

Reforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Sector: What Next?

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ABSTRACT

Employment sector has been invariably affected in the current crisis resulting from the global pandemic of COVID-19. This demands a paradigm shift in the present way of intervention in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector through short- and long-term strategies.

Keywords: Employment, Nepalese TVET Sector, TVET Policy and Practice

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is increasingly gaining emphasis worldwide as it prepares young people for employment and helps overcome their socio-economic challenges. TVET is also perceived as a tool that fundamentally provides the youths with necessary skills required for job market and that subsequently leads to the economic development (Anderson, 2009). It is imperative that one of the bases for sustainable livelihood is employment and gainful income (McGrath, Mulder, Papier, & Stuart, 2019) and the TVET offers necessary skills to the youths for employment (Maclean & Wilson, 2011). Realizing the contributions to the socio-economic development of nations through skills is enhancement and engagement, TVET is gradually gaining policy attention globally. Its role has ever increased amid the present global pandemic with hundreds of thousand youths losing their jobs and, thus,

posing a challenge to retain the workforce in their normal health condition. Nevertheless, the TVET sector at the moment can hardly address the unprecedented situation with its present normative way of functioning. This requires a diagnostic assessment of major problems rooted in the TVET sector so that a set of measures can be introduced to revitalize it in a new normal situation. The assessment is also pertinent to generate employment opportunities in the future. With this into consideration, this article has brought out major problems and possible strategies required to redeem the TVET sector. The article begins with the description of TVET sector development citing a reference from a case of developing country Nepal before presenting possible reforms.

TVET Sector Development: A Country Case

Nepal is a country replete with diversity both in terms of socio-cultural and ecological heritages and thus carries an array of immense opportunities. Within a small territory of 147,181 square kilometers, as many as 126 ethnic groups with diverse cultures have been living here for generations (CBS, 2011). Besides, geographical diversities ranging from fertile plains in the southern parts with 60 meter from the sea level to mid-range hilly landscape and high mountains in the north with the top of the world (8848 meter) also present Nepal as a high potential for agricultural and other economic activities. However, having a per capita income of approximately US\$ 1000, the country is acutely facing the resources to overcome poverty, lack of infrastructure, weak services, etc. (Ministry of Finance, 2019). More specifically, agriculture as the most dominant employment sector hardly fulfills the basic needs of the people in Nepal as there exists a very weak linkage between employment and the skills that youths receive before they enter into the world of work. In such a context, TVET is expected to overcome unemployment challenges, and importantly, fundamental efforts for the development of the sector began in the country with the establishment of the Council of Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) in 1989. However, the sector has not yet progressed in realizing its meaningful contribution to the job market.

Despite some government efforts to streamline the sector through legal and policy mechanisms like CTEVT Act, TVET policies, and institutional mechanism of CTEVT, the sector has been ever relegated to the back-burner. It is considered to have been less connected with diverse employment providers and is also not substantially playing an anticipated role in reducing unemployment rates and lowering poverty in the country. Thus, it has not gained wider popularity among youths in Nepal. This may be the reason as to why TVET hasn't been a popular choice for the students with better educational performance.

Limited and Inefficient Government Intervention

There is a marked exodus of job-seeking Nepali youths to the Middle East and elsewhere. Most of them do not have the specific skills required for their jobs. The reason is that only 10 percent of Nepal's migrant workers receive TVET qualifications (International Labour Organization, 2015). Further, women migrant workers bound to serve as domestic workers are also mostly unskilled (Nepal Planning Commission, 2016). To address the problem, the annual intake capacity of TVET institutions of Nepal is not enough. At present, the enrolment capacity of the public and private institutions for the same is less than 130,000 which include both short-term and project ventures (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2018a; MoEST, 2018b). Although the government plans to provide short term skill development courses to 45,000 youths (Nepal Planning Commission, 2020), this will not suffice the aspirations of the youth populace seeking for employment.

In this connection, the Nepal government is currently expanding and developing TVET infrastructure in its 607 local government levels out of 753 (Government of Nepal, 2020). But this is a herculean task for the government since much-needed TVET governance at large is not well-coordinated from federal to local levels. For this, the coordination effort for mustering supports from different stakeholders and concerned authorities such as CTEVT- affiliated and constituent colleges, short-term course providers, and TITI among others is anticipated. However, the coordinated efforts can also prod other TVET providers, including the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Labor, Employment, Vocational and Skill Development Training Center (Department Level), Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies (MOICS)-Department of Cottage and Small Industries (DCSI) in operating their programs. Likewise, the National Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management runs some academic and training programs. Besides, some projects such as EVENT (a project in collaboration with the World Bank), TVET practical partnership (an EU supported and CTEVT and British Council -implemented project) and, ENSSURE (a Swiss-supported project) are currently being executed. Other direct donor-funded programs are being implemented through GOs and NGOs across the country. Also, there are some marked initiatives from the private sector end. However, a clear framework to streamline all these efforts has not been made yet.

TVET schools have been established to provide a decent learning environment, appropriate physical facilities, and training materials to meet the demands of the job market. But this is not mostly happening because many TVET institutions are in operation without the required physical and learning environment. Disable-friendly infrastructure has hardly been constructed. Work-based learning as an essential aspect of TVET is to be strengthened in the TVET system. A well organized and meaningful unit to recognize the indigenous, local and self-innovative learning is yet to be

made much functional. Importantly, apprenticeship has yet to be institutionalized though the government has emphatically included this in its annual policy and budget for the fiscal year 2020/21 (MoF, 2020). Consequently, the sector is not being able to develop human resources with employable skills and approaches. School facilities are not only the issue but the numerical presence of TVET institutions in itself is a matter to ponder.

Un/coordinated Policy and Initiations

The TVET Policy, 2012 played a significant role for the development of the TVET sector. After the formulation of the TVET policy, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) and CTEVT started meaningful coordination with TVET stakeholders albeit coordination is still a challenge. The sector-specific projects such as TVET PP and ENSSURE are already in place. However, the gaps are observed in quality control and Monitoring and Evaluation aspects of TVET system. The policy has not been aligned much with economic development related to agriculture, migration and training for informal sector workers. The TVET policy does not explicitly incentivize the private sector as well. Competency-based curricula, enterprise development and meeting global standards among other areas are not thought of while framing the policy. The policy is yet to be made compatible with the Nepal Constitution (2015), and the new federal setups of Nepal. National Education Policy, 2019 has made specific provisions in vocational and technical education in Nepal.

The constitution has envisaged TVET as the means to prepare competent, competitive and ethical human resources so to enable them to live up to national interests. The constitution also intends to make education sector scientific, technical, and employment-oriented. It has enshrined a provision for enhancing access of the marginalized population to skills development. Articles 31 to 39 of the law of the land have specified provisions related to free and employment-oriented quality education. Furthermore, the particular concern of TVET has also been prioritized in the Sustainable Development Goals- Goal 4, quality education (Nepal Planning Commission, 2015) laying emphasis on TVET/skills development. Out of seven education-related targets stipulated in the global transformative goals, four are related to skills development. In line with this, Nepal has set a specific target to increase the number of youths and adults with relevant skills that includes technical and vocational, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

The Major political parties also have manifested TVET as their priority area. The Nepali Congress (NC) has envisaged the opening of technical schools under local levels and encouraged the proliferation of local entrepreneurs and their enterprises in the rural areas. Then CPN- UML envisaged restructuring of TVET system to ensure 70 percent human resources in the technical sector. The then Maoist (Central) pitched a skill

and employment program within the country putting forth the concept of labour bank, youth employment and poverty alleviation funds in each village for employment. Nepal Loktantrik Forum, later merged into Nepali Congress, but for local resources mobilization, skills and technology for the enhancement of production and income generation.

In keeping with the constitutional spirit, the Sustainable Development Goals and manifestoes of various political parties of Nepal opted for an integrated TVET Act and a long-term strategic plan necessary in the new federal structure. To implement the plan as per its spirit, a dedicated group of human resources is required. Department of Development Education at Kathmandu University-School of Education has launched a first-ever Master's Degree in TVET in Nepal since 2018. The program needs long-term support to produce dedicated human resources in TVET sector who can critically engage in managing and leading the sector. This concern draws relevance since the experts in Nepal, mostly engaged in managing and leading TVET as of now, are the outcomes of experiences rather than that of formal academic qualifications.

What Next in The Context of Present Crisis?

Every country has its own contexts and priority initiatives. The strategies applied to any initiative may differ from place to place and from time to time. Some interventions can be adopted while some others can be ignored or contextualized. Nevertheless, citing the country-specific case analysis, it can be claimed that TVET sector requires special attention to vitalize the job market in the new normal situation. The sector requires many short and long term reforms which are as follows:

- Reform in training: Linkage with a job (apprenticeship) can connect students/trainees with employers, but it requires standards in the design and delivery of training compatible with the need of the existing job market at home and abroad.
- Governance: Coordination with MIS (Management Information System) and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), institutional restructuring in line with federal setups, and developing institution with integrity is essential.
- Access: Disabled-friendly infrastructure in each local unit and equity in training/learning opportunities are necessary.
- Knowledge re-construction: Local knowledge can be renovated and disseminated. Innovative entrepreneurship can be a strategy to attract investments.
- Institutional building: Human resource development, sustainable financing, avoidance of resource overlapping, integrated approach of TVET fund, enhanced political commitment, coordination among various TVET providers and elevated roles of private sectors are the ways to advance TVET institutions.

- Recognizing prior learning and National Vocational Qualification System: A country can possess several local and indigenous occupations and skills. National Skill Testing System can be made adequately functional to attract and include people with skills through informal means.
- Coordination among TVET stakeholders: A strong linkage and coordination among the TVET stakeholders including oversight actors can be established.
- Other areas: Besides, human resource development and technological up-to-date are other areas to be considered for the development of TVET sector in Nepal.

Conclusions

The current crisis stemming from COVID-19 has not only adversely affected the TVET stream but also brought opportunities for its growth. The opportunities can be harnessed much by initiating and sustaining short-term and long-term reforms making departure from the cosmetic reforms made in the past. In this context, policy reform, infrastructure development, training, governance, institution building, and strong coordination among stakeholders can be initiated shortly. However, the government should formulate a long term plan to create a supply-driven workforce development mechanism, envisioning tiers of government such as the federal, provincial and local level along with the current practices from market demand mechanism. This requires reliable and sustainable financing in this sector. Importantly, financing in TVET can be a possible tool to reduce brain drain and enable an environment conducive to the young generation to enhance their capacity, get decent earning and live a quality life in a country. It can also be one of the important tools to address the employment and livelihood needs of the returnee migrants during and in the aftermath of COVID 19.

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