that women are equally capable of leadership and teaching, but the institutional culture is yet to fully embrace this truth.

Diksha offered a deeply personal account of institutional neglect and discrimination. *“I faced resistance, particularly in the male-dominated Management Committee”* she recalled. Despite her dedication to improving education, she found herself

struggling against a system that failed to support her. She noted, *“There is a dearth of representation and inadequate support from management”* pointing to a structural flaw that prevents women from advancing and influencing policy.

Across all four stories, there is a shared reality: institutional systems that are slow to accept women in leadership and often reluctant to offer them meaningful representation. Despite working hard, showing results, and building trust among students, these instructors remain underrepresented in key decision-making spaces.

This theme highlights the urgent need for institutional reforms that go beyond symbolic inclusion and offer women real power, participation and voice. The stories of Sabitra, Mamata, Puja and Diksha show that women are not just willing but ready to lead - what’s missing is the institutional will to support and recognize them.

### ***Theme 3: Commitment to and Vision for Change***

Although they are facing societal norms, institutional barriers, and gender bias, all four women instructors demonstrated a strong commitment to change and a clear vision for a more inclusive, empowering educational environment. Their stories are not only about overcoming obstacles but also about proactively shaping the future of technical and vocational education in Nepal.

Sabitra showed unwavering dedication to her role and to improving the system she

worked within. She expressed a deep sense of purpose: *“I was determined to succeed, believing that women have unique strengths like dedication, passion, and cooperation.”* Her belief in the transformative potential of women in education reflects a vision where gender equity is not only possible but necessary. She emphasized, *“Women can be as successful as men if they are given equal opportunities”* pointing to a future where fairness is central to institutional growth.

Mamata's narrative reveals her inner drive to not only survive but also empower others. She noted, *“I have actively empowered my students and contributed to the institution”* positioning herself as a change maker. She believes change comes from within, stating, *“Though often seen as less commanding, women bring emotional intelligence, transparency and dedication to their roles.”* Mamata's approach to teaching as “more than a job” underscores her long-term vision of mentorship, leadership and institutional transformation.

Puja was vocal about the need for structural and cultural shifts in her institution. *“I constantly sought professional growth through collaboration and technology”* she said, highlighting her forward-thinking attitude. Despite being in a system that often excludes women, she pushed boundaries, adding, *“I believe that women, although often undervalued, are equally capable of leadership and teaching.”* Her advocacy for a “women-friendly environment” shows a strong commitment to creating inclusive

spaces where women can thrive and lead.

Diksha's story is a testament to resilience and visionary thinking under pressure. Although she entered teaching as a necessity, her mindset evolved over time. *“It became an opportunity for personal and professional development”* she said. Diksha turned challenges into motivation, working hard to “promote change” even in a resistant environment. Her vision extended beyond herself: *“There is a need for more opportunities for professional development, especially for women in rural areas.”* Her forward-looking views demonstrate a deep understanding of systemic inequality and a clear roadmap for empowerment.

Together, these instructors are not only surviving within difficult systems, but they are committed to reforming them. Their shared vision incorporates more inclusive leadership, equitable opportunities, and empowered students and instructors alike. Through innovation, collaboration and an unyielding belief in their purpose, these women are already agents of change, paving the way for a more just and effective TVET system in Nepal.

## Discussion

### *Intersections of Gender, Culture, and Professional Identity*

The findings underscore the complex interplay between gender norms, cultural expectations and professional identity construction among women instructors in TVET. While all participants valued their roles as educators and were committed to

their students, their narratives reveal how societal beliefs about femininity shape their daily experiences. The cultural expectation that women are primarily responsible for household management creates a double burden that impacts their effectiveness, well-being and capacity to pursue leadership roles.

Drawing on feminist theory, these findings illustrate how patriarchal norms continue to dictate women's lived realities even in professional environments that claim gender neutrality. The tension between personal identity as a mother or wife and professional identity as an instructor is deeply intertwined with cultural expectations of obedience, sacrifice and modesty from women. This intersectional tension reflects the broader struggle for gender equality in Nepal.

### ***Structural Barriers and Institutional Power Dynamics***

The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within TVET institutions emerged as a structural issue rather than an individual limitation. Despite being qualified and experienced, the instructors faced institutional barriers that restricted their access to decision-making spaces. This aligns with cultural capital theory, which suggests that individuals' cultural backgrounds, gendered experiences and social networks influence their access to institutional power.

The male-dominated leadership structures described by the participants reinforce the idea that technical education is a masculine domain. These structural patterns not only hinder women's professional growth but also sustain a cycle where women instructors remain confined to classrooms, with minimal

influence over curriculum, policies or institutional strategies. This has implications for the overall effectiveness and inclusiveness of the TVET system, especially for female students who lack visible role models in leadership positions.

### ***Women as Agents of Change in TVET***

One of the most significant insights emerging from the narratives is that women instructors are already playing active roles as agents of change even within restrictive environments. Their commitment to students, innovative pedagogical practices and dedication to professional growth demonstrate leadership qualities that are often overlooked due to gender bias entrenched in society and workplace.

This finding challenges deficit-based narratives that portray women as passive victims of systemic oppression. Instead, their stories illustrate a vision for a more inclusive TVET system, one built on collaboration, empathy, equitable leadership and continuous learning. Their agency suggests that empowering women within TVET institutions could have transformative effects on teaching quality, institutional culture and gender equity outcomes.

### **Key Insights, Conclusions and Implications**

This study explored the experiences of women instructors from Nepal's TVET institutions, revealing that they face challenges, such as biasedness, inequality and a lack of resources. It emphasizes that

power in education is not only about money but also about sharing knowledge, where power-sharing is essential for societal transformation. Despite these challenges, women instructors are hardworking, talented and capable, often overcoming stereotypes and proving their worth. Their success in teaching is influenced by factors like time management, leadership and an understanding of cultural issues. Women instructors contribute to creating a better learning environment, and their ability to build strong relationships with students and colleagues enhances the overall atmosphere in the classroom. They are disciplined, ethical and focused on achieving results, creating a supportive and positive environment that helps in improving student performance. Their flexibility and caring attitude are strengths, which enable them to handle various challenges while connecting diverse cultural backgrounds.

The study concludes that women instructors are enriching and transparent in their academic roles, possessing strong skills in classroom management and ensuring quality education. They believe in their ability to lead and guide students, and they maintain a harmonious relationship with both students and staff. The research also highlights that women instructors create a positive, non-competitive learning environment, where students perform better. Despite challenges, they are able to connect different cultural practices and improve educational outcomes.

The findings highlight the urgent need for gender-responsive institutional reforms within TVET. Policies must go beyond

promoting women's participation and instead aim to dismantle the structural and cultural barriers that inhibit their advancement. Some key implications include:

- Establishing women-friendly institutional cultures through gender sensitivity training, supportive leadership and inclusive decision-making structures.
- Providing targeted professional development opportunities for women instructors, especially in leadership, pedagogy and technology integration.
- Strengthening gender-responsive policies within TVET, ensuring that women are adequately represented in curriculum development, management committees and policy formulation.
- Supporting work-life balance initiatives, such as flexible schedules, childcare support and counseling services to reduce the dual burden carried by women educators.

Such interventions would not only enhance the professional growth of women instructors but also contribute to broader goals of equity, inclusion and quality in Nepal's TVET sector.

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## Article

# Understanding Dropout Dynamics of TVET Students: A Case of Apprenticeship Model in Nepal

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## Abstract

The dual-VET apprenticeship model is considered as an improved model of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) that enhances a higher possibility of ensuring a rewarding job. Such model provides dual benefits. On the one hand, it helps trainees achieve high employability and, on the other hand, the employers get skilled and loyal workforce to their industries. Despite sound theoretical base of this modality, the practice shows low retention rate in Nepal and many trainees drop out from the program in the middle. This study seeks to understand the dynamics of dropout phenomenon via apprentices' dropout experiences. It basically adopts a qualitative approach. However, it first assesses the prevalence and distribution of such dropout event of apprentices quantitatively to problematize the issue. Then, in-depth interviews with five dropouts and two FGDs with current apprentices draw qualitative information to enrich the study. This study portrays three major findings: a) The dropout phenomenon starts right from the selection process of apprentices, b) The apprentices consider this program as a program to pursue their short-term interest, and c) There is a mismatch between apprentices' expectation and field realities. In sum, the occurrence of dropout of apprentices was the result of less informed choice, lack of counseling during the program, and institutional arrangements of TVET system where the ground realities were interwoven with socio-cultural and economic background of apprentices. The dropout phenomenon is explained under the social cognitive career theory. One of the major contributions of this study will be identifying policy-practice gaps in implementing the apprenticeship model of TVET. Moreover, the findings will be helpful to understand and improve the working strategies in undergoing TVET programs and projects in the local context of Nepal.

*Keywords:* dropout, TVET, dual-VET apprenticeship, apprentices

## Introduction

The concept of apprenticeship is connecting learning with work. Emerged from the European countries like Germany and

Switzerland, the dual-VET apprenticeship model has been instrumental to connect the world of education with employment

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(Deissinger, 2010). The close coordination between workplace and technical institutes in such modality equips people with practical skills and work-based learning experiences along with theoretical knowledge, supporting them for smooth transition to the world of work. The dual-VET modality has gradually been contextualized and adopted by different nations, such as Australia, USA, China, India and many more (Pilz & Li, 2014).

Dual-VET apprenticeship program in Nepal has been supported in Nepal by the Enhanced Skills for Sustainable and Rewarding Employment (ENSSURE) Project since 2016. Like the dual-VET system practiced in Germany, Switzerland and Austria (Deissinger, 2010), Nepal has implemented the program of 24-month duration in a dual-VET apprenticeship modality in few pre-diploma courses offered by Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) (Renold et al., 2024). The period of 24-month offers apprentices the learning opportunity in both the technical schools and occupation-related industries by facilitating them to combine hands-on skills with classroom learning (Boli et al., 2020).

The dual-VET apprenticeship modality designed in the context of Nepal offers a win-win situation to all the concerned stakeholders. The apprentices as well as the industries, supporting their placement both benefited from this modality. Eichhorst et al., (2012) suggest that dual-VET system prepares apprentices to be more work-ready through real and updated work experiences, thereby minimizing skill mismatch during

career development. He further adds the graduates of this system in the developed countries are evident of being quickly and easily employed as compared to the general education. Likewise, the benefits to industries/employers can be immediate as well as lasting. Renold et al., (2024) mention that industries get low-cost labor with reduced recruitment and adjustment costs of hiring employees while supporting apprentices' placement. In the long run, they are directly shaping the quality and quantity of workforce required for their industry in future.

Despite remarkable benefits to each stakeholder involved in implementing the program, the program is struggling to take pace in Nepal. The formative assessment of the first cohort conducted by Boli et al., (2020) reflects that it has been challenging to motivate youths to enroll in the program. Not only about enrolling but also the apprentices enrolled in the program seem less motivated to complete the course. The results obtained by analyzing the dropout trend of two batches from ENSSURE Project reflect that the dropout rate of apprentices increased from 35.6% in the first batch to 50.3% in the second batch. Although the result of quantitative analysis of dropout among apprentices highlighted places of origin, types of courses and socio-economic factors to significantly affect the dropout decision, the combined effect of the significant factors contributed only 6% behind the dropout reason. This signified that the dropout among apprentices was more a phenomenon

that demands qualitative exploration of individual experiences.

### ***Purpose and Research Question***

The purpose of this study was to understand the dynamics of the dropout phenomenon by listening to apprentices' dropout experiences in dual-VET apprenticeship program in Nepal. To pursue the purpose, the following research questions were undertaken by the study: a) How do apprentices describe their experiences of discontinuity from the dual-VET apprenticeship courses?, and b) What are the dynamics that play a role in their dropout decisions?

### **Methodology**

With the aim of understanding the dropout occurrence of TVET apprentices in Nepal, some dropout cases were identified following the quantitative assessment of dropout apprentices. Currently, the course is also being run independently by CTEVT itself, however, the apprentices considered under this study were from the first phase of program launch when it was solely implemented by CTEVT under the project's support. Since the quantitative analysis was carried out only with the dropout data provided by ENSSURE Project, the study is considered more qualitative. It only uses quantitative rigor to problematize the issue of dropout in the study. I, thus, proposed this research from interpretive paradigm. Aligning with the idea of Taylor and Medina (2011), I believe the experience of dropout is subjective and has multiple reality to

different individuals. The apprentices varying in socio-cultural and demographic aspects have their own unique perception towards the apprenticeship program that guide their decision of dropout. This can't be generalized to all the apprentices who quit the program before completion.

A quantitative analysis using descriptive statistics was done with dropout data from among a total of 1,441 apprentices who were admitted in different trades of apprenticeship program supported by the ENSSURE Project in the FY 2076/77 B.S. and 2077/78 B.S. Among these apprentices, two-fifths were found dropouts of the program. This objective analysis seeks to see the dropout events of an individual where social, economic and geographic characteristics of the trainees were further analyzed to know how these factors were influencing the dropout decisions of apprenticeship. Using some statistical tools, such as correlation, chi square test and logistic regression, the relation and contribution of these background characteristics to drop out event was analyzed. The statistical tools 'correlation' and 'chi-square' test were found as appropriate ones to see whether the relationship/differences in educational background was statistically significant (Fox et al., 2014). The quantitative analysis identified a very few characteristics as statistically significant and gave low Nagelkerke  $R^2$  value of those factors. This implied that the quantitative analysis could not sufficiently describe the dropout event, demanding the need of a qualitative approach. So, this study used in-depth interviews and

FGD with participants as two major data collection tools to understand the dropout occurrence qualitatively.

So, five cases were taken to understand the dropout decisions of apprentices. First, few apprentices were selected randomly from different trades for interview. The process of selecting new participants was over after reaching the 11 participants and realizing the data saturation (Dahal et al., 2024). Identifying the similar reason between many cases, finally 5 cases were considered enough for study. Dropouts were consulted for the in-depth interview. In addition to the in-depth interview with dropouts, two FGDs (one with male apprentices of automobile engineering and one with female in IT trade) were conducted with current apprentices to explore their experience of studying in school as well as working in companies. The FGD was conducted to understand the problem faced by apprentices working in the second phase of the program. Following Litchman (2013), the quantitative data was analyzed using the SPSS software while the three C approach (coding, categorizing and concept) was applied in analyzing the qualitative data.

Listening to the experience of an individual, it gave the impression that their subjective understanding was unique and largely non-generalizable (Cohen et al., 2018). Even within the similar background and context, the dropout decision of individual apprentices was guided by different reasons. Meaning of the same context was embedded differently with different subjective meanings among them. So, it was difficult to understand the

complexity of views and to categorize those views in specific groups (Creswell, 2007). Thus, the qualitative data collected through cases were used for understanding the dropout phenomenon to attain the insider's view (Tuly, 2010) of current apprentices under this study. The result and conclusion made in the study was, therefore, the double interpretation of understanding dropout phenomenon (Taylor & Medina, 2011). The finding was the researcher's reflective understanding on participant's meaning on their dropout decision.

The decision of dropouts was more a subjective phenomenon. Such a subjective reality influencing the dropout decision was the result of peoples' action, reaction and interaction in their personal and socio-economic context (Saldana, 2015). This qualitative understanding intended to understand, explain and demystify the social reality based on people's reasoning of dropout decision in certain specific context. Philosophically, my role in the second phase was more an interpretive role to understand the situation responsible for dropouts rather than finding the universal laws for the dropout event (Willis, 2007). In order to ensure the trustworthiness in the research, this study adopted member checking and triangulations between FGD and in-depth interview as two major approaches.

### **Causes of Dropout: Findings of Basic Statistical Analysis**

The status of 1,441 TVET trainees admitted in the FY 2076/77 B.S. and 2077/78 B.S. under

the apprenticeship program supported by the ENSSURE Project showed a high intensity of dropout where two-fifths of the trainees (575 out of 1,441) had left the program in the middle. Among those 575 dropouts, almost 90 percent were found dropping during their internship at companies. Among those dropouts identified, 243 apprentices were out of contact, probably had already been abroad for work; and among those surveyed apprentices, majority of them (56%) reported as their personal or family problems, such as death/illness of family member, weak financial status, needed to engage in household chores as the reasons for quitting the study without completing the course. The second (8.7%) and third (8.1%) major reasons were due to getting new job or starting their own business and losing their interest on the admitted training program. The other reasons for dropping out were preparing/going for foreign employment (6.6%) and starting other studies (6%). Some of the dropouts were found joining Grade 12, or Bachelor's degree in general education, leaving those TVET courses. Likewise, in case of female, the marriage after admission was one vital reason for their dropout, as it led to shift their residence with new roles assigned in the husband's family. Out of 115 dropout females, 10% had left their training program because of their marriage.

The dropout rate was statistically significant in terms of their place of residence, types of training, and sociocultural, demographic and economic conditions. In terms of the trainees' place of origin, the dropout was highest

(48.6%) among trainees from the Gandaki Province and lowest in the Madhesh Province (36%). Likewise, the dropout rate among hill/mountain trainees was lower (36%) than the dropout rate (43.5%) from Tarai/Madhesh trainees. Regarding trade, it was highest (51%) among the apprentices admitted in mechanical engineering and lowest (28.8%) among electrical engineering. Marital status was another statistically significant factor where the dropout rate among married apprentices was 52.7% and it was only 40.1% among unmarried/never married apprentices. Beyond the common understanding, the analyses revealed that the background, such as, gender, age, rural/urban origin, poor or non-poor family status were not statistically significant in explaining the dropout of the apprenticeship training program.

In addition, the low Nagelkerke  $R^2$  value (detail statistical analysis in Appendix B) revealed from the binary logistic regression model implied that the combined effect of all these significant factors identified by the study was only around 6%. It means only six percent of dropout events could be explained by those significant factors. These results indicated two main ideas. First, either there are some other major factors that explain more on the occurrence of dropout which are yet to be captured. More than this, the very low contribution of those factors signifies that the dropout is a subjective phenomenon rather than a cause and effect event. Thus, the dropout occurrence needs to be understood qualitatively. Now, the following section presents the understanding of dropout

incident by listening to the experiences of dropouts qualitatively.

### **Listening to the Participants: Experiences Leading to Dropout Decisions**

This section presents the major reasoning conceived from the dropouts' experience that they expressed for their dropout decision. The reasons ranged from inadequate orientation before entering the program to their socio-economic context including the managerial aspect of the apprenticeship program itself.

#### ***Engage in TVET Program: A Means of Wait and See for Other Opportunities***

Apprentices were found generally admitted both in TVET programs and in the general education stream. This was reflected through 3 out of 5 cases of dropout apprentices and in both FGDs. Apprentices were found joining the TVET program at the waiting time for their result in general education. If the result comes during the program and they get opportunity, they prefer to join the higher level in general education and quit the TVET program. Likewise, the FGD conducted with the current apprentices revealed that they have examples of many apprentices who are now waiting for result of their applications for foreign employment. If they get selected for foreign jobs, the result will evidently be dropout in the TVET program. Apprentices were found not having even patience of a few months to get the certificate of TVET program which would enhance their skills and job level even abroad. This could be sensed during the study why only about

50% of dropouts were reachable. Most of those remaining might have already been to overseas jobs.

*It is better to take such training rather than staying idle, but this can't be a major pathway for career development. Instead, it can be taken as a medium for capacity development and additional point to support our major education.*

- IT apprentice, Kathmandu

This means apprenticeship for them was not the means to enhance their skills and value in labor market but only the program to get engaged with during their break or result awaiting period.

#### ***Mismatch between Student's Anticipation and Field Reality***

One of the reasons behind dropout was that apprentices lost their interest in the middle of the program due to the mismatched realities. The experience of apprentices varied from their expectations also contributed to triggering them in taking dropout decision. Although major problems were caused due to covid-19 pandemic, this was similarly explained by the current apprentices consulted during FGD. They mentioned two reasons behind this: First, most of the apprentices are convinced by their friends, brother/sisters, or someone close to them to join the program. They don't get proper know-how of course content, training modality, requirements to get qualified after this program or any of the important information related to it. This improper guidance and lack of sufficient

information prior to enrollment create a negative perception about the program among apprentices, resulting in obstacles they face something very different from their expectations. They ultimately leave the course looking for other comfortable options.

*Without getting proper information, my father compelled me to join the mechanical course, believing it to be linked with the automobile sector. But later, I realized it was different from my expectation which ultimately discouraged me from putting effort into what I was learning.*

- Mechanical apprentice, Kathmandu

Second, for joining the course with the mentality of utilizing free time for free of cost, apprentices aren't ready to work hard during the course. They generally consider it a short-term training and are not ready to accept that it requires full-time engagement and strong dedication to complete and get certified through it. The three cases that pursued apprenticeship as alternate option to general stream mentioned facing some or the other reasons like financial constraints, issues in industry, or problems from family after certain period. However, this was more due to mismatched realities than the technical issues.

### ***Working Environment of Industry***

Although the batches taken for study were affected by covid-19 pandemic, there were other additional issues working in industry that led them to drop out. Both the dropouts and current apprentices

highlighted it. Restricting the apprentices to work in frontline or giving primary work opportunities, improper guidance from in-company trainers, assigning the same task repeatedly every day, skipping the incentivization in the industry were some practices that made apprentices uncomfortable or discouraging to continue the training. The mechanical apprentice expressed that they feel lost when they become unable to match the theory they learnt in school with practice at industry. The employees would take full advantage of those apprentices, as they do from their staff. Furthermore, while working in the industry, apprentices get a very minimum amount of money as incentive where they perform like a fulltime employee. The female IT apprentice, mechanical apprentice and automobile apprentice all faced the same situation. They consider this situation as an injustice to them and oppressed by the employer. The ignorance and ineffective guidance from supervisors further demotivated them.

*Ignorance from supervisor, less incentive than agreement, mismatch between theory and practice all added to each bit of discouragement to me.*

- Automobile apprentice, Kavre.

At this proper point, they forget that this is the agreed obligation where they are working as an apprentice and not as an employee. In many cases, the apprentices would be looking for other better options and take the decision of dropping out as soon as they find some other opportunities.

Similar experience was shared by the male apprentices considered during FGD who were the ongoing apprentices of automobile course.

### ***Socio-economic Condition of Apprentices***

The economic aspect of the apprentices also contributes to dropping out in two ways. First, the apprentices who belonged to economically backward families could not afford the accommodation costs incurred during the training period. The allowances provided by the training, or the incentives given by industries were not sufficient for apprentices to cover up their logistic arrangements. The second situation was that due to the economic crisis in the family, apprentices themselves had to cover up all the financial responsibilities of their family. Three out of five participants left the training due to financial constraints.

*In the situation where I was struggling to manage money for tiffin, because industry hadn't given me a single penny, I was focused on passing the teacher's license exam for stable and attractive income to support my family. So, it didn't take me long enough to leave the course once I passed the exam.*

- IT apprentice, Madhesh

*Belonging to a poor family, it was impossible to use a bike for travelling to attend classes, so I ended up staying at rent. But I was struggling to pay the rent as well... Today I am bound to fulfill the financial needs of my family*

*after my father's death. But I soon wish to complete my unfulfilled dream by supporting my younger brother to pursue the course and get certified.*

- Electrical apprentice, Koshi

The gender-based differences faced by the female apprentices in family or industry demotivated them to continue the courses. It clearly reflects the lack of women-friendly environment in the so-called male suitable trades during industry-based learning. Although the apprentices might be treated equally and nicely during institute-based learning, they struggle during industry-based learning. The arduous task of this sector makes it difficult for women to complete the task on time at the beginning. Although they become efficient over time, people judge their working capacity at the very beginning and discourage them from continuing.

*Right from the institute-based learning, I was performing quite well in my batch. With the placement at a well-equipped industry, I had got an opportunity of good practical learning. However, the eyes our society have towards female technician seriously lowered my confidence ... no clients would trust me and ask to repair their cars at the workshop making me think that I am a girl and it is not the regime I'm expected to be involved.*

- Automobile apprentice, Kavre

The observation of Grundall and Mack (2023) was like the experience that female is meant for table works and simple jobs rather than the heavy technical or blue-collar jobs.

Meanwhile the concern of family support lags being guided by societal perception, it becomes difficult to engage in this sector.

*My family had been nagging me about riding bicycle to work and staying up late to work after my industry placement at an IT company. They gradually began to show dissatisfaction to this working environment.*

- IT apprentice, Madhesh

This was also reflected in the study conducted by Mwinkume et. al. (2024) in Ghana where males were three times more likely to choose TVET than female. The experiences of dropout female apprentices and the experience of current female apprentices feels similar. A group of IT female apprentices in FGD mentioned their struggle in finding industries which accept them happily for internship in their workplaces.

### **Understanding Dropout Phenomenon in TVET**

Listening to the experiences and stories of dropout from apprentices led to the realization of four major dynamics behind this phenomenon. Now, discussing cases with the existing literatures and social cognitive career theory gave an interesting understanding to this study. Four prime observations derived from this discussion are explained in the following headings:

#### ***Perception on TVET: Second Class Education, Blue-collar Job***

Ideally, TVET courses like dual-VET

apprenticeship program is considered instrumental in linking its graduate better to the world of work (Eichhorst et al., 2012). However, people in Nepal perceive it as a second-class education meant for disadvantaged groups in society which is reflected well in our stories as well. This practice of giving little value to TVET is common to other developing countries as well. TVET is less favored than general education and is often pursued by academically and financially weak students who are unable to afford academic degrees (Nawi et al., 2024). In Nepal also, still students who are academically sound and economically strong select the science and engineering after school education while education (targeted subject for teaching profession) becomes third or fourth option and technical subjects (which is directed to production work in factories) is the last option for students. Zia et al. (2019) found that 60% of the respondents showing apathy to pursue career in the TVET sector in Malaysia. As concluded by Maskey (2019), TVET is recommended as a career choice to academically unsuccessful people in Nepal because of the greater societal preference to general education and so-called white-collar jobs.

The societal perception towards TVET is one prime issue for apprentice dropout. It has first been challenging to have sufficient enrollment in the apprenticeship program (Boli et al., 2018). Subsequently the enrolled apprentices are much guided by these societal values and perception hence deciding to

drop out from the course. Despite providing the apprenticeship program for free of cost, dropout rate is in increasing trend (as shown by quantitative results). Thus, to reduce the dropout rate, it needs improved understanding of society in TVET which further demands a collaboration among educators, government and society (Nawi et al., 2024). The negative perception about TVET affects student's motivation (Baoteng et al., 2024). Since the cultural value, economic benefits and social settings shape the perception of vocational education, there is an urgent need to address these issues and create a favorable environment.

### ***Economically Disadvantaged Groups Enrolled in TVET***

As mentioned above, the practice of giving little value to TVET (Maskey, 2019) is a global phenomenon in the developing world (Nawi et al., 2024). Society conceives that the elite population engages in white-collar jobs where the weaker sections engage in blue-collar jobs. Thus, TVET has become the area of academically and financially weak and socially disadvantaged groups of people. As a result, such programs intentionally target those weaker section. This is the origin point of dropout phenomenon which amplifies the process in different stages.

The apprenticeship program for being new to Nepal is offering scholarship to provide equitable access to the poor, and the marginalized groups as well. This, in turn, results in the targeted population joining the course only due to the scholarship

offered without even having complete information about it. Later they face multiple inconveniences. Residing in a rented place far from their hometown, it then becomes challenging for apprentices to afford their living cost, which is not covered by the scholarship offered. In addition, such youths are also expected to earn and support their families financially. This makes them count every possible opportunity cost. Additionally, incentives provided by industries are quite low or sometimes null which do not serve the purpose of their income. So, once they get a better chance to work and earn somewhere they cannot wait 24 months to complete the course and drop out immediately. In this regard, apprentices do not look for relevancy, location, feasibility or anything about the work they get.

### ***Program Approach: Free Riding, Supply Driven***

The need of uplifting has been realized at the policy level in Nepal. The constitution of Nepal demands TVET to develop competent and professional human resources through a “technical, vocational, empirical, scientific, employment and people-oriented” education (Government of Nepal [GoN], 2015). A separate plan “TVET Sector Strategic Plan 2023-32” has been implemented to uplift the TVET sector in Nepal. Number of development partners and projects have taken initiative to increase attraction to TVET. In this regard, ENSSURE Project – a dual-VET apprenticeship model (Boli et al., 2019) - provides a full scholarship to the enrolled apprentices. However, the actual

enrollment is lower than the capacity, facing high dropouts. The youths migrating for foreign employment is in increasing trend (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2021), resulting in a situation of hiring expensive foreign labor to run the industries in the country (Renold et al., 2024). This is basically due to two major causes: free schooling modality and supply driven system.

Equally pressing is the inadequacy in design of apprenticeship program model itself. For making it a free course, youths jump into the program without any proper exploration of the project. Due to the challenge of receiving applications lesser than the total seats, the schools are forced to consider the applicants randomly. The important aspects like their interest, attitude, hunger to pursue the course, relevancy of the course to them are completely avoided while selecting the apprentices. Indeed, selection becomes more like a collection process. The fact explained by Grundall and Mack (2023) that career guidance plays a significant role in guiding informed career decisions in youths bears much relevance in this context. When applicants become apprentices without proper information, counselling or knowledge about the course, they become highly prone to dropout.

Likewise, the production of TVET graduates in all is becoming supply driven. Where there is a need for industry's engagement in the training cycle right from curriculum designing to its revision stage (Bajracharya & Poudel, 2021), the apprentices are being

connected and handed over to employers only after school-based classes for industrial learning. Thus, naturally, employers may not necessarily be interested in contributing to the courses from their end. Those apprentices might only be considered as low-cost labor in their industry. As a result, there is neither assurance of an appropriate learning environment or guidance to apprentices, nor do they get respect and agreed incentives at work. Since taking labor market need into consideration supports better career development in youths (Tuan, 2024), a strong collaboration with industry right from the beginning is essential for successful result of apprenticeship model.

### ***Dropout as a Result of Encountering Multiple Inconveniences***

Keeping all the grievances expressed by the dropouts at one place, I reflected that the dropout phenomenon of apprentices was a result of the inconveniences they experienced at different phases of their engagement. The inconveniences start from the stage of choosing this program. There is a practice of choosing this apprenticeship program by the students who are having poor school results and not able to join other general programs. In addition, this program is free of direct cost. So, students and parents do not like to miss this opportunity where there is a possibility of gaining at least some skills without paying school fees. Naturally, this program attracts those students who are economically poor and have academically poor results (Boli et al., 2019). It is the targeted group as well. Although school fees are waived,

students struggle to cover up their living and travelling expenses. As they do not get time to engage in earning apprenticeship, they experience financial inconvenience even during the first three months when they fully engage in school. Even when they start apprenticeships in industry, they get very low amount of money which is insufficient to meet their personal needs. In many cases, they are also expected to meet the financial needs of their family. This situation triggers the calculation of opportunity cost they are compromising for study.

When the apprentices start working in the industry, many apprentices might find that the nature of their job is neither that of their interest nor the best fit for them. This was due to the lack of proper counselling at the time of admission. It is normal that individuals cannot continue their careers in the sector that lacks their interest, aspiration or self-efficacy (Baoteng et al., 2024; Hong et al., 2023). Furthermore, it becomes discouraging with the unfavorable environment, such as less support from supervisors, paying minimum incentives or not paying anything at all. At such situations, many apprentices fail to visualize and hold onto the essence of program in having long term benefits of sustainable skills and rewarding employment, hence deciding to drop out of the course.

Aligning with Hunt (2008), I also reflected that the dropout phenomenon of students in dual-VET apprenticeship program is a result of multiple inconveniences that they experience at different stages. The stories

of dropouts signified that it was the sum of multiple discomforts experienced by the apprentices at different stages of their engagement from school to workplace. These multiple inconveniences create adverse circumstances, tension and stress leading to confusion and dilemma about continuation or dropping out from the program. At such a situation, once they get one triggering point, they decide to drop out from the program which had never been their first choice. Thus, pursuing apprenticeship courses seems like travelers looking for shade to rest or protect themselves from sun/rain while reaching their pre-decided destination.

### **Understanding Dropout Phenomenon from Theoretical Lenses**

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) developed by Lent, Brown and Hacket based on Albert Bandura's Social cognitive theory guides the dropout phenomenon among apprentices in Nepal. This theory helps in explaining the phenomenon from the level of agency where Bandura (1986) suggests that the cognitive process of an individual shape one's behavior. In this regard, there are three major components of SCCT that guide the cognitive process and behavior of taking career decisions: self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goal setting mechanism (Lent et al., 1994).

Reflecting upon the cases of dropout taken in the study, it is understood that apprentices having negative or low self-efficacy towards TVET chose to drop out of the course. Their mismatched interest and passion, and low

confidence in case of female apprentices discouraged them to continue the course. Likewise, when the outcome expectation and personal goals of individual is mismatched with that of the apprenticeship program, apprentices decided to drop out (Liu et al., 2020). Some apprentices were planning to go abroad, and some were expected to work to fulfill immediate financial needs of the family while the course in return equipped apprentices with employable skills to gain employment and income in the long run. The expectation of the period and range of return did not match between the apprentices and offered courses; this ultimately made them leave the course in between. Likewise, the goal of some apprentices was to achieve positions related to general stream but had enrolled in the course for utilizing their free time. This mismatch also contributed to drop out decision.

In addition to the three significant components, SCCT mentions some contextual influences that stimulate the cognition and guide the individual's behavior (Lent et al., 1994). In this context, the contextual influences that guided the dropout decisions were societal value, prioritizing general education's degree over TVET, lack of orientation and career guidance among apprentices, pressure from parents/elders to enroll in course to utilize free time, discouraging societal belief of female being into TVET and so on. These contexts in one way or the other enhanced the behavior of apprentices to consider dropout as a suitable option.

## Conclusion

This study concludes the TVET in Nepal is still considered as second class education which is provided to the weaker group of the society which cannot do well in formal education. In addition, there exists lack of proper selection process and approaches, such as inadequate orientation, targeting to the weaker section of the society and supply driven approach. As a result, the apprentices consider this program as a scheme to pursue their short-term interest. They continue in the apprenticeship program unless they become successful to enter the field of interest, such as foreign employment. In the similar ways, the companies (workplace) are neither properly instructed nor supervised. With this, the apprentices experience mismatch between their expectation and field realities.

Despite increasing awareness, advocacy, initiatives and investment in the Nepalese TVET sector, the net enrollment rate is declining seriously. The provisions of promoting TVET is reflected in Nepal's constitutions (in article 51, h(1)), TVET Sector Strategic Plan (2023-2032) and continuous support from development partners. However, the budgeting does not align with the intensity of planning. The national share of budget in TVET seems to decline from 5.25% in 2020 of educational budget to 4.25% in 2024 (Ministry of Finance [MOF], 2020, 2024). Likewise,

the enrollment rate in TVET, except some health-related programs, has been declining in recent years (CTEVT, 2081). Nepalese youths have still not been able to realize the role TVET can play in linking them to employment.

Attracting youths to TVET programs like dual-VET apprenticeship not only reduces the skill mismatch but also acts as a bridge to support a smooth transition from education to labor market hence checking brain drain from Nepal. On the one hand, the latest census of Nepal shows around 210,000 youths have already migrated abroad for employment and other purpose (CBS, 2021). On the other hand, employers are forced to hire expensive labor from abroad due to lack of skilled Nepali workers to run the industries (Renold, et al., 2024). Thus, this study suggests practices for enabling environment to retain youths in Nepal and get them in decent jobs by encouraging them to pursue career in TVET sector. For this, first the societal image of TVET must be improved and the proper system of career guidance and information has to be in place to help youths make informed career decisions. This study would be helpful for policy makers and planners of TVET in the country to reduce the dropouts in the field and to utilize the scarce resources of the country. At practitioners' level, such as technical schools, it would provide help in developing supportive strategies to practice proper orientation-led trade selection among apprentices and address the issues faced during implementation of the apprenticeship courses.

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**Appendix A****Statistical Analysis of the Relation between Dropout and Respondent's Background**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Dropout Intensity</b>	<b>Significant (Chi square value)</b>
Type of school	CTEVT school = 41.2% Private school = 37.2%	Not significant (0.313)
Types of trade	Automobile engineering = 41.1% Electrical engineering = 28.8 % Hotel management = 46.3% Information technology = 41.4% Mechanical engineering = 51.9%	Significant (0.000)
Marital status	Married = 42.7% Unmarried = 40.1%	Significant (0.032)
Ethnicity	BCTD = 42.5% Dalit = 47.9% Janajati = 36.5% Tarai Middle class = 40.6%	Significant (0.039)
Residence	Hill/mountain = 36.0% Tarai/Madhesh = 43.5%	Significant (0.003)
Province-wise	Province 1 = 39.5% Province 2 = 36.7% Province 3 = 45.9% Province 4 = 48.6% Province 5 = 41.6% Province 6 = 48.1% Province 7 = 40.8%	Significant (0.006)
Rural Urban	Rural = 40.2% Urban = 40.4%	Not significant (.496)
Economic status	Poor = 40.8% Non-poor = 40.5	Not significant (.889)
Family size	Small (6 or less) = 40.1% Large (more than 6) = 42.5%	Not significant (.423)
Age of the trainees	Below 20 years = 59.1% 20-25 years = 59.3% Above 25 years = 48.0%	Not significant (.476)
Gender	Male = 40.9% Female = 40.2%	Not significant (.835)

## Appendix B

### Result of Logistic Regression

Dependent variable: Status of apprentices (dropout, completed)

Independent variable:

Variables in the Equation							
		<b>B</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
Step 0	Constant	-.386	.055	50.131	1	.000	.680
Variables not in the Equation							
				<b>Score</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	
Step 0	Variables	Type of occupation		35.751	4	.000	
		Type of occupation (1)	.044	1	.833		
		Type of occupation (2)	27.898	1	.000		
		Type of occupation (3)	5.229	1	.022		
		Type of occupation (4)	.000	1	.990		
		Marital status (1)	4.300	1	.038		
		Ethnicity of trainees	8.384	3	.039		
		Ethnicity of trainees (1)	1.488	1	.223		
		Ethnicity of trainees (2)	4.189	1	.041		
		Ethnicity of trainees (3)	6.516	1	.011		
		Geo-Region (1)	9.494	1	.002		
		Province of trainees	18.340	6	.005		
		Province of trainees (1)	.273	1	.602		
		Province of trainees (2)	1.600	1	.206		
		Province of trainees (3)	4.609	1	.032		
		Province of trainees (4)	1.792	1	.181		
		Province of trainees (5)	.159	1	.690		
		Province of trainees (6)	2.790	1	.095		
	Overall Statistics			60.163	15	.000	

<b>Model Summary</b>			
<b>Step</b>	<b>-2 Log likelihood</b>	<b>Cox &amp; Snell R Square</b>	<b>Nagelkerke R Square</b>
1	1819.754a	.043	.058
a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 4 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.			

<b>Variables in the Equation</b>		<b>B</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
Step 1a	Type of trade			25.454	4	.000	
	Type of trade (1)	-.564	.212	7.099	1	.008	.569
	Type of trade (2)	-1.050	.221	22.555	1	.000	.350
	Type of trade (3)	-.393	.211	3.454	1	.063	.675
	Type of trade (4)	-.544	.205	7.071	1	.008	.580
	Marital status (1)	.548	.249	4.830	1	.028	1.730
	Ethnicity of trainees			7.934	3	.047	
	Ethnicity of trainees (1)	-.206	.282	.534	1	.465	.814
	Ethnicity of trainees (2)	.018	.309	.003	1	.955	1.018
	Ethnicity of trainees (3)	-.439	.256	2.937	1	.087	.645
	Geo-Region (1)	-.135	.154	.760	1	.383	.874
	Province of trainees			7.583	6	.270	
	Province of trainees (1)	.302	.220	1.890	1	.169	1.353
	Province of trainees (2)	-.009	.278	.001	1	.974	.991
	Province of trainees (3)	.410	.218	3.535	1	.060	1.507
	Province of trainees (4)	.386	.297	1.696	1	.193	1.472
	Province of trainees (5)	.028	.214	.017	1	.897	1.028
	Province of trainees (6)	.302	.258	1.365	1	.243	1.352
	Constant	.262	.363	.520	1	.471	1.300

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: Type of occupation, Martial status, Ethnicity of trainees, Geo-region, Province of trainees.





## Article

# Agribusiness Innovation through TVET: Role of Business Incubation in Nepal

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## Abstract

Although the agriculture sector is the backbone of rural economy in Nepal, the agricultural productivity is low in rural areas coupled with limited opportunities for value addition. This has forced the youths to migrate abroad for employment. The Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system operating in Nepal has provided thousands of youths with technical skills. The education provided to the youths with a focus on entrepreneurial skills has, however, been weak. This study has reviewed the aspects of business incubation and examined how it can stimulate innovation and strengthen rural transformation in rural agricultural businesses. It has also reviewed the evidence from various agricultural policies of the country, innovation methods and incubation models operated in other countries. The study has identified business incubation as a mechanism to link skills with enterprise creation. Incubation services, such as market linkage development, business development support, will help in empowering trainees to become agricultural entrepreneurs. It has been concluded that the agricultural value chain can contribute to development and inclusive economic growth. Innovation centers, various support funds and national incubation frameworks should be established at various levels to formalize this approach in agribusiness. Moreover, it is imperative to transform Nepal's skills ecosystem into a vehicle for agribusiness innovation and rural prosperity.

*Keywords:* TVET, agribusiness innovation, business incubation, rural transformation, entrepreneurship

## Introduction

Nearly two-thirds of the workforce are employed in agriculture, which continues to be the backbone of Nepal's economy (Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO], 2021; National Planning Commission [NPC], 2024). However, the industry is marked by an aging workforce, low productivity and little

value addition. According to the economic activities report published by Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), the capacity utilization is 48.3% in 2024/2024 (NRB, 2024). Thousands of young people are admitted into Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions annually, but

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a predominant proportion end up migrating abroad or working in different fields, as the system is unable to train job creators in comparison with job seekers (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2021; Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training [CTEVT], 2022).

Nepal has traditionally been a subsistence farming country. There is a growing recognition that agribusiness should transform rural areas (Helvetas Nepal, 2023; United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2022). However, innovation, entrepreneurship, and access to markets and technology are key areas in agribusiness, where Nepal's business system has yet to make a significant contribution (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021).

In the context of Nepal, this article claims that business development services and incubation, especially in the agribusiness, CTEVT, and provincial TVET bodies have been providing practical skills training for employment generation (CTEVT, 2022). Yet, it seems that TVET provides regular, conventional and traditional training models that emphasize short-term skill achievement, such as vegetable farming, livestock management or agro-mechanic operations, without linking these skills to enterprise development (ADB, 2021; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2023). In contrast, agribusiness innovation goes beyond crop production. It encompasses the development of new products, enhanced processes, and innovative business models (FAO, 2021).

When TVET is connected to innovation and entrepreneurship, it can create a new generation of youth-led agribusinesses that strengthen value chains and generate local employment (Helvetas Nepal, 2023).

In Nepal, agricultural enterprises and processing operations appear to have contributed to skill development. Nowadays, the connection between TVET outputs and the needs of Nepal's agribusiness segment has been ruptured. The graduates are skilled, but they lack market orientation, business management experience and innovation exposure (ILO, 2020; UNDP, 2022). Furthermore, linking this gap requires a new approach, one that implants business incubation within the TVET ecosystem. Business incubation refers to a structured support system that helps hopeful entrepreneurs transform innovative ideas into viable businesses. It provides mentorship, technical guidance, seed funding, workspace, access to networks and market linkages. Altogether, incubators have been successful in stimulating entrepreneurship in the technology and manufacturing sectors (ADB, 2022). In the Nepali context, TVET-based business incubation could serve as a practical model for agribusiness development, where training centers act as "skills-to-startup pipelines" (Helvetas Nepal, 2023). In a similar vein, imagine a TVET center that not only teaches mushroom cultivation techniques but also helps trainees develop a branded mushroom business offering mentoring, packaging design, marketing channels and financial access. Such an approach converts technical

education into enterprise creation, allowing trained youths to innovate, compete and scale their operations (CTEVT, 2022; MoEST, 2023).

Some promising initiatives already exist in Nepal. Provincial governments have started experimenting with Enterprise Development Funds and youth entrepreneurship programs. Development partners like UNDP, ILO, and Helvetas have piloted agri-enterprise coaching and SME incubation models (Helvetas Nepal, 2023; ILO, 2020; UNDP, 2022). However, these remain isolated efforts rather than integral parts of the national TVET system. In Nepal too, various discussions are held on agricultural value chain development. Although TVET skill development is stressed for entrepreneurship, empirical research on how to operate in an integrated manner is limited (ADB, 2022).

This system can be important for contributing to the development of agribusiness through innovation, especially in Nepal, a country with an agricultural economy. If programs that develop people's skills are transformed into learning and transformed into a vibrant innovation ecosystem, agribusiness entrepreneurs can be inspired to improve Nepal's rural economy.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Theoretical Perspectives on Business Incubation and Innovation***

The concept of business incubation originates from theories of innovation systems and entrepreneurial ecosystems,

which emphasize the role of supportive institutions in fostering innovation and firm creation (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Isenberg, 2011). According to the Triple Helix model, collaboration among universities, industry and government generates environments conducive to innovation and entrepreneurship. The implications of this model is for promoting entrepreneurship development, innovation and skills utilization. It can be used as a tool to measure whether these aspects can be integrated into curriculum development, practical research and training methods to increase productivity and add value to products.

This experience is based on the belief that the development of skills in agribusiness and innovation through experiential learning should be based on the development of the overall capacity of the market actors in the value chain. Various levels of learning, universities and training institutions are not able to address the demands and needs of the market. In this way, there is a lack of coordination between the skills required in agribusiness and the content provided. This model will help in matching the necessary skills that will support the development of the value chain provided by skill provider (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). Incubators, within this model, act as intermediaries facilitating knowledge transfer and reducing the risks of market entry for start-ups (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2021). In the same way, based on the experience so far, it

can be seen from the fact that various exports have been made in addition to improving the living standards of rural communities. The development of agribusiness value chains will help Nepal become globally competitive in the agricultural sector (Bhandari, 2024).

### ***Empirical Evidence on Business Incubation and Agribusiness Innovation***

Empirical research highlights the effectiveness of incubation programs in enhancing startup performance and innovation outcomes. Studies in Asia and Africa show that incubated enterprises demonstrate higher survival rates, innovation intensity and employment generation than the non-incubated firms (ADB, 2022; Hackett & Dilts, 2004). For example, empirical evaluations in India's agricultural universities found that agribusiness incubators increased product diversification and access to finance among rural youth entrepreneurs (MANAGE, 2020). In fact, the things that came out of the review have been seen positively. In the context of business incubation, there are many different institutions and ecosystems of enterprises, and underestimating any one aspect can be risky for the market. In business development, especially in incubation, there is limited attention to the dynamics of the relationship between training institutions and business organizations. Moreover, business incubation is not a panacea for business development, but it is a tool that can effectively develop skills, build relationships across various aspects of the enterprise, and clarify the state of the business management

structure and plan where all of these can support innovation.

In Africa, Kanu et al. (2019) found that agribusiness incubation significantly improved market access and technology adoption for smallholder enterprises. Similar outcomes were observed in Kenya and Tanzania, where incubation centers linked to vocational colleges enhanced innovation in post-harvest processing and agro-logistics.

In Nepal, empirical literature is still emerging but promising. UNDP's *Micro-Enterprise Development Programme (MEDEP)* demonstrated that incubation-style mentorship and financing helped over 70 percent of micro-entrepreneurs sustain their businesses beyond three years (UNDP, 2022). Evaluations of the *Nepal Agricultural Market Development Programme (NAMDP)* show that coordinated value-chain incubation increased youth participation in high-value crops and agri-tech ventures (Helvetas Nepal, 2023).

Evidence from the TVET sector also underscores the incubation gap. ADB (2021) and CTEVT (2022) report that while TVET institutions produce skilled graduates, fewer than 10 percent transition into self-employment. Integrating incubation components, business plan development, coaching and seed-funding could substantially raise that figure.

According to ADB (2020), business incubation is not a panacea for all the problems of entrepreneurship. This study specifically shows that it is a strategy that can

work on the ways in which various aspects of business development work, but these are linked to the socio-economic aspects of the entrepreneur. In regards to the developing countries, the evidence from the study on the financial potential of graduates trained by CTEVT depends on factors, such as the social aspects, the potential for skill development and the availability and continuity of local raw materials.

The theoretical and empirical literature implies that business incubation bridges the gap between skill acquisition and innovation-led entrepreneurship. Although most studies focus on technology or manufacturing sectors, relatively few address agribusiness incubation within TVET frameworks, especially in low-income, agrarian economies like Nepal. This study fills that gap by analyzing how incubation can serve as a catalyst for agribusiness innovation within Nepal's evolving TVET system, linking policy, institutional reform and inclusive rural development.

### **Methodology**

This study draws on a desk-based literature review, policy analysis and comparative case review. This approach aimed to explore how integrating business incubation into TVET in Nepal's agricultural system can promote agribusiness innovation and inclusive rural transformation. A descriptive-analytical framework was applied to synthesize theoretical insights with empirical evidence, identify institutional gaps and make policy recommendations.

### ***Data Sources and Collection***

The policies of the Government of Nepal related to agricultural development, practices in various countries, incubation and the systems adopted were studied. Similarly, the selected topics included research topics, articles on technical skill development and incubation, analytical articles relevant to agricultural entrepreneurship and literature that was necessary at the policy level. The facts of the studies based on agricultural business development and business incubation in Nepal were studied. The focus was on presenting the articles logically, covering topics, such as skill development approaches in business incubation, models of entrepreneurship ecosystem, human resource development and innovation systems.

### **Findings from the Review**

#### ***Importance of Business Incubation for Agribusiness in Nepal's TVET Sector***

In order to address structural issues with agribusiness and young employment in Nepal, business incubation must be integrated into the TVET system. It serves as a crucial link, turning unskilled labor into long-lasting businesses and creating an innovation ecosystem that the rural economy needs urgently.

#### ***Bridging Skills-to-Enterprise Gap***

Traditional TVET programs in Nepal often produce skilled graduates who lack the entrepreneurial capability to start or manage a business. Incubation provides the crucial "missing middle" by offering post-training

support in business planning, financial management and market linkage. This ensures that technical skills are effectively translated into viable agribusinesses, moving beyond mere subsistence livelihoods (MoEST, 2021).

Through a significant youth population entering the job market, Nepal faces a pressing challenge of unemployment and underemployment. TVET-based incubation shifts the focus from creating job seekers to nurturing job creators. By supporting young "agripreneurs," incubation cultivates a culture of self-employment and innovation, which is essential for sustainable economic growth and aligns with the national Youth Employment Transformation Initiative (Government of Nepal, 2015).

### ***Driving Innovation in the Agricultural Value Chain***

Nepal's agribusiness sector remains largely traditional with limited value addition and market access. Incubation centers embedded in TVET institutions can become hubs for practical innovation, where graduates are mentored to develop new products, improve processing techniques and explore niche markets. This directly contributes to enhancing productivity and competitiveness, a key goal of Nepal's Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development [MoALD], 2025).

Nepal's agriculture is highly vulnerable to climate change. A modern TVET system with incubation can equip entrepreneurs

with the knowledge and tools to adopt climate-smart technologies and sustainable practices. This alignment with Nepal's Green Economy Framework ensures that new agribusinesses are not only profitable but also environmentally resilient (Ministry of Forest and Environment [MoFE], 2020). However, TVET-based incubation creates vital linkages between educational institutions, the private sector, financial institutions and government agencies. This synergy ensures that training is demand-driven and the graduates have access to a full spectrum of support services, from seed funding to market intelligence. This ecosystem approach is fundamental for achieving systemic and inclusive rural transformation (ADB, 2019; Bhandari, 2025).

### ***Forging Future: Pathway for the TVET-Led Agribusiness Innovation in Nepal***

The vision of transforming Nepal's agribusiness sector through a revitalized TVET system is both ambitious and achievable. The convergence of these two domains is not a matter of chance but of strategic design. The journey from a traditional training model to a dynamic innovation ecosystem is possible through a multifaceted pathway that involves structural, pedagogical and systemic shifts.

Institutional re-engineering and embedding incubation at the core is the first step to structurally integrate business incubation units within existing TVET institutions, particularly agricultural schools and colleges. This goes beyond adding a new course; it

requires establishing a dedicated physical and programmatic space where ideas can be prototyped. This means creating "agri-incubators" with access to demo farms, food processing labs and digital marketplaces, transforming TVET campuses from mere learning centers into vibrant enterprise hubs (MoEST, 2021).

According to the World Bank (2020), curriculum transformation from skill-delivery to problem-solving is the TVET curriculum that must evolve from teaching isolated technical skills to fostering entrepreneurial competence. This involves a project-based learning where students develop business models for real-world agricultural challenges. Modules on market analysis, financial literacy, value chain management and digital marketing become as fundamental as training in crop production or livestock management. This creates a mindset of innovation, preparing graduates to be solution-finders, not just laborers.

### ***Building Bridges: The Ecosystem Partnership Model***

TVET-based incubation will thrive on strategic partnerships. Linkages with private agribusiness firms ensure market relevance and provide channels for graduate enterprises. Collaborations with universities inject advanced research and development, while partnerships with financial institutions facilitate access to startup capital and credit. This multi-stakeholder approach creates a supportive ecosystem that de-risks entrepreneurship for young graduates (ADB, 2019).

Leveraging digital and green technologies, a modern agripreneur must be equipped for the challenges of the 21st century. TVET incubators must serve as access points for climate-smart agriculture technologies, such as drip irrigation and organic farming techniques and digital tools for e-commerce, precision agriculture and supply chain management. This dual focus ensures that the new generation of agribusiness is sustainable, resilient and competitive (MoFE, 2020).

### ***A National Framework for Coordinated Action***

This transformation requires a top-down enabling environment. CTEVT, in coordination with provincial governments, must champion the National Agenda for Agribusiness Innovation through TVET incubation. This framework would standardize best practices, mobilize resources, and align the efforts of all stakeholders towards the common goal of creating 'agripreneurs'. There is immense potential for business development, but by strategically integrating incubation into the TVET sector, Nepal can effectively harness the demographic dividend. It can address the aspirations of rural youth and unlock the hidden value in the agricultural sector. This is not just an educational reform that is happening now; it is also an economic strategy. It is a way to transform acquired skills into enterprises, enterprises into innovation, and innovation into inclusive rural prosperity. It is not too late to reimagine CTEVT as an engine of agribusiness innovation, which powers a future where

Nepal is not just a traditional producer. It is envisioning knowledge and creativity and inclusive entrepreneurship.

### **Discussion**

Business incubation has emerged globally as an effective mechanism for fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, particularly in sectors undergoing structural transformation (OECD, 2021). Incubators provide a structured environment in which hopeful entrepreneurs can develop, test and scale business ideas by accessing mentoring, finance and networks (ILO, 2021). In the context of Nepal, integrating incubation within TVET could bridge the existing gap between technical skill development and market-driven innovation, creating a generation of agripreneurs equipped to drive a local economic transformation.

In Nepal, incorporating business incubation into TVET is possible. Despite this, there is a challenge to transform local economic development, to create new curricula and to work by integrating it into value chain development. Similarly, there is a danger that agricultural entrepreneurs will be more theoretical than practical knowledge. However, there is immense potential to work in the field of skill development by generalizing such barriers. Currently, there are many problems in agricultural enterprises in the country. It is important to work to solve these problems, which CTEVT has seen as an opportunity to lead.

### ***Linking Incubation and Agribusiness Value Chains***

Incubation plays a catalytic role by connecting trained youths to the value-chain actors, such as input suppliers, collectors, aggregators, wholesalers, processors and retailers (FAO, 2021). Through these linkages, trainees can identify market gaps, develop innovative solutions and transform technical know-how into business ventures (Bhandari, 2024). Despite being an agri-entrepreneur and being good in terms of production, they do not make a good linkage among the market actors. They face a barrier to access market network. Their market depends on linkage development due to this reality, a technical supporting part for business incubation.

For example, a graduate trained in dairy technology through a TVET institution with incubation support could establish a value-added dairy enterprise producing flavored yogurt or cheese for urban markets. Similarly, youth skilled in horticulture could develop organic packaging and e-commerce models targeting health-conscious consumers. These examples highlight how incubation embeds innovation at the intersection of production, processing, and marketing, thereby creating multiplier effects across local economies (Helvetas Nepal, 2023).

### ***Nurturing Agripreneurs through Integrated Support Systems***

The conventional TVET programs often end at the training phase, leaving graduates without the networks or confidence to

commercialize their skills (CTEVT, 2022). This is complemented in Nepal by company incubation, which provides a post-training innovation pathway that includes market exposure, seed fund access, mentoring and coaching. According to Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB), learners who receive organized incubation help have a much higher chance of surviving and expanding their businesses (International Labour Organisation, 2020).

Additionally, incubation fosters entrepreneurial attitudes that promote risk-taking, inventiveness and problem-solving abilities that are frequently lacking in conventional training methods (ADB, 2021). Participants can test technology, sample goods and co-create solutions with local communities through the innovation ecosystem established by TVET-incubation linkages. This improves employment and boosts rural businesses' ability to innovate (OECD, 2021).

### ***Scaling Innovation through Institutional Collaboration***

To function as catalysts, incubator will be institutionalized within the wider TVET and agribusiness ecosystem. Collaboration among TVET institutions, private sector actors, universities and development partners is crucial to ensure financial sustainability and knowledge transfer. However, business incubation support tools tend to be transformative rather than institutional in nature (MoEST, 2023). The globally successful incubation models, such

as India's National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management, Agri-Incubator, and Kenya's Agribusiness Incubation Hub demonstrate that partnerships linking academia, government and the private sector so that they can accelerate innovation and rural transformation (ADB, 2022).

In Nepal, similar collaboration could be achieved by establishing Provincial TVET Innovation Hubs, where local training centers host incubation units that focus on specific value chains, such as dairy, fruits, vegetables and herbal products. These hubs could leverage existing government funds like the Youth and Small Enterprise Self-Employment Fund (YSEF) and align with donor-supported programs for financial and technical backing (NPC, 2024; Helvetas Nepal, 2023).

Such an approach would not only expand the scope of TVET but also promote inclusive innovation, enabling women, marginalized groups and returnee migrants to access agribusiness opportunities. Inclusivity is particularly relevant in Nepal, where female participation in agriculture is high but access to entrepreneurship resources remains limited (FAO, 2021; UNDP, 2022).

### ***Innovation as Systemic Outcome***

Business incubation within TVET is not only an add-on activity but also a systemic innovation on how skills, entrepreneurship and markets interact. When effectively designed, incubation transforms TVET centers from passive training providers into active innovation platforms. These platforms

stimulate bottom-up innovation, allowing local entrepreneurs to experiment with technologies, such as solar dryers, mobile-based agro-advisory apps, or low-cost processing machinery (ILO, 2021; MoEST, 2023).

To enhance the competitiveness of Nepal's agribusiness, an innovation ecosystem needs to be created. This is in line with Nepal's Sixteenth Plan (NPC, 2024), which promotes value chain development, entrepreneurship and technology transfer as the cornerstones of economic transformation. Thus, business incubation can work by developing a link between the technical capabilities of TVET early graduates and the capacity of the agricultural sector for innovation.

### ***Building Innovation-Driven Agribusiness Future through TVET***

One of the most promising but understudied areas of rural development for a country like Nepal is business incubation. In particular, recent research suggests that skills development alone does not always result in innovation, employment or entrepreneurship (ADB, 2021; CTEVT, 2022). Combining acquired technical skills with market access, business incubation support and innovation services yields much better results for agribusinesses (Bhandari, 2024; ILO, 2020).

In agribusiness, from production to market and competitiveness, the learning of business incubation covers the objectives of vocational training to the use and development of new technologies by agribusiness entrepreneurs (MoEST, 2023). In business development,

it transforms the business into an innovation ecosystem by training the dynamic value chain, market demand and supply system (Bhandari, 2024).

In addition to directly supporting Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 8 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' and SDG 9 'Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure', the model is in line with Nepal's national priorities under the ADS, Youth Employment Policy, and Green Economy Framework (Government of Nepal, 2015; NPC, 2024). The TVET-based incubation might be the institutional mechanism that converts these policies into observable results for rural enterprises if it is mainstreamed (Helvetas Nepal, 2023).

According to ILO (2021), innovation is not only about technology but also about creating new linkages: between skills and markets, between youth aspirations and local resources, and between learning institutions and private enterprises. In the same way, ADB (2022) notes that by fostering such linkages, TVET incubation centers can transform rural youths into innovation actors who introduce new products, develop value chains, and address community challenges through entrepreneurship.

In the long term, Nepal's agribusiness competitiveness will depend not only on the quantity it produces, but also on how creatively it produces, processes and markets its agricultural products (FAO, 2021). TVET, when reimaged as a platform for innovation and incubation, can play a decisive role in shaping that creative, knowledge-based

future. Nepal, now, needs the National Agenda for Agribusiness Innovation through TVET Incubation, a coordinated framework that mobilizes provincial governments, CTEVT, private agribusinesses, universities and development partners to co-create the next generation of agripreneurs (MoEST, 2023; UNDP, 2022). Integrating business incubation into TVET is more than an educational reform; it is an innovation movement, a pathway to transform skills into enterprises, enterprises into innovations and innovations into inclusive rural prosperity.

### ***Reorienting TVET Policy toward Innovation and Entrepreneurship***

The integration of business incubation within TVET represents both an institutional innovation and a strategic policy opportunity for Nepal. To translate this concept into systemic impact, a coordinated framework is required to align the national TVET reform, agribusiness competitiveness strategies and youth entrepreneurship promotion under a single innovation agenda. The following policy and institutional implications provide a roadmap for operationalizing this vision.

Nepal's education policy (2019) focuses primarily on producing skilled human resources to meet labor market demands, but it pays limited attention to entrepreneurship and innovation outcomes. A fundamental policy reorientation is therefore necessary from a "training for employment" paradigm to a "training for enterprise and innovation" paradigm (ADB, 2021).

This shift would require integrating entrepreneurship development, incubation

and business model innovation as core components of all agricultural and technical syllabuses. The TVET institutions should include enterprise incubation targets within their performance indicators, ensuring that success is measured not only by employment rates but also by the number of enterprises created, sustained and scaled (ILO, 2021).

Besides, innovation-oriented TVET reform aligns with the objectives of Nepal's ADS and the Youth Employment Policy, both of which emphasize entrepreneurship, technology transfer and market access (Government of Nepal, 2015). Mainstreaming incubation into TVET can thus operationalize these policy commitments through structured and measurable interventions.

### ***Establishing Provincial TVET Innovation and Incubation Hubs***

According to ADB (2022), co-funding arrangements can be developed through public-private partnerships to ensure sustainability and reduce dependency on donor-driven projects. With the federalism in place in Nepal, provincial governments have increasing authority over education, enterprise development and agriculture (NPC, 2024). This creates an opportunity to institutionalize the Provincial TVET Innovation and Incubation Hubs that serve as regional platforms linking skills, innovation and markets. Each hub could specialize in specific value chains, for example, citrus in Sudurpaschim, dairy in Bagmati, or vegetables in Koshi Province, based on local comparative advantages. These hubs might be embedded within existing polytechnic

institutes or CTEVT-affiliated centers so as to reduce infrastructure costs and enhancing ownership. Such hubs can collaborate with universities, private sector associations, and development partners like UNDP, ILO, and Helvetas, which already possess experience in entrepreneurship coaching and SME development (Helvetas Nepal, 2023; UNDP, 2022).

### ***Financing Mechanisms for Agribusiness Innovation***

In the context of Nepal, access to finance may be one of the extreme barriers for young entrepreneurs in agribusiness (FAO, 2021). For this, the government and financial institutions could design the Innovation Seed Funds or the Agripreneurship Challenge Funds targeting TVET graduates who complete incubation programs. Such funds could be managed jointly by provincial TVET boards and local development banks to provide small grants, soft loans, or equity matching support to early-stage ventures (MoEST, 2023).

Furthermore, the YSEF can be reformed to incorporate innovation criteria, supporting not just traditional enterprises but those that demonstrate technological, social or environmental innovation. Financial literacy and business management modules should also be integrated into TVET curricula to ensure that graduates are investment-ready and capable of managing growth sustainably (ILO, 2020).

### ***Strengthening Research, Monitoring and Knowledge Exchange***

OECD (2021) stated that evidence-based policymaking is essential for scaling innovation. The government should establish a National Agribusiness Innovation Observatory to document lessons learned, success stories and policy impacts. Such a knowledge platform could serve as a repository of data on startup performance, gender inclusion, technology adoption and job creation.

The success of an enterprise is based on the regular monitoring and evaluation (M&E) that assesses not only training outcomes but also innovation outcomes, such as the number of new products, processes or business models emerging from incubation programs. Collaborative research between TVET centers and universities, especially in the fields like agricultural technology, value chain analysis and digital marketing can further strengthen the innovation ecosystem (ADB, 2022).

### ***Promoting Inclusive Innovation and Green Transition***

Nevertheless, innovation must be inclusive and sustainable. Policies should ensure that women, marginalized groups, and returnee migrants have equitable access to incubation services, finance and mentorship. Targeted quotas and gender-responsive design within TVET incubation programs can help in overcoming existing barriers (FAO, 2021; UNDP, 2022). Furthermore, Nepal's move toward a green and circular economy presents new opportunities for innovation.

Incubation centers should prioritize enterprises that promote climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy applications, waste recycling, and eco-friendly processing technologies. This aligns with the Green Economy Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) (NPC, 2024).

### ***Toward National Framework for Agribusiness Innovation through TVET***

In order to make these changes official, Nepal needs a National Framework for Agribusiness Innovation through TVET, to be developed jointly by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD), and provincial governments. The framework should define clear governance mechanisms, resource mobilization strategies, and accountability measures to integrate innovation and incubation into the mainstream TVET system (MoEST, 2023). TVET can be positioned by such a coordinated framework not just as a training subsystem but also as a strategic driver of rural innovation and economic transformation, transforming Nepal's rural communities from subsistence-based economies into innovation-driven agribusiness clusters and its youth from job seekers into job creators.

### **Conclusion**

Research has been conducted on sustainable business services to strengthen agribusiness in Nepal, transform agribusiness into inclusive economic growth, and create

employment opportunities. Various vocational education and trainings conducted by CTEVT in Nepal have provided skills. It is imperative to use these skills to become entrepreneurial along with business development. It is expected that business incubation services along with business skill development can act as a mechanism to develop agribusiness entrepreneurially.

This article has shown that the incubation services conducted in Nepal are operated by a few donors and are gradually being phased out. It is, however, essential to operate this service sustainably and promote in an integrated manner along with vocational education and training. Based on experience, it is expected that vocational education and training graduates who have not been successful at their work due to having insufficient entrepreneurial skills will be able to benefit from incubation services, which will help agricultural entrepreneurs to develop and strengthen their market.

Business development and incubation should be institutionalized along with the vocational skills provided by CTEVT. This leads to the conclusion that policy reforms should be made to develop agricultural businesses along with skill development. In regards to the institutional reform, CTEVT can be developed as an institution that provides vocational skills and works on innovation in agricultural business development. It is also necessary to develop enterprises run by students who have received vocational education and training as a provider of incubation services based on demand and needs.

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## Article

# Exploring Students' Understanding and Practices of Cultural Hospitality: A Thematic Review of Global and Nepali Perspectives

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## Abstract

This thematic review examines how the culture of hospitality, the art of serving the guest selflessly with respect for their unique background, fits into the hospitality education and training. The study follows a qualitative review approach, analyzing literature, industry requirements, and existing hospitality programs to assess how cultural awareness is incorporated into student's learning. The findings till the time is that most of the hospitality industry is more focused on the technical skill, that is, hard skill, while the cultural hospitality or the soft skill, is still in the shadows. Combining cultural hospitality with modern hospitality education can better prepare students for the global job market, foster welcoming environments and increase guest experiences. The study also highlights practical approaches for teaching cultural hospitality, such as implementing cultural values and local practices into classroom activities and aligning learning with real-world industry requirements. The review concludes that planned training in cultural hospitality, supported by appropriate teaching methods and continuous guidance, can empower students and educators to meaningfully integrate cultural values into the hospitality education which further meets the industry expectations.

*Keywords:* cultural hospitality, hospitality education, cultural competence, globalization

## Introduction

Cultural hospitality is a critical component of present hospitality. It is essential for addressing the needs of an increasingly globalized world. As international travel continues to grow, the hospitality industry requires professionals capable of delivering inclusive, culturally sensitive service to diverse guests. Hospitality education is the foundation for acquiring these skills to provide students with both operational

proficiencies and intercultural competencies for cultivating significant guest experiences (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). Students exhibited a strong interest in acquiring these skills to enhance their professional competitiveness; however, they faced challenges, such as language barriers, unfamiliar cultural norms, and the demands of balancing academic and practical responsibilities (Cheung & Li, 2019).

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Cultural competence is a part of hospitality education, where schools and training institutes are moving away from traditional, task-based courses. It is adopting the programs that better reflect the needs of a global economy, which is mainly focused on. Nepal is famous for its diversified ethnic groups and rich cultural history and hospitality, so creating hospitality curriculum has its unique set of opportunities and challenges.

The hospitality sector of Nepal has a vital role in the national economy being a major source of foreign currency, but it suffers from the problem of finding qualified human resources with specific training, especially having cultural competency, as the ability that always gives selfless hospitality beyond the guest's expectations (Adhikari, 2021; Karki & Sharma, 2023). The hospitality programs of Nepal or related training always focus on more practical hard skills, and they are very unaware of cultural competence, which can be called the soft skill. This kind of situation always makes it hard for the graduate or the hospitality workforce to provide with utmost hospitality for the guest coming from different cultures or countries of the world for lack of cultural awareness. There could be different obstacles, like language barriers and having less knowledge about their culture. It further makes it harder to understand their needs and make them satisfied with the services that they are offered. It is therefore most important to have proper understanding of both community-based hospitality and other hospitality business houses as a whole. This type of practice in the hospitality industry

would increase skilled workforce, which can compete with the global workforce, protecting our core local and cultural values and improving the quality of services that we deliver. However, there are many challenges in including or teaching cultural hospitality. It is more than becoming an excellent or successful teacher or trainer. You also need to plan carefully, including learning how to communicate with people from other cultures around the world and identifying the things that make a cultural difference before you apply what you have learned into practice (Hjalager & Andersen, 2020). As hospitality education is not limited to the classroom, students should apply their learning hands-on skills in their daily working life, such as internships, apprenticeships or as employees. It always poses challenges to balance their time constraints. Sometimes, institutions lack the resources or experienced instructors to provide comprehensive training on culture. Some programs are doing very well, which offer classes and workshops that teach individuals about other cultures. Some fail because they do not have enough financial resources or the infrastructure though willing to address this kind of issue (Kim & Jeong, 2018). This difference has many consequences. For example, the university or the training institute with an outstanding program and a curriculum produces graduates who are very poorly equipped with cultural awareness to interact with people from different cultures. It makes them unprepared for what the hospitality business is actually looking for as the core competence in their employees or workforce.

Students' experience with teaching cultural hospitality is not always the same. People who have taken a lot of training are more capable and confident while dealing with guests from the same culture. But it becomes very uncomfortable, as they have very low confidence while dealing with those from a different culture in both learning and working places with cultural differences. (Okumus & Yagci, 2021). Students always want to learn in their comfort zone, and they do not want to come out of their comfort zone, which makes them unprepared for the professional issues (Baum, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly highlighted further deficiencies of our education system, which warrants a flexible curriculum that can easily adapt to evolving industry dynamics (Gretzel et al., 2021). Students having cultural competence and a blend of practical skills could secure better careers. They will be competent workforce for the long run (Tasci & Pizam, 2020). For the hospitality industry, the students must learn about cultural hospitality at school because modern tourists expect services that fulfill their needs with respect to their culture.

This all indicates that the implementation of cultural hospitality is not an easy job, and it also highlights the importance of professionals who can think beyond the traditional methods (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). If the cultural hospitality is not integrated into graduates, they will not only fail to compete in the job market but also deliver low service quality, resulting in negative impact on guests and dissatisfaction to employers (Cheung & Li,

2019). The objective of this thematic review is therefore to identify and analyze the need for incorporating cultural hospitality into modern hospitality education and training, with particular attention to its benefits to different stakeholders and implementation challenges. The whole research is guided by the role play by the cultural hospitality to enhance the graduate competencies, meet the hospitality needs and strengthen the hospitality institute.

### **Methodology**

This paper follows a thematic review approach to find the existing literature that is published on different sites and at different periods. Similar thematic review approaches have been successfully applied in hospitality and tourism research to analyze educational practices, industry expectations and curriculum development (Baum, 2022; Hjalager & Andersen, 2020; Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). For this information, 11 different peer reviewed journals were reviewed systematically, focusing on the cultural hospitality, hospitality education and practices. To draw broader contextual insights into cultural diversity, service practices and hospitality, additional 16 papers, books, journals, online publication and reputable websites were consulted. The following key words were used to find out the contents on the internet or from the sources: organizational culture, service innovation, cultural diversity, communication, hospitality industry, soft skills, employee behaviors, leadership, motivation, work

ethics, culture, human resources, employee retention, sustainable tourism, cultural heritage, community-based tourism, guest satisfaction, guest retention, service quality, education, workforce, development, local culture values and hospitality services.

I went through the sources that are published within the period of 10 years and that discuss the hospitality and culture and its connections. For this, I read the title and abstract and excluded the articles that were not directly relevant. Full text articles were read carefully and important information noted and coded the on cultural hospitality, teaching practices, industry expectations and challenges. The recurring ideas are further grouped into themes and summarized to show how cultural hospitality enhances graduate competencies, meets industry needs and strengthens hospitality institutions.

Studies show that cultural competency is no longer a choice in hospitality education, as it is an integral part of hospitality for guest satisfaction. Lugosi and Jameson (2017) emphasize the imperative for educational programs that align with the realities of a globalized industry, given that hospitality professionals regularly engage with tourists from all global contexts. Li (2019) endorses this perspective, stating that students proficient in intercultural communication possess a competitive advantage in the labor market of the hotel industry. Tasci and Pizam (2020) mention that cultural intelligence is important for guests' happiness because it always generates high revenue. It ultimately increases the profitability of a business. The

results suggest that the need for cultural competence is growing because the sector is getting more diverse, and people are expecting more from it, as accessibility to the world has been super easy.

### **Theme 1: Effects on Hospitality Industry Economy and Branding**

Scholars highlight that economic advantages and strategic brand differentiation are associated with cultural competence. Lugosi and Jameson (2017) mentioned that hotels and restaurants that meet the demands of people from different religions and ethnicities obtain more customers for their business. This is shown by the fact that hotels or restaurants that offer halal meat, vegetarian food, or gluten-free options had the extra revenue, and they had loyal customers (Khalek et al., 2023). Students who are skilled at dealing with people from different cultures help their firms compete in new markets as they can provide very unique services to the guests (Cheung & Li, 2019). Including local art, cuisine, and traditions in the hospitality industry, it helps in distinguishing brands in a competitive market, with a unique experience, which further strengthens local economies and increases revenue (Tasci & Pizam, 2020). The study shows that being knowledgeable of other cultures is important for making money and building unique, reputable companies.

### **Theme 2: Enhancing Guest Experience through Cultural Hospitality**

Cultural hospitality is very important to

give travelers unique and unforgettable experiences. Globally, the culture varies from place to place, and every practice could be a new experience for people. It is better than just delivering services by trying to get in with local authentic hospitality and respecting different cultural backgrounds and requirements of its clients. The future of hospitality is dependent on professionals' ability to invite guests from different ethnic backgrounds, making them feel genuinely welcomed and valued. This system is helpful to build an emotional connection to the customer that makes them happier with customized cultural experiences, meet current needs and leave a lasting positive impression to the guests. It will encourage the travelers to visit the place frequently (Pizam, 2019).

The students educated in cultural hospitality with interpersonal skills acquire the ability to anticipate and accommodate a wider range of guest needs and wants before they articulate to them (Okumus & Yagci, 2021). This enhances the relationship between service providers and clients, resulting in increased business and positive word-of-mouth referrals. The academic consensus posits that cultural competence significantly influences long-term economic prosperity; that is, contented consumers are more interested in returning and recommending the establishment. Therefore, adding cultural hospitality training to school programs is good for both the experience of visitors and the long-term success of the hotel business in a successful way.

Cultural hospitality also prefers inclusivity by bridging the social and emotional gaps between guests and service providers. Tasci and Pizam (2020) state that those hospitality workers can tailor their interactions with clients depending on their values, rituals and the ways of communicating who know about other cultures and which often go beyond basic service standards. Lugosi and Jameson (2017) had strongly stated that the connection between culture and hospitality education enhances not only service satisfaction but also the emotional well-being of both clients and workers. When the hospitality personnel who work in the frontline show that they understand and respect the cultural differences, customers feel like they belong, turning regular service exchanges into important experiences. Tasci and Pizam (2020) state that this strategy enhances a brand's reputation, clarifies cultural misunderstandings, and helps the company maintain a good standing.

### **Theme 3: Encouraging Environment and People Friendly Practices**

Countries like Nepal have great importance and influence of the cultural competency due to the spiritual and societal values for the long-term growth of the hospitality industry. These values are deeply rooted in our context. Hjalager and Andersen (2020) say that hospitality businesses may build better relationships with the community and promote responsive tourism by learning about the local cultures. This cultural knowledge also helps hotels and restaurants

use eco-friendly ways and fits in with local customs. This reduces their effect on the environment and builds a good relationship with the people who are living there.

Studies show that Nepal's tourism sector is featured with rich cultural heritage and religious plurality. However, adding cultural competence to hospitality education has both positive and negative impacts. Hospitality programs still mostly use traditional teaching methods and lack enough experiential learning that emphasizes intercultural communication. Karki and Sharma (2023) say that many schools are having problems in combining global hospitality standards with local cultural norms. This makes it difficult for students to navigate class and workplace. Baum (2022) also says that education after the epidemic gives Nepalese schools a chance to change their curriculum with the combination of traditional knowledge, inclusive teaching methods, and digital resources. This change in the teaching practice could help students become more flexible towards other cultures and better prepared to accommodate both domestic and international tourists in a world after the epidemic.

The importance of cultural competency is on gradual rise to sustain the hotel sector. Hospitality workers can literally connect with the host communities and develop good relationships, as they know a lot about local customs and cultural frameworks (Hjalager & Andersen, 2020). By making sure that the operating procedures follow local

environmental and social norms, these kinds of partnerships help in cutting down the waste and misuse of the resources, which leads to a more sustainable tourism industry. This ethical approach ensures that visitors' local cultures and ecosystems are not harmed. It is also important for the long-term benefits to the industry.

Staff who are aware of other cultures are important for keeping local customs and values alive because they know the impact and the benefits they can get from it. It has a vital role in creating a long-lasting hospitality business (Tasci & Pizam, 2020). Adding real cultural elements like local art, food and customs puts together the guest experience better, boosting the host community economically and socially. Students who take hospitality classes that emphasize sustainability and cultural competence are ready for the summons of the sector today to become responsible leaders, earning money with proper balance of social and environmental responsibilities (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017).

#### **Theme 4: Pedagogical Challenges - Obstacles to Implementation**

Many schools are facing trouble teaching cultural hospitality even though everyone agrees that it is important for the students. The successful education system of the world like European methods, nowadays, uses practical workshops and real-life situations to bridge the gap between theory and practice. It bears significance to cope with practical aspects (Hjalager & Andersen, 2020). These

programs provide students with the practical experience and critical thinking skills that they need to deal with prevailing cultural differences in the workplace. However, these methods are still the exception rather than the rule, which shows a big difference in the quality of education provided.

The major barriers to the hospitality school include limited funding and a shortage of skilled educators specializing in cultural competency. These factors contribute to the marginalization of such a subject in favor of conventional technical fields (Kim & Jeong, 2018). The absence of a well-structured and comprehensive curriculum based on cultural hospitality often lacks the skill to solve business challenges, which creates a big difference between educational achievements and professional expectations (Baum, 2022). To settle these differences in hospitality training, one must invest more money and make major changes to the curriculum.

Nowadays, incorporation of digital tools and experiential technologies into hospitality education is growing day by day. Gretzel et al. (2021) address that virtual reality and simulation technology can enhance students' multicultural service situations although direct interaction is a bit difficult. Mixed learning, integrating classroom theory, online courses and field trips to culturally diverse locations represents a creative methodology in Nepal for teaching and learning (Adhikari, 2021). Hospitality companies can ensure that cultural competence training stays useful, easier

and less expensive by using technology and hands-on learning.

### **Theme 5: Student Experiences - What they Learned and What they had to Deal with**

Though cultural hospitality has a greater influence on students, it comes with larger difficulties. Okumus and Yagci (2021) claim that students who get enough cultural training are more confident and able to adjust whether they have to work in different settings. These students develop important interpersonal skills that will make them able to be employable and ready for careers in hospitality markets connected to the rest of the world. The training is beneficial for the students to tackle cultural differences more efficiently, helping them grow both personally and professionally.

As it takes time to change, it might be difficult to negotiate the situation. Cheung and Li (2019) have defined that the existing difficulties, including language barriers and unfamiliar cultures, can be formidable in the absence of sufficient institutional support. The COVID-19 pandemic increases these challenges by hindering experiential learning opportunities, as extensive remote and hybrid models fail to replicate the interaction-intensive characteristics of hospitality education (Gretzel et al., 2021). The difference between possible benefits and challenges shows the importance of having robust support systems for students to be successful in cultural hospitality training.

In addition to this, the interest of students and their involvement are equally essential elements in delivering genuine cultural understanding. Research indicates that when students understand that cultural studies are strongly linked to professional achievement, their levels of engagement and reflection increase (Okumus & Yagci, 2021). Intercultural exchange programs in the society, community-based tourism lectures, and collaborative international coursework have also been demonstrated to increase students' cultural empathy. Karki and Sharma (2023) conclude that in Nepal, the compatible exposure to diverse local people may vary students' perceptions of inclusivity and develop an appreciation for diversified cultural heritage as an integral aspect of their professional identity. So, enhancing cultural pedagogy through experiential and reflective learning can easily influence both academic performance and students' readiness for the global stage as well.

### **Theme 6: Industry Perspectives and the Future of Hospitality Education**

From the hospitality industry's point of view, it is very important to connect the education system with real-life work situations and to meet the needs of the industry with guest satisfaction. The fundamentally heterogeneous character of contemporary hospitality necessitates a comprehensive overhaul of the curriculum rather than incremental modifications (Pizam, 2019). The industry prefers professionals with a lot of cultural knowledge so that they fulfill the

amenities for a wider range of guests, thereby earning image and money.

The industries have been advocating for structural reforms with the integration of cultural intelligence into hospitality education programs to cultivate a workforce adept at inclusive and culturally sensitive service (Tasci & Pizam, 2020). A need for certain developments in the industry, which stresses the commercial reasons for this kind of integration, should be forwarded by the industry in collaboration with providers (Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). Baum (2022) says that if graduates do not fulfill these criteria, it will decrease their chances of getting a job and make it harder for employers to ensure standard of their services. So, ending the gap between what students get in school and what businesses need is still a very important issue for the hotel industry's long-term growth and sustainability.

The school and the business house, where the people are culturally competent, foster cooperative environment. Baum (2022) emphasizes the lifetime learning and professional training in addressing skill deficiencies in service quality and digital literacy which was a major issue in the hospitality industry during the post-pandemic period. A strategic association between educational institutions and industrial stakeholders can be cultivated to create inclusive learning environments where employees enhance their cultural knowledge consistently. It contributes to developing their interpersonal skills, which are common

soft skills sought by the industry in their employees (Tasci & Pizam, 2020).

In the developing countries like Nepal, where the hospitality sector is completely diverse with higher cultural value, collaborative training programs and mentorship initiatives can offer students and professionals practical experience with global service standards, preserving local authenticity (Karki & Sharma, 2023; Lugosi & Jameson, 2017). This integrated approach makes academic as well as industrial performance better, ensuring that the future hospitality professionals are flexible and aware of other cultures; it ultimately enables them to compete on a worldwide scale in a better way, fulfilling the expectations of guests as well as the industry.

## Conclusion

Going through all the thematic reviews of literature, what I found is cultural hospitality is a central pillar of hospitality education rather than a supporting concept. If we think hospitality education is all about the hard skills, technical knowledge and techniques, we might be wrong because the cultural values and interpersonal skills are the key components that build a competency to give genuine hospitality. Genuine hospitality is instrumental in making guest satisfaction. This gap in study creates a big impact while serving the diverse guests from across the globe and diminishes the quality of real services. Integration of cultural hospitality into education is very important in a country like Nepal, which is rich in cultural practices

with diverse communities and ethnicities. Here, every ethnicity bears unique hospitality. Yet the current hospitality education and training system is not capable of utilizing the full advantage. It is therefore essential to include cultural awareness and hospitality in training and curriculum so that the students meet global industry needs. Even the industries become more competitive in the global market, preserving local identity and cultures.

Thematic analysis of the literature indicates that implanting cultural hospitality into education enhances students' readiness for the global job market, promotes inclusive and welcoming service environments and strengthens both industry and institutional outcomes. Increasing the locally relevant content and practices in teaching learning process could further improve the effectiveness of cultural hospitality training. By aligning curricula with practical industry expectations and cultural values, hospitality education can produce graduates who are not only technically competent but also culturally aware, adaptable and capable to deliver high-quality, globally relevant and sustainable hospitality services.

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## Article

# Occupational Health and Safety at Workplace: A Reflective Review of Nepal's TVET Sector

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## Abstract

Ensuring occupational health and safety (OHS) is essential for maintaining a secure and healthy work environment. It encompasses multiple aspects, such as occupational health and safety-related training and awareness among the formal and informal workers, integration of hands-on practical practices in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and proper use of occupation-wise Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at workplace. Although it is one of the major components of decent work, Nepal still has limited access to occupational health and safety along with the use of PPE at workplace. This review paper was prepared through relevant literature review and searches on Google Scholar to access a diverse range of articles, research papers and reports. The findings reveal significant gaps in OHS awareness, training and practical implementation, particularly in the TVET sector. Despite increasing emphasis on employee skills development, workplace safety remains inadequately addressed. Insufficient infrastructures, lack of occupation-specific PPE, limited OHS hands-on practical processes in training curricula and the absence of structured monitoring systems contribute to unsafe working conditions and unprepared workers in Nepal. The study emphasizes the need to integrate practical OHS practices into TVET curricula, engage certified OHS experts, improve the quality and accessibility of PPE, and raise awareness among workers, employers and government entities. These measures, combined with an effective enforcement of safety regulations, are essential for fostering a safe work environment, enhancing workers' well-being and promoting sustainable economic growth.

*Keywords:* occupational health and safety, personal protective equipment, workplace safety, TVET, decent work

## Introduction

Workplace safety has become a significant concern in recent years. Advancements in technology, changing work conditions and the nature of work have greatly contributed

to increasing workplace risk and complexities. These factors have increased the challenges of raising sector-specific awareness and ensuring the effective

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execution of occupational health and safety measures to potential personnel. While generating employment by providing skills is essential, it is equally important to equip workers with the necessary knowledge and information about Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and its safety measures (protective helmets, safety gloves, safety goggles, dust mask, protective boots, ear plugs and hi-visibility jackets). OHS plays a crucial role in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) (Ronoh & Mburu, 2023).

With 10 years of experience in the TVET sector, focusing on ensuring the quality of short-term vocational skills training across various occupations, I have consistently been concerned that simply providing skills, knowledge and attitudes are insufficient for adequately preparing skilled workers. These observations raised critical questions: Why do workers neglect the PPE? What factors influence their attitude toward workplace safety? And, how can TVET programs better address these gaps? It is also essential to equip them with an understanding of workplace hazards by incorporating OHS training and its allied measures. While the primary goal of TVET is often seen as employment, it is essential to extend this goal to include employment in a safe working environment - a key dimension of decent work. If a graduate secures a job but lacks awareness of safety practices or fails to prioritize workplace safety, it cannot be considered a successful outcome. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to review related literatures to understand

proper use of personal protective equipment and safety practices in the learning and earning environment.

During employment verification visits, I observed that trained and untrained workers rarely raised concerns about safety with their employers and were often willing to work in unsafe environments without wearing task-specific personal protective equipment (PPE). I rarely found workers wearing personal PPE, and when they did, it was often only partially worn. This raises concerns about their safety and need for better training and awareness of the significance of using PPE correctly. This also raised a critical question for me: Why do workers neglect PPE or disregard safety measures? What factors influence this behavior?

Therefore, integrating practical OHS practices is vital in the TVET sector when preparing workers through training. This approach not only enhances the employability of graduates but also ensures their safety and well-being at workplace. Addressing both aspects ensures the development of a skilled workforce and safeguards their well-being. A work-related accident refers to an unforeseen and unplanned sequence of occurrences resulting in physical harm to an individual while performing their job duties. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), promoting safe working conditions for workers is one of the core areas of work within the Decent Work agenda.

In Nepal, vocational skills training is provided by different TVET entities. However, the absence of fundamental

knowledge and practices in occupational health and safety has contributed to ongoing workplace hazards. TVET provides the skills, education and training, whereas skills are the ability to use an individual's thoughts, ideas and creativity to do something, change it and obtain value from work. In other words, skills are the ability to translate knowledge into practice to achieve the desired work results.

### ***Concept of Occupational Health and Safety***

OHS highlights ensuring safety, health and well-being of individual workers at workplace. Worker safety has been the first priority in the developed countries. It is a discipline that deals with preventing work-related injuries and protecting and promoting workers' health. The main objective is to improve workers' working conditions and environment. OHS involves the scientific study and practical implementation of measures designed to safeguard employees' physical well-being, security and overall welfare within their work environment. It also encompasses policies, standards and practices to prevent accidents, injuries and illnesses caused by work-related hazards. OHS also promotes a healthy and conducive work environment that supports employees' physical and mental well-being, ultimately enhancing productivity and organizational success (General Federation of Nepalese Trade Union [GEFONT], 2011). Employers and training providers are legally obligated to provide a safe working and learning environment, which includes safeguarding

and enhancing the health and well-being of employees, as well as preserving the broader environment with preventive measures at workplace. Pre-preparation with task-related PPE measures is most important for the workers. According to ILO, OHS encompasses all facets of health and safety inside the workplace, aiming to avert the incidence of occupational accidents and disorders.

As mentioned above, the definition and understanding of occupational health and safety indicate its important role in ensuring decent work. It is particularly beneficial when formal workers acquire practical knowledge during their learning processes, as this empowers them to effectively advocate for their safety when they enter the workforce. Awareness and use of occupation-wise PPE among workers are very important: it helps in preventing work-related injuries, illnesses and fatalities, enhancing the ability to work in dirty, dangerous and difficult work (3Ds), ensuring worker's physical and mental well-being, producing efficient and motivated workers, reducing absenteeism due to work-related injuries or illnesses, and ensuring the OHS regulations, such as legal protections, reducing costs associated with workplace accidents, medical expenses, legal liabilities, and loss of skilled workers.

Although the importance of OHS and PPE is widely acknowledged, most existing studies focus on industrial or formal sectors in the developed countries, with limited attention to semi-skilled workers trained through

TVET programs in developing contexts like Nepal. Moreover, while TVET programs aim to enhance employability, there is insufficient evidence on how these programs incorporate practical OHS training and whether graduates are adequately prepared to prioritize workplace safety. This study addresses this gap by reviewing existing literature on OHS awareness, knowledge and proper PPE use among the formal and informal sector's workers. The findings aim to provide insights into how practical OHS measures can be effectively integrated into vocational skills development training, ensuring that graduates not only gain technical skills but also work safely and sustainably in their chosen professions.

### ***Workplace and Availability of PPE***

A workplace is a physical location where the individual learns and works for his/her employability. In the evolving work landscape, the concept of a workplace has transcended the conventional office setting. However, in the TVET sector, workplaces are utilized as learning and earning places. To maximize workplace safety, a collaborative approach involving both employers and employees is essential in creating and sustaining a secure and healthy work environment (Occupational Safety and Health Administration [OSHA], 2023). While employers bear the primary responsibility for implementing safety measures, the active participation of employees is therefore crucial for their effectiveness. PPE, as defined by OSHA, refers to a gear worn to reduce exposure to

various workplace hazards. At workplace for workers, the OSHA recommends a comprehensive set of protective items. These include: 1. Eye and face protection: Safety glasses, goggles, or face shields 2. Foot protection: Safety shoes 3. Hand protection: Gloves 4. Head protection: Hard hats 5. Hearing protection: Earplugs or earmuffs. This array of protective gear is designed to safeguard workers from potential workplace dangers and hazards in the construction industry.

PPE is used to reduce the risk of exposure to hazards that can lead to severe workplace injuries and illnesses. These risks may arise from chemical, radiological, physical, electrical, mechanical or other workplace dangers. PPE includes items, such as gloves, glasses, shoes, earplugs or earmuffs, hard hats, respirators, coveralls, vests and full-body suits (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024).

UNESCO-UNEVOC (2013) identifies the workplace as a critical component in TVET, emphasizing the role of work-based learning in developing competencies that align with the market's demand. Likewise, ILO highlights that the TVET workplace should balance skill acquisition and exposure to the occupational safety measures (ILO, 2020). It also states that the learning modalities adopting Work-based Learning (WBL), where integrating OHS measures by using PPE (protective helmets, safety gloves, safety goggles, dust mask, protective boots, ear plugs, and high-visibility jackets) and their practical knowledge are imperative to potential workers.

### ***Decent Work with Safety and Security of Workers***

A safe working place is also one of the issues of decent work, which is also the worker's right. Decent work refers to employment that respects the fundamental rights of individuals and upholds workers' rights concerning safe working conditions and fair wages. It also prioritizes the physical and mental well-being of workers in terms of the performance of their jobs. The ILO established the decent work agenda as a global initiative to advance employment opportunities, uphold workers' rights, ensure social protection, and foster social dialogue. Likewise, the TVET also plays a vital role in promoting decent work by producing workers with occupational and technical skills and equipping OHS measures with knowledge for productive employment and adaptability in the labor market. According to ILO's Decent Work Agenda 2030, more people in decent work means stronger and more inclusive economic growth.

Decent labor emphasizes the provision of productive employment for both genders within an environment defined by freedom, equality, security and human dignity. Essential ideas associated with these objectives include unemployment, work-life equilibrium, professional advancement, employee engagement and remuneration frameworks. The core elements of decent work consist of employment opportunities, social protection, workers' rights and social dialogue. All of these components are directly related to workers' welfare and

protection. Likewise, the OHS is ultimately an issue related to workers' welfare, so integrating OHS into their learning and work environments is essential.

### **Literature Review**

Accidents tend to happen at workplace due to improper use of PPE and stubbornness in refusing to wear PPE (Hasim & May, 2018). Therefore, raising awareness among workers and employees is critical to encourage them to use the appropriate PPE measures, including protective helmets, safety gloves, safety goggles, dust masks, protective boots, ear plugs and high-visibility jackets. Moreover, there are several ways to encourage awareness among the workers and employees, including practical training on using the PPE, selection of the proper PPE based on the given relevant task and maintenance of PPE. Occupational health and safety imply the condition in which employees are safeguarded against physical, mental, emotional or pain-related challenges stemming from their work environment (Saputra & Mahaputra, 2022). The field of OSH is concerned with preventing, detecting, evaluating and controlling workplace risks that might endanger employees' health and well-being as well as have an impact on the environment and surrounding communities (GEFONT, 2011).

The National Living Standard Report 2022/23 reveals significant changes in the labor market. The proportion of employment in agriculture is declining gradually (from 70.7 percent in 1995/96

to 1.9 percent in 2022/23). It indicates the position of employment in other sectors is progressively increasing (9.5 percent in 1995/96 to 56.6 percent in 2022/23) where integration of OHS in technical education is slow off the marks. According to ILO estimates, 160 million people globally suffer from work-related illnesses each year, and over 250 million workers are involved in occupational accidents. Of them, accidents and occupational illnesses claim the lives of almost 1.2 million workers annually (ILO, 2001). This highlights that OHS is a critical issue closely connected to workers' rights. Most Nepalese workers are involved in the informal and formal sectors and are still unaware of the importance of OHS and safety measures (GEFONT, 2011).

According to the skills testing report of CTEVT (2022/23), a total of 25% of graduates have completed their skills level in different occupations every year. They all are prepared to start work at workplaces, either in domestic or foreign markets. Workers' exposure to occupational safety and health risks, subpar living and working circumstances, restricted access to social protections including healthcare services, and forced overtime labor are all linked to their health risks (Labour Migration Report, 2022). According to the Labor Migration Report 2022, in Nepal, every year, more than 500,000 workers receive labor permits for foreign employment. The Foreign Employment Board also reported that significant funds have been channeled to disabled workers who suffered injuries during foreign employment.

A study report on the current state of Occupational Safety and Health in Nepal (2011) highlights that the absence of proper monitoring and policies makes it challenging to establish effective mechanisms to enforce health and safety measures, particularly those related to the appropriate use of specific PPEs in practice. Integrating practical OHS applications into vocational training is still a relatively new concept in Nepal and has not yet been prioritized by all TVET stakeholders. It has started to talk only in industries. However, it is important to other sectors, such as training institutes and skills testing centers, and still needs to be justified. Curricula have a small space regarding OHS, which is limited in the theory. Graduates must understand safe workplaces, including occupation-related PPE, after completing skills training. High-risk jobs for health and safety include those requiring machinery and equipment, electrical work, construction, transportation, the use of chemicals, dusty conditions and crowded or dimly lighted areas (Upadhyay, 2002). Although the kind and degree of risks may differ between the two categories, it is crucial to understand that OHS concerns are not only important for blue-collar workers but also for white-collar professionals (GEFONT, 2011). Sector-wise, occupational health and safety training has significant positive outcomes for workers (International Society for the Study of Work & Organizational Values [ISSWOV], 2018). Without understanding the real-world application of OHS and its measures in skills training, material and methodologies may be restricted and impact transferred to

the workplace. Thus, safety rule training is merely one of many steps to reduce risk and foster a preventative culture. Skills training without OHS knowledge and practice may lack depth and limit transfer to actual work contexts. Thus, safety regulation training reduces hazards and promotes preventive practices.

### ***Occupational Health and Safety in Nepal***

The National Education Policy, 2019, of Nepal has made significant provisions for TVET, with a focus on increasing access, affordability and quality of technical education. The aim of this policy is to create a workforce with the necessary skills to propel the country's economic development. Likewise, the National Occupational Safety and Health Policy, 2020 emphasizes that effectively managing occupational health and safety enhances worker productivity and impacts positively the overall social and economic development of employees.

The Sixteenth Plan (2024/25 - 2028/29) also embeds the OHS, TVET, social protection, and decent work within an integrated employment and human development agenda, especially in its chapters on productive employment and social security and human capital. The OHS is framed under dignified work and safe workplaces through commitments to eliminate forced and hazardous child worker, strengthen workers inspection, and integrate occupational risk prevention with health and social security systems. TVET is positioned as a core driver of productivity and sectoral competitiveness

and a central pillar of human capital. Similarly, TVET expansion, social protection reform, and decent work-oriented growth are expected to operate together to reduce poverty and inequality to support Nepal's economic growth. To promote safe and healthy work environments, the Government of Nepal has enacted the National Occupational Safety and Health Policy, 2020, and has also developed specific OHS guidelines for workers in the brick industry.

The TVET Sector Strategic Plan (TSSP) 2023-2032 highlights that the areas of Quality and Relevance encompass accreditation, instructional management, curricula, and the availability of laboratory facilities, including machines, tools and equipment. However, the plan does not address the inclusion of Occupational Health and Safety measures, nor does it consider their availability and practical application during the skills training processes.

The Labor Act of 2017 outlines regulations regarding OHS for workers in Nepal. The Act mandates that each workplace must create a Safety and Health Policy, which must be registered at the appropriate labor offices. It also establishes provisions for the formation of various OHS-related committees. Under this Act, employers are held responsible and accountable for their obligations to workers. They are required to provide essential notices, information and training related to safety and health. Additionally, employees and workers share responsibility for maintaining safety and health at workplace. This includes refraining from engaging in

activities that could endanger the safety and health of others, cooperating with employers to ensure the effective implementation of health and safety measures, and using personal safety equipment provided by the employer.

After multiparty democracy was established in 1990, Nepal government started to prioritize the health and safety of its employees (Adhikari & Maskay, 2004). To encourage safe, healthy and effective working conditions, the Ministry of Labor and Employment started "The Occupation Safety and Health Project" in 1996. This project carried out a number of continuing OHS initiatives, such as training sessions, awareness campaigns, monitoring activities, interventions and cooperation with pertinent parties. The OHS at workplace was ensured by strategic goals and ambitions defined in the Three-Year Interim Plan (2007/08-2009/10). Establishing industry standards and conducting routine company monitoring were important elements of this strategy. The strategy placed a strong emphasis on the creation of initiatives aimed at increasing awareness, offering training and orientation, improving education and capacity building, and carrying out inspections, monitoring and assessments for different stakeholders. In order to promote a safe, healthy and effective workplace, the policy plan was also revised. Promoting and expanding occupational health and safety were considered as essential components of organizations and workplaces.

When it comes to public health challenges, infrastructure, health concerns and workplace safety are important factors (Prajapati et al., 2023). In order to protect people's safety, health and well-being, OHS is a multidisciplinary discipline (Junevičius & Gelžinytė, 2009).

### ***Decent Work Theory***

TVET is an integral aspect of lifelong learning and training that begins at various educational institutions and levels. TVET comprises four key components: technical, vocational, educational, and practical training (Owais et al., 2020). Hence, TVET requires effective training and practical experience. Integrating safety measures and practical applications into these programs enhances productivity and the sustainability of individuals' employment. Furthermore, reviewing theories related to worker welfare and employment, such as the Decent Work theory, is relevant to this topic and highlights the importance of workers' safe working and learning environment and sustainable economic growth.

Decent work is also a place where a living wage is paid with the necessary social protection; human rights are protected; equality of opportunity is ensured; and human dignity is respected (Ghai, 2003). The ILO views decent work as a basic human right and a means to improve working conditions. Consequently, decent work emphasizes four key strategies: fundamental rights associated with employment, labor conditions, social security, social protection and social dialogue.

The Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) defines the concept of decent work and assesses it through five dimensions: (a) physical and relational safety, (b) access to healthcare services, (c) fair compensation, (d) leisure and rest time, and (e) alignment of corporate values with family and social values (Blustein et al., 2016). PWT theory suggests that decent work can be achieved when these components are maintained together. According to PWT, decent work is a key component of employed life, which is also a critical aspect of mental health and a significant predictor of worker's well-being. As a result, employees need better working conditions and environment. Furthermore, a good work has a significant connection with wellness and work performance, which has significant implications for both individual and organizational outcomes.

Additionally, a decent work highlights workplace social courage (WSC). According to Namal et al. (2024), the willingness of people to speak up and handle difficult issues at workplace as in case of bullying or harassment in spite of possible negative outcomes is known as WSC. It has been increasingly acknowledged as vital to a healthy work environment and it also fosters a positive workplace culture, which is a critical factor in job satisfaction. According to Ghai (2003), everyone has to have access to "quality of work", which refers to decent labor. It further incorporates social protection, workers' rights, employment and social dialogue, and high-quality work. These are the main elements of decent work.

Employment opportunities, social security and protection and workers' fundamental rights are some of the features that define decent workers.

In 2019, the United Nations (UN) documented a decent work in the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in recognition to its importance. The elements mentioned above all pertain to the welfare of workers. Social security offers protection against unforeseen events, which is a crucial component of occupational health and safety for workers. Generally, two metrics are used to assess social security's sufficiency: the ratio of public spending on social security to GDP and the level of workers' coverage with regard to emergencies. Security accounts for some 20 to 30 percent of GDP in many wealthy countries.

According to Blustein et al. (2016), from psychological perspective of decent work, precarious work affects worker's mental and physical health. Precarious work refers to uncertain and insecure employment and cannot support the household. Here, uncertain and unprotected types of jobs cannot satisfy workers. According to a different definition, precarious work is generally understood to be a multifaceted concept with four main components: income, protection (including access to benefits and legal protections), vulnerability (such as helplessness or a lack of bargaining power or the ability to assert workplace rights), and continuity or employment insecurity.

In the developing countries like Nepal, precarious work still exists in the labor market. Likewise, psychological health is a consequence of unhealthy working conditions. It shows that workers suffer psychological effects if the workplace is not maintained in a healthy environment. People are finding it more difficult to maintain their feeling of security, health and well-being at work as a result of the rise in unsafe employment. It follows the safe, secure, purposeful, dignified, and in line with the best aspects of the human spirit as the characteristics of decent labor. The World Health Organization (WHO) describes well-being as a condition where each person recognizes his/her own potential, can handle the usual stresses of life, works productively and effectively, and is capable of contributing to their community.

Social policies and labor markets both influence employment circumstances. Employees' physical and emotional well-being is correlated with steady and secure employment. Adopting a widely recognized definition of decent work - one that is equitable, respectable, stable and safe - can direct future research, legislative efforts and viable remedies for the growing labor issue. According to ILO, decent work is creating, strengthening and extending worker protections, such as labor and social security, that are adapted to the cultural contexts of particular societies and promoting employment through sustainable institutional and economic frameworks. Along with protecting, advancing, and achieving the

essential rights that define a respectable and fair workplace, it also entails fostering social discourse via intentional exchanges between governments, labor unions and companies. All workers who want a steady, respectable and safe job in the labor market must provide high-quality work. Without decent employment, workers sometimes have little agency and meager negotiating power, which makes it challenging to oppose oppressive and exploitative working circumstances. They have few alternatives in this position and face the danger of suffering serious repercussions that they will not be able to find employment to support themselves.

The impacts of workplace precarity have not been shown to be mitigated by employees who have greater access to healthcare benefits, a healthy work environment, steady employment and workplace assistance. As a consequence, the psychological, physical, emotional, and behavioral health of employees and their families is greatly impacted by elements including child labor, dangerous working circumstances and prior unstable or low-paying employment. Similarly, OHS is related to a healthy work environment, which leads to increased dedication to work, performance and decent work. Decent work contributes to a higher level of work satisfaction among the workers. Workers who experience job dissatisfaction are more likely to inefficiency and turnover. Additionally, the workplace condition directly impacts the employees, which is critical to work performance. In this case, there will be an increase at workplace

health and safety issues, ultimately leading to employees leaving the organization, increasing the workplace hazard cases, such as accident, fatalities cases, stress, anxiety, physical and mental related diseases and so on. This ultimately causes higher cost and decreases the value and reputation of the organization. The workplace consists of physical, social and psychological factors. The psychological factors include the worker's inner needs and external influences. Among many psychological factors, workplace social courage is defined as the willingness of employees to speak up and question employers or relevant entities when they perceive something is wrong. Studies show that social courage is related to proactive activities enhancing workplace conditions. However, the role of social courage at workplace has not been preferred by employers in the labor market.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative approach and conducted a literature review as the primary methodological strategy, including desk reviews and analysis of secondary data to achieve the set objective. The main objective of this study is to assess workers' awareness and use of occupational health and safety measures at workplace. This approach was considered appropriate for synthesizing existing knowledge and identifying research gaps related to OHS in the TVET sector of Nepal.

In the qualitative approach, literature review analysis plays a significant role in shaping

the overall research design, particularly in studies that examine workers' awareness and utilization of OHS measures in vocational training environments. Given that OHS practices in TVET institutions are contextual, experiential and interpretive, a comprehensive review of relevant literature was essential for ensuring conceptual clarity, methodological alignment and analytical depth.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), engagement with existing literature in qualitative inquiry helps in situating the study within broader academic and policy debates, thereby strengthening its theoretical grounding beyond mere description. The literature review also supported the justification and alignment of the chosen methodology. A critical examination of previous qualitative studies on workplace safety, including those using document analysis, thematic analysis, case studies and interviews strengthened the suitability of combining a qualitative literature review with thematic analysis for this study.

Furthermore, the literature review was instrumental in identifying contextual research gaps in Nepal's TVET sector. While substantial global research exists on OHS, there remains a limited qualitative evidence on how instructors, trainees and training institutions in Nepal perceive and implement safety measures. Synthesizing existing studies enabled this research to clearly describe what is already known, what remains underexplored, and why further investigation is necessary (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Google Scholar has been used as the primary database to conduct an extensive search of relevant literature. The review focused primarily on recent publications, prioritizing peer-reviewed articles published within the last twelve years to ensure current relevance and empirical accuracy. Occupational health and safety, Personal protective equipment, Workplace safety, TVET and Decent work are key words selected to capture both global and context-specific literature related to OHS practices in vocational training settings. From the initial collection of identified studies, a total of 32 national and international research articles were systematically selected based on their direct relevance to the research objective: assessing workers' awareness and use of occupational health and safety measures in the workplace settings, particularly within TVET sector.

### **Major Findings**

Nepal's workplace safety is vulnerable, with insufficient infrastructure for OHS in both working and learning environments. The literature review revealed some key points on OHS vulnerabilities in Nepal's workplaces and TVET settings:

#### ***Inadequate OHS Infrastructure and PPE Availability***

Occupation-specific PPE is inadequate, including protective helmets, safety gloves, safety goggles, dust masks, protective boots, earplugs, and high-visibility jackets. Technical training centers rarely engage certified OHS experts to oversee and

implement safety measures in learning and earning workplace.

#### ***Knowledge and Awareness Gaps***

Workers lack knowledge, training and awareness of occupational and task-related OHS, hindering their ability to work in safe environments and advocate for PPE. Women are particularly vulnerable in both formal and informal sectors. Proper use of PPE measures is not consistently recommended by employees/workers and employers. Graduates often enter the workforce unprepared to handle job-related risks, especially in the construction, manufacturing and mechanical sectors. After completing skills development training programs, graduates often lack the confidence and knowledge to advocate for safety measures in dangerous, dirty and difficult (3Ds) work environments. Many workers dislike or misuse PPE due to a lack of awareness and knowledge. Hence, there is a general lack of seriousness regarding workplace hazard-related issues among workers, employers and the government.

#### ***Curriculum and Policy Deficiencies in TVET***

Occupation specific OHS topic along with PPE are not clearly mentioned in the course curriculums. There is insufficient research on workplace accidents and fatality rates. OHS is often considered a low priority by practitioners in TVET sector. Most educational institutions, particularly those offering technical and vocational training, do not integrate OHS practices into the

curriculum. Nepal's education policy lacks a structured monitoring system to ensure the implementation of practical safety measures during the learning process, especially in TVET settings. Additionally, there is no structured curriculum for teaching OHS practices in TVET institutions.

### ***Low Prioritization and Misuse of Safety Measures***

OHS is deprioritized by workers, employers, TVET practitioners and government bodies. Workers often dislike or misuse PPE due to unawareness; few workers partially use PPE at workplace, but most of the equipment provided is of low quality. The Department of Labour and Occupational Safety under the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security does not effectively work on OHS and related training for workers or ensure their safety.

### ***Limited Research and Data***

There are insufficient studies on workplace accidents, fatality rates and gender-specific risks, hindering targeted interventions. This gap extends to gender-specific risks, with no strong data on how women in formal and informal sectors face disproportionate vulnerabilities, such as workplace linked hazards or inadequate PPE fit. Few national databases track incident rates, causes or long-term health impacts. Technical training centers and the Department of Labour and Occupational Safety conduct minimal research, leaving policymakers without evidence for interventions. Consequently, targeted strategies, for instance, sector-

specific PPE standards or women-focused training remain underdeveloped.

## **Discussion**

These findings highlight a critical gap in Nepal's workplace safety and occupational health approach. The lack of adequate infrastructure, insufficient availability of PPE, and limited knowledge and training on OHS contribute to hazardous working environments across various sectors. Owais et al. (2020) emphasize that effective TVET requires a combination of theoretical instruction and practical experiences. Integrating OHS measures and practical training into TVET curricula is essential for preparing workers to navigate workplace risks safely.

The absence of a structured monitoring system within education policies, particularly in TVET settings, increases the problem. Consequently, the graduates enter the workforce without the necessary skills and knowledge to identify workplace hazards or advocate for their safety. The situation is particularly alarming in high-risk sectors, such as construction, manufacturing and mechanical industries, where workers often remain unprepared to handle occupational risks or demand proper safety measures.

The concept of decent work, as defined by the ILO, views workplace safety and the proper use of PPE as fundamental rights and key aspects of improving working conditions. Additionally, the theory of decent work emphasizes the importance of workplace

social courage. Namal et al. (2024) describe social courage as the willingness of individuals to address challenging workplace situations, such as unsafe practices, harassment or bullying, even in the face of potential negative effects. However, the lack of certified OHS experts in technical training centers further hinders workers' ability to prepare adequately for real-world workplace hazards. Acquiring knowledge and skills related to OHS improves workers' competence and empowers them to advocate for their safety and prioritize their well-being.

Ghai (2003) also pointed out the importance of quality work for all. Their framework for decent work highlights critical dimensions, such as employment, social security and protection, workers' basic rights and social dialogue. Within this framework, social security and protection explicitly address workers' safety concerns, whether in formal or informal employment. However, practical implementation of these measures remains a significant challenge before Nepal's labor market, particularly for vulnerable groups, such as women. Gender-specific approaches to workplace safety and OHS training are urgently needed to address the unique risks faced by women in both formal and informal sectors.

Precarious work, often characterized by insecurity, lack of protection and uncertainty, profoundly affects workers' mental and physical health. Blustein et al. (2016) explain that such employment conditions fail to provide satisfaction or stability, leading to

heightened stress and dissatisfaction. Unsafe working environments further amplify these issues, contributing to poor mental health and low motivation among workers.

The role of Department of Labour and Occupational Safety in providing OHS training and enforcing safety regulations is paramount. Comprehensive policies, stricter enforcement of safety standards and enhanced workplace inspections are critical to improving worker safety.

These challenges align with my own professional experiences. It is essential to ensure that workers are employed and equipped with the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to prioritize safety and encourage a motivated and productive workforce. Employment that focuses on workplace safety can significantly contribute to the preparation of empowered workers who are confident in their abilities, satisfied in their roles, and capable of thriving in a competitive job market.

## Conclusion

This qualitative literature review demonstrates that OHS remain a critical yet inadequately addressed issue in Nepal's workplaces, particularly in the TVET sector. Although OHS is internationally recognized as a fundamental component of decent work, its practical integration into Nepal's skills development system and workplace practices is still weak and fragmented. The review highlights persistent gaps in workers' awareness, access to occupation-specific

PPE, hands-on OHS training and institutional commitment to workplace safety.

The findings suggest that many TVET graduates enter the labor market without sufficient knowledge, confidence or practical experience to identify workplace hazards, properly use PPE or advocate for their safety especially in Dirty, Dangerous and Difficult (3Ds) work. This situation is further worsened by the weak enforcement of labor regulations, limited involvement of certified OHS experts in training institutions, inadequate monitoring mechanisms and insufficient research on workplace accidents and occupational risks particularly those affecting women and informal sector workers.

From a decent work perspective, unsafe working conditions undermine workers' physical, psychological and social well-being, restricting their ability to engage in productive, dignified and sustainable employment. The Psychology of Working Theory further supports that the absence of physical and relational safety, health protection and secure working environments contribute to precarious work, stress and reduced job satisfaction. Therefore, improving OHS is not only a matter of compliance but a fundamental strategy for enhancing worker well-being, productivity and economic development in Nepal.

To address these challenges, this study highlights the need for systematic integration of practical OHS training into all TVET curricula, including occupation-specific risk assessments and mandatory PPE usage; engagement of certified OHS

professionals in technical training centers and skills testing facilities; improved quality, availability and standardization of PPE, especially for high-risk sectors, such as construction, manufacturing, and mechanical trades; strengthened policy implementation and workplace inspections by the Department of Labour and Occupational Safety; and the development of a national database on workplace accidents, injuries and fatalities to inform evidence-based interventions.

Ultimately, skills development in Nepal must move beyond employability and prioritize safe employability. A TVET system that embeds OHS as a core competency will better prepare workers for real workplace conditions, reduce occupational risks and contribute to achieving decent work, social justice and sustainable economic growth. Future research should incorporate empirical field studies, including interviews with workers, trainers and employers to deepen understanding of behavioral, institutional and cultural factors influencing OHS practices in Nepal.

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## Article

# Making Vocational Training Effective for Employability

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## Abstract

Vocational training is important for empowering youths to link them to formal labor markets. This review paper highlights the role of vocational skill development program in addressing unemployment especially among marginalized groups and youth in Nepal. The study follows a qualitative approach with thematic analysis to explore the relationship between short-term vocational training and its outcomes. After reviewing various national and international studies, the paper focuses on key challenges, such as gender disparities in employment outcomes and other common barriers. Once there is underemployment and skill mismatch, which is evident from market saturation and economic conditions, the ultimate goal of vocational training is not achieved. These happen because the job market changes and sometimes gets too full. The paper therefore argues fair and inclusive training are imperative, while support after training is equally important. Only fair and balanced approach helps in creating equal chances and supporting long-term growth in the countries like Nepal.

*Keywords:* vocational training, youth employment, gender disparities, underemployment

## Introduction

Vocational training is instrumental in reducing poverty and unemployment issues in the developing countries. It helps individuals gain skills to meet labor market demands, which further increases employability and supports to find work and earn money (Messerli, 2012). The programs under vocational training are popular for skilling people quickly. In Nepal, vocational training that focuses the marginalized communities especially for women are important tool to their empowerment. It prepares them to work and fit into labor market. It helps people move from learning to doing. Many people have

lack of skills demanded by the labor market. To this, the vocational training helps them learn skills. In addition to creating chances for self-employment, such as starting small tailoring enterprises in the community, learning tailoring skills also gives trainees a sense of empowerment and autonomy. In Nepal, where women are socio-culturally restricted in exercising their right to freedom of movement and choice of work, modifying training might serve as a suitable and feasible way for them to earn money at home or in a supportive community settings. It contributes to their economic empowerment

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and social standing by preparing women as active economic agents.

In Nepal, the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) is the apex body assigned suitably with the responsibility of managing the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). It provides a range of diploma, pre-diploma and short-term vocational training programs with the purpose of enabling more people, especially the youths who cannot afford to join purely academic education. These skill-oriented programs play an important role to build human resources necessary for the country. The trained persons have the potential of employability in Nepal and abroad as well (Bagale, 2015). However, people are not fully aware how the short-term vocational training programs prepare graduates for immediate entry into gainful employment or self-employment, especially toward adaptation to rapidly changing industry sectors. In Nepal's Tarai region, different vocational training programs have supported people to learn skills and reduce unemployment along with income generation (Kharel, 2020). It is, however, not the same case because long-term results are not clear. There is not enough evidence to show if these programs really supported to increase employment opportunities and changes.

The vocational skill training programs helps women move out of their social and cultural limits in addition to empowering them to enter the labor market with various required skills. These programs teach hands-on skills;

they also boost confidence in them. The technical skills therefore pave way for career opportunities, jobs, self-enterprises among women (ILO, 2021).

In recent years, employment has grown up rapidly because of several factors like huge labor market demands, economic development, political and government situations. The ILO reports that in 2019, Nepal's unemployment rate was 3.7%. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this scenario altered suddenly, and by 2021, the rate had risen to 5.1%. However, as the majority of individuals work in the informal sector or are underemployed, statistics cannot give a full picture. The Government of Nepal has implemented a number of policy measures aimed at fostering economic expansion and job creation in an effort to lessen the issue of unemployment. Different reports state that more than 400 thousands youths join Nepal's labor force every year. However, there is an acute shortage of skilled human resource in the market. This demand-supply gap in skilled human resource is also caused by the ignorance of the youth about other career options. Due to such circumstances, many youths are forced into menial jobs with minimal earning potential. The need of the hour is quality vocational training institutes that meet the national and international standards of industry and market.

The TVET sector has been growing in Nepal. Different national and international agencies have been investing in training to bridge the gap seen in the labor market. In

the training providing institutions, people learn market-oriented skills. The skills-based training makes them easier to find jobs and support in securing stable income opportunities, thus contributing not only to human resource development but also to broader economic growth in the country as a whole. These skill training programs are also helpful in removing barriers that stop young people from getting good education, like high fees and few learning chances. This provides a chance to learn practical skills for careers, who are drop-outs from the formal education. To make it better, governments and communities need to join their hands. More supports and access will improve people's dreams and meet what employer wants.

However, skill development training programs have some issues. These programs support gaining technical skills, but the graduate's ability to obtain a job is hindered by the absence of structured job placement services, post-training services, and ongoing assistance. This makes it evident that the real effects of vocational training programs are shown in engagement only; the individuals try their best to get employment, but it remains only training used for engagement instead of income-generating activities. Workers with only basic vocational training are not competent in labor markets that are marked by skill mismatches and unpredictable employment prospects (Brunello & Rocco, 2017). Even though there are numerous examples of vocational training helping participants acquire employable skills, it is

still thought to have shortcomings in terms of helping graduates find long-term sustaining jobs.

With this in the background, the paper focuses on employment and engagement aspects of graduates in the context of short-term vocational training. Thus, this study aims to review existing literature to understand how vocational training contributes to employment or engagement: which support to understand whether vocational training leads to sustained employment or only engagement.

### **Methodology**

This paper followed a thematic analysis using a qualitative approach. This method helps to sort and show themes in the data by looking at different issues (Boyatzis, 1998). As per Alhojailan (2012), thematic analysis supports researchers to closely explore the relationships between concepts and compare them with repeating data patterns. It also eases to link different views and thought shared by researchers.

I reviewed 21 different selected literatures to perform the thematic study. The review covered recent publications. The main purpose was to explore and summarize research into how vocational training supports employment, with a particular focus on Nepal. The methodology included a systematic collection, evaluation, and analysis of scholarly articles, research papers, reports, and policy documents that help in understanding the relationship

between training and resulting employment opportunities. Materials were collected by conducting intensive searches on academic databases, such as JSTOR and Google Scholar, and government sources related to TVET. Every source was selected based on relevance and quality to ensure that its content had a close link with the research purpose. I found and reviewed literature by using keywords, such as vocational training, analysis of youth employment, relevance to Nepal and developing countries. Each study was reviewed in full, coded manually, and divided into themes relating to employment outcomes demographic differences and structural constraints.

### **Training for Employment and Self-Employment**

The vocational training programs bring close relations to the world of work. In Nepal, CTEVT is the apex body that promotes technical and vocational education and training for employment and self-employment. It develops and conducts relevant vocational training to meet the current market demands with practical skills suitable for both the formal and informal sectors among the youths in the country through its polytechnic institutes. It follows the principle of competency-based education and training, blending theoretical input with practical exposure so that a graduate is immediately productive upon employment. It works in collaboration with industries, employers and local governments to make the training curriculum responsive to labor

market demand for better employability of graduates. In addition, it also promotes self-employment initiatives through entrepreneurial training, access to micro-financing, and promotion of small businesses at the local level. The role of vocational programs is enhancing employability among youths (Silwal & Bhatta, 2017).

While unemployment among youths is still a serious problem in many countries, vocational training remains one of the key pathways to enhance employability and take up self-employment opportunities among young people, particularly in regions with high unemployment rates. These programs have their double roles. It teaches individuals practical skills that match with labor market needs. This helps people create their own enterprises and is also helpful to find jobs. For example, a study by the Employment Fund program in Nepal showed that participants had a 50% increase in non-formal employment, while their monthly earnings increased by 72%. This shows how vocational skill training can change job chances (Chakravarty et al., 2016). A study from Pakistan, the FATA-DA training programs shows significant enhancement in the livelihood of employed ones, with employment rates increasing by 1.94 times after training (Ullah et al., 2021).

The vocational training is not always useful in finding a formal employment. But, it supports self-employment in a strong way. These programs provide hard skills and soft-skills, which cover many needs in the

labor market. Quality vocational training boosts confidence and make people aware of their abilities. This builds motivation and helps them stay involved in their work. For people, this mix of skill and personal growth is very important as they enter in a competitive job world. Vocational training also includes entrepreneurship skills. This makes self-employment a real option that props up local economies, where there is high youth unemployment. Vocational training creates opportunities through targeted skill development (Silwal & Bhatta, 2017). Such training also serves as a motivating factor especially where the formal employment jobs are rare.

The special skills are catered during the vocational training along with the blend of practical and theoretical skills. These programs focus on real, practical skills that match with different industries. Employers usually see them as strong workers, which can lead to better performance and higher productivity. This makes vocational graduates more employable because they received hands-on working experience and other relevant skills. These open more paths for them. Several vocational training programs open more career paths for people. It also direct to better paying jobs once people gain their work experience or receive more knowledge on it. A study in Pakistan also supports these ideas. The vocational training meaningfully increased employment rates and also experienced higher earnings among youths in the tribal areas of Pakistan (Ullah et al., 2021). By the entrepreneurship training,

it enables individuals to create their own businesses, which can bring in high earnings and contribute to economic growth. After vocational training programs, the possibility of higher earnings through self-employment is also reflected in various studies that show entrepreneurs are better prepared to handle market challenges (Rabail & Babar, 2021; Sanam, 2021).

### **Outcome of Training Differs across Demography**

Not only knowledge and skills are transferred through vocational training but also attitudes fostered by it. However, its results witness significant variations. In the context of Nepal, it includes different demographic groups, and factors such as age, gender and socioeconomic background that influence the outcomes of training programs. Studies on the training program outcome across different groups show what factors make the programs more effective (Stöterau, Kemper, & Ghisletta, 2022).

The impact of vocational training also changes strongly by gender disparities. Women often gain more in terms of self-employment, especially in the developing countries. But at the same time, many women are pushed into low-paying fields. These jobs follow obsolete ideas and prevent women from entering better-paying, and male-dominated trades. This limits their chances to earn more and grow economically. It underlines the need for gender-friendly policies that encourage women to enter a wider range of skills and higher-paying fields. Research

shows that Nepal's Employment Fund program successfully supported women in overcoming traditional labor market barriers through targeted training and life skills development (Chakravarty et al., 2016). But even with these gains, gender gaps still appear. However, vocational training programs frequently shows gender segregation, channeling women into traditionally low-paying occupations, such as tailoring and beautician, thereby reinforcing occupational stereotypes and limiting access to higher-paying roles (Kharel & Silwal, 2023). Similarly, a study by Ullah et al. (2021) found that young men had to achieve higher employment rates after post-training compared to young women. This shows the need for training programs that understand the special challenges women face. With more gender-sensitive planning, women can move into better jobs and have stronger economic futures.

Socio-economic background also plays a vital role in varying outcomes of vocational training. Many people from low-income families face deep problems like limited financial support, poor training quality, and weak social opportunities. These challenges make it hard for the marginalized groups to use the full benefits of the training. Because of this, they often fall back into underemployment and face unstable income again and again. Studies shows that training programs in low and middle-income countries usually give better result for the marginalized groups because their starting job level and economic conditions are very

different (Stöterau, Kemper, & Ghisletta, 2022).

But, even now, many people from the disadvantaged backgrounds still face severe problems. They lack access to financial support, post-training support and quality training. It further worsens poverty and unemployment problems (Rabail & Babar, 2021). These barriers create a cycle that is hard to break. So, vocational training should look deeper into the social and economic issues that affect how well people can benefit from it. These differences show why training programs must be designed carefully. They should include gender-friendly policies, special support for new or inexperienced learners and the clear plans to deal with crowded job markets. Understanding how demographic factors and training interact will help leaders design programs that are fairer. This can improve access and outcomes for people from many different backgrounds.

### **Other Factors behind Low Employment**

Although the vocational training is often seen as a path to better jobs, it sometimes creates a cycle of underemployment and skill mismatch. One problem is publication bias. Positive result gets shared more, while negative experiences are not reported as much. This gives people an unrealistic idea of how well these programs work. It leads to too much attention on training models that do not fit everyone (Wagma et al., 2021).

Market saturation is another big issue. When many young people learn the same type of skills, the job market fills up fast. Too many

people compete for the same work, and rate of task decreases in market. This makes the values of training go down because employers can hire easily for low pay. Ullah et al. (2021) also point this growing problem in their research.

The success of the vocational training programs also depends a lot on the economy and what labor market needs at the moment. Even well-trained people struggle to find jobs when the economy is weak or when industries change. This leads to more underemployment and fewer chances to use their skills (Ullah et al., 2021). Other structural problems like weak industry linkages, lack of financial assistance and support, and the training that does not consider gender needs draw equal concern. These barriers keep many people trapped in low-quality works that do not contribute to job market (Shiferaw, 2020). The main barrier is not the training itself, but training remain only for engagement.

Although the vocational training increases employability, its result requires close observation. The vocational training should not be a scheme to create a self-reinforcing cycle of problems, so it needs rupturing systemic barriers by better aligning the content of training with market demand, incorporating strong post-training support, and developing closer industry partnerships. Vocational training outcomes assessment needs honing evaluations so the programs can retain usefulness and fairness. It becomes instrumental in creating long-lasting job opportunities that are more equal for everyone.

## Conclusion

This thematic review summarizes that vocational training is an important way to reduce unemployment and improve economic opportunities in the developing countries, especially in Nepal. The study depends on secondary literature and includes studies with varied method and outcomes measures. It is clear that vocational training programs have strong potential. They can help people find jobs and even start their own small business. But these programs also face serious challenges that must be fixed for them to work well. The vocational training gives individuals with real skills, and it helps many women join the labor market and explore business opportunities. However, the gender and socioeconomic backgrounds shape the results in different ways. People from poor families face barriers that stop them from using their new skills fully. The study also points out worrying trends. Sometimes vocational training can create underemployment and skill mismatch unknowingly. When too many people learn the same skills, the job market gets enough human resources with similar skills and wages decreases accordingly. This is why training programs must change with the labor market. They need strong follow-up support, not just training alone. Policy makers should also bring in gender-sensitive ideas to make training programs more inclusive. In the Nepali context, vocational training alone cannot overcome structural labor market weaknesses. Without collaborative efforts among employers, local authorities and financial institutions, training is likely to become a short-term activity instead of a lasting solution.

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