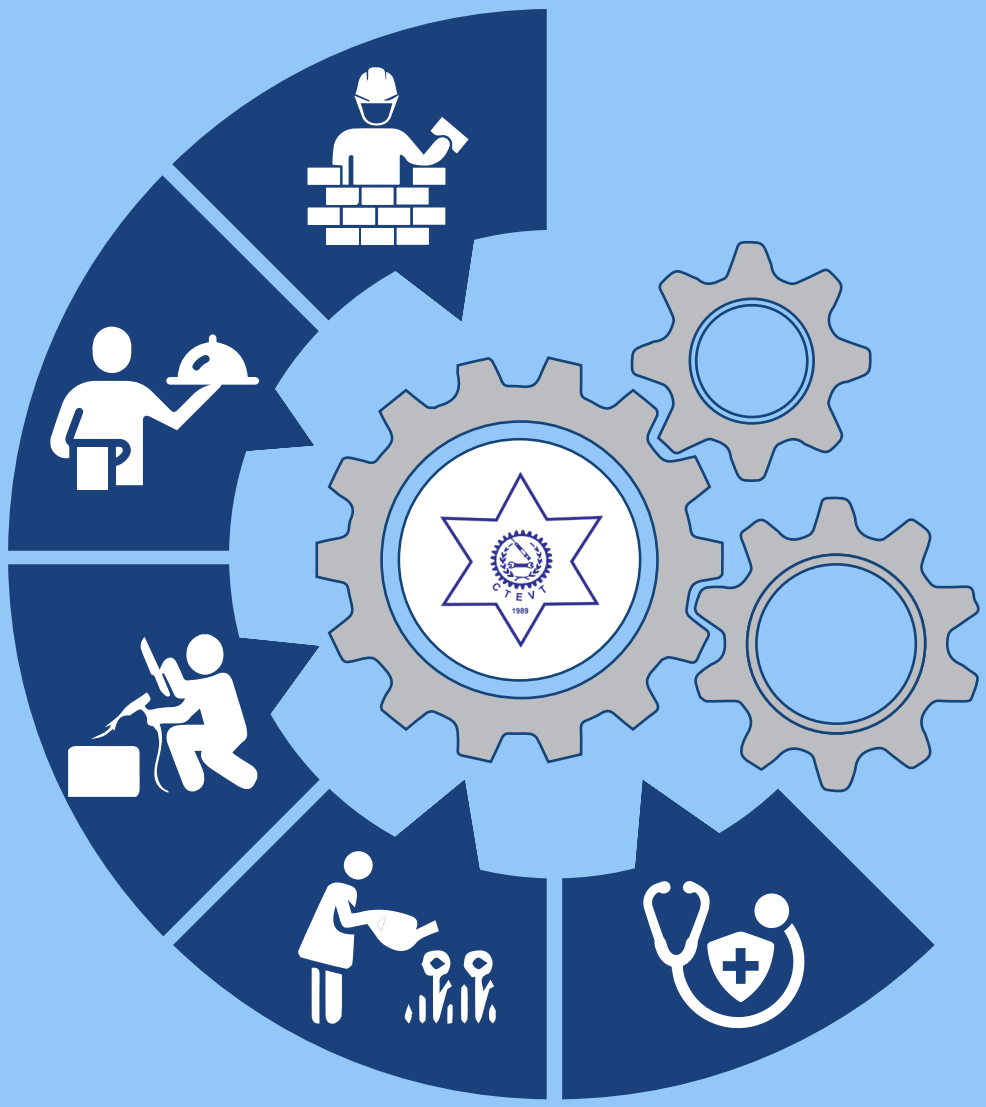
ISSN:2773-8248
Vol.-1, Issue-16, February 2022

Journal of

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)



2022

A Publication of

Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT)

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Journal

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Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Journal

ISSN: 2773-8248
Vol.- 1, Issue: 16, February 2022

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Published by
Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training
Research and Information Division
Sanothimi, Bhaktapur, Nepal.
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Technical and Vocational Education and Training from the Vantage Point

EDITORIAL

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed severe threat to human life. In additional to health sector, the economic, social and educational activities are at the receiving end of global crisis. Protecting life is the top priority everywhere the coronavirus spread. Nepal too could not escape the pandemic. Despite such crisis, the CTEVT has tried to continue its activities.

Obviously, the continuation of TEVT journal amid Covid-19 pandemic remained a challenging task. The pious academic work of CTEVT, is, however, continued with reduced presence as compared with the previous years. This time, we have been able to publish only eight articles.

The aim of the journal publication is not only to create informed public on multifarious issues of TVET via the articles prepared with academic rigor but also to bring into light the CTEVT activities and foster debate for augmenting the value of TVET in Nepal. The CTVET believes this publication contributes to this front.

In this edition, the article 'Coping COVID-19 Pandemic-Induced Adversities through Parental Involvement: Experiences of Late Adolescents Pursuing Diploma program from Kathmandu Valley' by Ramila Subedi is the article on how the adolescents experienced adversities caused by COVID-19 and how they coped with them through parental involvement. With purposive selection of three adolescents who had been pursuing diploma programs from the Kathmandu Valley, the writer found that adolescents experienced socio- economic adversities along with the risk induced by their indulgence in online platforms. The study underscores the role of familial and parental involvement in managing the adversities facing their adolescent children.

Likewise, Anil Muni Bajracharya explains the challenges of the informal skill learners that are encountered during the accreditation of their skills through the National Skill Testing Board. In his article, 'Addressing Informal Skill Learners' Challenges in Skill Test in Nepal', he mentions despite having the benefits of recognition of the prior learning and establishment of testing system for forty-five years, the number of the informal skills learners appearing for the skill test is not encouraging. According to

him, massive awareness on the testing authority is imperative to integrate the informal learners into the formal education system for the decent employment, gainful income and to eliminate the underemployment.

'Occupational Shift in Semi-urban Areas of Nepal: A Socio-cultural Dynamics' by Rakshya Acharya focuses the importance of socio-cultural dynamics in the occupational shift, especially abandoning the agriculture. Several socio-cultural aspects, such as modernization, urbanization, industrialization have greater influence in this process, the writer concludes in the paper after listening, narrating and reflecting to the life stories of people in the outskirt of Kathmandu Valley. She also stresses the need for redefining agricultural policy to attract youths in it, thereby envisioning technical and vocational education.

In the article, 'Instructional Leadership Behavior among Principals of Two Schools in Lalitpur, Nepal', writer Bishnu Lamsal points out that in a successful school, schoolheads or principals' leadership plays a vital role in the academic achievement of the students. Conducting the study on two renowned private schools of Lalitpur district, the author says in recent years, principals in schools are more sincere and serious about their knowledge and skills to enhance the academic quality of students, which he believes, would lead Nepal's education system to a new height in the days ahead. This study will help school administrators and other stakeholders know more about how the improvement in instructions can be carried out and educational excellence promoted.

Similarly, Rajendra Bahadur Shrestha throws light on the existing situation, explores issues, and shares some innovative initiations to strengthen the employer engagement in CTEVT technical schools in the article, 'Strengthening Employer Engagement in CTEVT Technical Schools: Some Practices and Initiatives'. Arguing that the employer engagement in the TVET programs of the CTEVT is under-explored in Nepal, the writer suggests the country should have national level policies that guide the engagement of employers and employer associations in TVET programs. Stakeholders' awareness and sensitization on the importance of public private partnerships in TVET system should be enhanced from federal to local levels, he adds.

Moreover, Ramesh Adhikari, Bidur Bastola, Unnata Timalsina, and Ranju KC have found in the study that female migrants, physically disabled migrants, who had elderly in their houses, and migrants from poor households were more likely to experience violence. In their joint article, 'Experience of Violence due to COVID-19 among Returnee Migrants of Sudurpaschim Province of Nepal', they present the study report focusing people from Sudurpaschim Province who have experienced violence after

they returned home from foreign employment. The writers point out the need for a comprehensive awareness program and services that can help to prevent violence among returnee migrants.

In the article named 'COVID-19 and Its Association with Psychological Health of Children, Adolescents and Young Adults', writer Rojina Basnet makes an attempt to identify the association of COVID-19 pandemic with the psychological health of children, adolescents and young adults. In the total 18 primary studies with most of them being cross sectional descriptive studies, the review the writers made found that the prevalence of anxiety levels among children ranged from 23.87 % to 38%. Reasoning that restriction on movement, social distancing, closures of schools, little interaction with peers, educational status, smart phone and internet addiction, and frequent watching, listening, or reading news related with COVID-19 resulted into anxiety, need for initiation of efforts to improve services within the country are underscored to overcome the increasing mental health problems.

'Skilling People in Nepal: Reality Vs Dream' is the article that stresses the need for more holistic approach for skilling people in Nepal rather than compartmentalizing into different components or programs. The writers Hari Prasad Lamsal and Anil Muni Bajracharya, however, view the cost to provide skill training to a large number of youths and adults is a concern of skilling people. According to them, adequate attention is required for the design and implementation of skill development program in an integrated manner.

Amidst chaotic situation caused by the pandemic, the research division at CTEVT became able to connect the experts, researchers and scholars to its academic endeavor.

The editorial team is grateful to the CTEVT management and staffs, and all authors for their cooperation and support in spite of hostility caused by the pandemic. Similar support and cooperation is expected in the years to come from the experts, researchers and scholars. As always, the feedback to the publication helps CTEVT improve its works and encourage for betterment.

The ideas and opinions expressed in these articles are purely of the authors and do not reflect CTEVT's views. The ideas expressed in the articles do not represent the authors institutional reprentation as the articles are authors' personal opinions.

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Coping COVID- 19 Pandemic Induced Adversities through Parental Involvement: Experiences of Late Adolescents Pursuing Diploma Program from Kathmandu Valley

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Abstract

Amid the truism that pandemics can cause devastating effects on individuals from different group and class, the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation. In the world that has been experiencing distancing and isolation, adolescents are no exception to the vulnerabilities. However, the risks and adversities they face even seem to have got overshadowed by their engagement with virtual platforms. At the same time, the expectations they have from their parents and the role parental involvement plays for helping them cope with the challenges have remained less discussed. The study, hence, aimed at unraveling how the adolescents experienced COVID- 19 induced adversities and how they coped with them through parental involvement. In this course, three adolescents who have been pursuing diploma Program from the Kathmandu Valley were selected purposively while narrative inquiry was adopted as the method of study. Out of the engagement with the adolescents' narratives, it was discovered that adolescents experienced socio- economic adversities along with the risk induced by their indulgence in online platforms. At the same time, the adversities were related to the denial they had faced in relation to indigenous skills. Despite this, they were found to have built resilience, and bounced back to normalcy from the adversities with support and engagement of their parents. Hence, the study implies adolescents' experiences of risks and adversities along with the role of familial and parental involvement in managing the adversities.

Key words: *Adversities; Coping Mechanism; COVID- 19; Parental Involvement*

Setting the Stage: Reflecting Upon Myself

The outbreak of COVID- 19, as many would say, was disturbing to me as well. Despite having the experience of a number of ups and downs in my life, the pandemic was stressful in a sense that it had left me with trepidation and uncertainty. However, the pandemic even provided me with an opportunity to see my child from a closer

distance and get acquainted with the ups and downs he had been experiencing. I must say, the same experience of being with my son of eleven and seeing his experiences amid the pandemic instilled an encouragement to conduct a study on how the adolescents of a different age group than of my child might have experienced the ups and downs during the pandemic and how they might have coped with the associated adversities. In my anticipation in the initial days, COVID-19 induced lockdown was to come to a boy of eleven with a great comfort. It was because I was sure of the provisions we had made for his safety, and the school closures could provide him a good break from his hectic schedule. On top of these, the laughter that would burst from his room had allowed me to have stronger belief that he must be entertaining himself with his mobile games. My conviction, however, started shaking, and took a serious turn after a couple of weeks when I started noticing an odd irritation, loss of appetite and restlessness in him. He would not say what exactly he had been feeling, but came up with frequent questions regarding what would happen if his school would not open for the entire academic session; or how we would manage for the years to come if his mother's employment would be cut off! Furthermore, the anxiety in him would get even clearer whenever there would be power cut, and he would move up and down the stairs with serious yell. This change in his behavior made me realize that the time was high and I had to talk to him.When I tried talking to him in the first week of April, he did not communicate with me properly. However, as I kept on going closer to him and sharing how I had been feeling, he gradually started opening up. I started waking him up, playing with him, and even chanting the lines from *Bhagwad Gita.*[1] The more I communicated with him, the happier he became. The boy, who used to burst in laughter alone in his room, was now there in the kitchen or the backyard, either making dough for muffins and *selroti*[2] with my brother, or helping my mother plant vegetables; and at the same time, talking of how he will engage his young ones in the art of making Nepali sweets, and selling them in the international market when he would grow up!

I was able to experience a great deal of satisfaction with my son building confidence, enthusiasm and optimism amid the scenario when my colleagues complained about their children's restlessness. The experience, however, even made me learn how we take the laughter of the adolescents as the exhibition of their relaxation and undermine the vulnerabilities they might be experiencing. To me, the experience of my son, who is in his early teens, reflected the experiences many adolescents of his age might have been experiencing. Nonetheless, I even aspired to know what experiences the individuals in their late teens might have had amid

1 A collection of the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna which occurs in Bhismaparva of the Mahabharata

2 A traditional Nepali sweet made of flour, ghee, sugar and spices

COVID-19 pandemic. This very aspiration encouraged me to conduct the study.

The study aimed at unveiling how the late adolescents, who have been pursuing Diploma Program, experienced COVID- 19 induced pandemic, and how they coped them via their parental involvement.

Pandemic Induced Adversities: A Preface

It is true that pandemics come to us with utmost disruption and lead our lives to serious turmoil. Be it the outbreak of plague during the fourteenth century (World Health Organization [WHO], 2000), or the eruption of cholera in the nineteenth century (Samal, 2013), pandemics have apparently led to heightened level of stress and anxiety among individuals (Roy et al., 2020). The outbreak of influenza, in the similar way, is another illustration of how the pandemics bring threat of getting insufficient support beside the threat they experience regarding contagion and treatment (Sullivan & Bourgoin, 2010). Besides, Madhav et al. (2017) have illustrated how fear- induced aversions during pandemics can make psychological impact upon an individual, which often reflects in the form of change in his/ her behavior.

A more vivid picture of how stressful pandemics can be, and to which extent they can impact upon the people is getting clear with the entire world struggling against the COVID-19 pandemic at present. Considering growing adversities among people amid the pandemic, a study made by Zhang and Ma (2020) in Chinese context revealed that more than 50 percent of people experienced fright with the outbreak of the Corona Virus, while post- traumatic symptoms of the pandemic (Liu et al., 2020) were also reported by the studies made with regard to COVID-19. The pandemic induced adversities, in the similar way, were even anticipated to hit the population in the UK by Durcan et al. (2020) where anxiety and depression were considered to rise as most common problems. Narrowing down to the context of Nepal, the COVID-19 is considered to be making serious impact on mental health of the people besides the effects it is probable to make on socio-economic aspects of a majority of population (Poudel & Subedi, 2020).

It is undeniable that the pandemic has affected people of all age group, gender and class. However, studies have it said that the effects of the pandemic experienced by different groups of people are different and subjective. Among the groups, the women across the globe are reported to have been experiencing gender-based violence, disruption of health services and support and financial insecurity (United Nations [UN], 2020), which are probable to instigate heightened level of fragility. In addition to the women, self-isolation induced by the pandemic is found to have disproportionately affected the elderly people since their social contact is more outside home to the community centers, and places of worship (Armitage & Nellums, 2020). In the same context, a study made by Santini et al. (2020) in the American context

even revealed that isolation experienced by the elderly groups prophesied higher level of anxiety and depression in them (Santini et al., 2020). Apart from the adversities faced by the women and elderly people, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children has also become an emerging discourse where the adversities the children have been facing are mostly related to the economic hardships faced by their families, the increasing cases of violence and abuses along with their dependence on the virtual platforms and the growing risk of their exposure to inappropriate content and online predators (UN, 2020).

Along with the women, children and elderly groups, the adolescents have become no exception to the adversities that have come with the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. As stated by Fegert et al. (2020), isolation, contact restrictions and economic shutdown have imposed change to the psychosocial environment in the countries affected by COVID-19.the authors further state that mental health of adolescents has been significantly threatened. Similarly, the adolescent girls are reported to have been more vulnerable with the growing chances of sexual exploitation and abuse, risk of early and forced marriage, and an increase in sexual reproductive health risks (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2020). Moreover, the discourses on closure of educational institutions as seen in the newspapers and social media provide another indication of the surging confusion and anxiety among the adolescents regarding 'What Next!' Growing adversities among the adolescents is also reflected in Mahato et al. (2020), where the forceful stay of adolescents inside doors is considered to be prompting their stress level.

Along with the uncovering of the adolescents' anxiety and burdensomeness amid COVID-19 pandemic, there have also been a series of discussions regarding how they are aligning to the social media platforms for the improvement of their mental and social health (Oosterhoff et al., 2020). Furthermore, as many adolescents seem engaged in the virtual platform, which has been adopted in Nepal to combat the impact of school closures (Dawadi et al., 2020), the vulnerabilities they have been experiencing appear to have got overshadowed by their lonely engagement inside the rooms. At the same time, since the young groups between the age 13- 24 are stated to have made most the utilization of social networking platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok, Instagram and Snapchat during the COVID-19 lockdown (Marengo et al., 2022), dilemmatic discussions regarding if they are really facing adversities can be heard from different nooks and corners. The dilemma, to a great extent, has led to misunderstanding the real experiences of adolescents, and even posed questions on what kind of strategies can be formed to best address the adolescents at present. At the same time, with replicated remarks on the adolescents' dilemma on school and college closures, the adversities they might be experiencing due to other socio-economic hardships appear to have got undermined.

Amid the illustrated paradoxes, the study aims at exploring different sorts of adversities experienced by the adolescents, who have been pursuing Diploma program. Specifically, it intends uncovering how these adolescents experienced isolation, their learning via virtual platform, and the restlessness they faced due to economic disruption in their families. In addition to uncovering the adversities faced by the adolescents, the study unpacks how parental involvement has been working as mechanism for them to bounce back to normalcy from the COVID- 19 instigated hostile atmosphere.

Parental Involvement and the Discourses on It

Parental involvement, for years, has been considered as a supportive mechanism to children. Be in determining educational success of children (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017) or in instilling social skills in them (Roy, 2018), parental involvement has always been given a significant emphasis. The significance of parental involvement echoes in the stress given by the UNICEF (2015) in unveiling policies and provisions for family and parenting support where the major emphasis is given on creating appropriate atmosphere for the children and adolescents. Narrowing down to the context of Nepal too, the Constitution of Nepal 2015, Part III hints the significant role of parental role, since provisions regarding right to identity and an amiable atmosphere for the children to grow (Constituent Assembly Secretariat [CAS], 2015) are clearly stated there. These policies, provisions and studies provide enough space to probe upon what role parental involvement can play in the lives of children- no matter to which age group they belong to or how adverse situation they are in.

Despite the crucial role of parental involvement for the holistic well-being of children and adolescents, studies about their roles seem to have been limited to discussion of their contribution in enhancing children's academic achievement. The limitation appeared vivid to me in a study made by Lara and Saracostti (2019) where the role of parental involvement in children's academic outcome in the context of Chile has been discussed. Stress on relationship between parental involvement and children's learning is visible in Panta (2015), which articulates the parental role in English language acquisition of their children. Apart from the contribution parental involvement can make in facilitating academic learning of children and adolescents, Gardner (2011) reveals the relationship between social efficacy of parents and children work as an instance to the role parental involvement can play in the process of social learning too. The role of parental involvement, if related with my experience, does not end only with reinforcement of cognition and academic achievement, though! My own reflection on how I used to feel healed amid different crises with support and encouragement of my parents allows me to anticipate the contribution parental involvement makes in mental health and well- being of adolescents (Resnick et al., 1997 as cited in Arulsubila & Subasree,

n.d). Relating to the discourse of mental health and psychological well- being to the present context, the significance of parental involvement in helping adolescents cope with adversities like stress, vulnerabilities and anxiety appear more pertinent to be explored, since the social distancing has left both the parents and adolescents in more solid premises where the adversities experienced by the adolescents can be clearly witnessed by the other.

Policies and Provisions to Facilitate Learning amid COVID- 19

The sudden outbreak of COVID- 19 resulted in the halt of teaching and learning that had been taking place via formal educational institutions with physical presence (schools, colleges, learning centers) throughout the world. This halt, as stated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020), prohibited about 291 million students from across the globe to get access to regular procedure of teaching and learning. As soon as the disruption was realized, alternative approaches to teaching and learning were sought for, arranged, and executed by different countries to which Nepal was no exception. As Mulenga and Marban (2020) put forth, shifting to digital pedagogical approach was chosen as the contingent approach to bridge learning to learning. Using digital sources like radio, television, and internet devices, as mentioned by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2020) was considered as a curative module for bridging pedagogical practices. This consideration is pretty apparent in the disclosure of Education Cluster Contingency Plan made by the Government of Nepal (GoN) which recommended easing learning of students from different nooks and corners via online portal, offline learning materials, SMS-based learning packages, automated voice messages, radio and TV programs, and printed materials (Nepal Education Cluster [NEC], 2020).

Simultaneous to Education Cluster Contingency Plan, *Emergency Action Plan for School Education, 2020* was brought by the Government of Nepal (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2020a). This plan comprehensively enlisted the activities related to management of school education during crisis, processes to be carried out for management, timeframe to carry them out and indication of the individuals responsible to carry them out. The plan even proposed categorizing learners as per their access to learning resources, and catering learning accessibility accordingly. Similarly, *Student Learning Facilitation Guideline [SLFG], 2020* was also brought into disclosure which clearly mentioned the roles to be played by Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD), Curriculum Development Center (CDC), municipalities, rural municipalities, schools and parents to ease learning of school level students (MoEST, 2020b). The guideline even emphasized special learning facilitation for differently abled children.

Apart from the initiatives mentioned above, Framework for School Operation [FSO], 2020 was brought into action by the GoN, which was basically concerned with preparation strategies and health protocols to be adopted by schools before, and while resuming teaching learning in face-to-face mode (MoEST, 2020c). In addition, the first ever virtual learning portal was developed by Center for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD), which, as stated by Shrestha and Gnawali (2021), was expected to have benefitted a majority of learners.

Aligning to the initiatives made by the state, schools and colleges seem to have adopted virtual mode of teaching learning so as to counter the challenges instigated by COVID-19 pandemic. Appearing in the study made by Subedi and Subedi (2020), different stakeholders of schools, including teachers, students and school leaders, were reported to have adopted self-practice of Information Communication Technology (ICT) to cope with COVID-19 induced challenges in teaching learning. Similarly, moving from the traditional (in campus) to online mode of teaching learning, in the words of KC (2020), was chosen by many universities including those in Nepal. In these policies and practices, however, the discourses on facilitating learners belonging to technical and vocational education and training have appeared to be pencil sketched.

Method of the Study

The study aimed at exploring how the adolescents pursuing Diploma program from the Kathmandu Valley have experienced COVID- 19 induced adversities, and how their parental involvement worked as a mechanism for them to cope with those adversities. Hence, standing within premises of interpretivism, narrative inquiry has been used as a way to understand and study the adolescents' experiences (Clandinin, 2013). In fact, human beings have always been the tellers of tales (Webster & Mertova, 2007) and, I believe, their knowledge about COVID- 19 induced adversities are shaped by the physical, social and cultural environment around them (Haydon et al., 2017), and how they see and interpret the environment (Amzat et al., 2015). Hence, I adopted narrative inquiry as my epistemological journey to explore the adolescents' stories (Creswell, 2008) and, at the same time, to generate understanding and insights (Saldana, 2013) about how they experienced adversities and how parental involvement helped them cope with them.

I conducted my study in the Kathmandu Valley where three adolescents age group of 10-19 year, who have been pursuing Diploma program, were selected purposively. I purposively selected the adolescents who have been pursuing Diploma in Hotel Management, Diploma in Fashion Designing, and Diploma in Computer Engineering. The main purpose of choosing the Kathmandu Valley as research site was accessibility

whereas I selected the adolescents, who, I believed were known to the discourse of adversities and resilience, and were willing to introduce them based on their knowledge and experience (Bernard, 2002; Lewis & Sheppard, 2006 as cited in Tongco, 2007).

The pathway to gathering information I selected was the in-depth interview while open ended questions were utilized to take stock of the experiences of research participants (Kvale, 1996). Questions were open and they were even different (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) as per requirement. While entering into the field for collecting data, I followed three metaphoric dimensions of narrative inquiry- place, temporality and sociality- to gain rich information (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006) and throughout the process, I kept motivating my research participants to narrate their experiences regarding COVID- 19 induced adversities and the role their parental involvement played as coping mechanism (Clandinin, 2013), aligning to the central area of my study.

Once the narratives were collected, I transcribed them and derived three themes based on the questions probing upon which I conducted my research. Through this, I was able to reorganize the stories of adolescents gathered through the information processes into a 'framework that makes sense', and give meaning to what I derived by telling in a chronological and coherent manner (Creswell, 2014) and which was further elaborated in details with support of relevant literature.

Unfolding the Narratives and Meaning Making

In this section, I unveil the experiences of my research participants regarding the adversities they faced amid COVID- 19 pandemic, and the role of their parental involvement in coping with those adversities. Findings are presented thematically, followed by discussion while insights are drawn with the support of relevant literature.

COVID- 19 Outbreak: A Turmoil

Ravi's narration of how distressfully the COVID- 19 pandemic hit him compelled me to consider it as turmoil. As a student pursuing Diploma in Computer Engineering, he had been setting the dream of doing Bachelor in Engineering right after the completion of the program he had been engaged with. Nonetheless, he was thrown in the world of serious confusion and dilemma after the schools were closed and the exams postponed. Reflecting upon how anxious he would be after the postponement of the examination, he shared:

The school closure was a serious turmoil for me. I had nightmares. I would wake up with severe anxiety, thinking 'What Next?' I was feeling like being thrown in a complete isolation. After a couple of weeks of the COVID- 19 lockdown, virtual classes were arranged to a huge relief! But, newer since the approach was, I was not being able to figure out what it is! On top of these, frequent power cut and internet glitches kept adding woes. Moreover, since

the computer engineering itself requires a lot of practical based projects, where we ought to work in close monitoring and guidance of our facilitator, I could hardly perceive the instructions given via Zoom. I still remember how I used to appeal in front of the computer, trying to make my facilitator understand what the confusion was, and frowning out of distress having found no way out! (Ravi, 2021 August 17)

To me, Ravi's articulation reflected the social adversity which is experienced by a huge number of adolescents across the country. Negative impacts caused by the closure of educational institutions in the wake of COVID- 19 pandemic, and discrepancies experienced by the students of different groups in the process of learning digitally amid the closure, is, in fact, a cumbersome adversity for the students of Nepal, including the adolescents (Dawadi et al., 2020). Moreover, as Ravi mentioned, the fear of 'What Next?' was found to have been acting upon Shrijana as well, who had been looking forward to starting a part time job after the completion of her first semester in hotel management. In the same context, Shrijana, with a big sigh mentioned,

"*The closure during lockdown really led me to a complete frustration. I had been thinking of doing a part time job which could help me gain new experience in learning. But, the postponement of the activities led everything to freeze! Tell me, would I be able to do the works on culinary art via virtual mode?*" (Shrijana, 2021 August 14).

Considering the experiences Ravi and Shrijana had, I could make a sense that the adolescents, being hit by COVID- 19 pandemic, have gone through stress in the form of dilemma about their career. The adversity, at the same time, was even reported to have been experienced by the adolescents from Hong Kong, where they were found to have been stressed and anxious about cancelation of anticipated academic programs and the job market they were to enter (Lee, 2020). The similar discourse is even highlighted by Mahato et al. (2020) in a study of effects of COVID- 19 lockdown in Nepal where adolescents are thought to find themselves stressed because of uncertainty of future with the postponement of higher secondary level examinations. Keeping together the experiences, I could develop an insight that closure of educational institution was an adversity for the adolescents while the constraint in bridging home to school via virtual mode was adding woes to their stress. Furthermore, as the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2021), illustrating the context of Sri Lanka notes, the adversity was intensified since arrangement of hands-on practical classes using tools and machines was a real challenge during the closure of educational institutions.

Along with the stress resulted due to closure of educational institutions and postponement of examinations, which Ravi and Shrijana narrated, the story of Kaushal spoke of economic hardship as a trigger to his anxiety. Marking the pandemic as the most unforgettable moment of his life, he stated,

Only I know how much vulnerable I had been feeling when the lockdown started. My parents had been anxious, for they had lost their only way of earning. I could hear mother and father talking how they could manage for the next day because my mother's beauty salon- the only source of earning for us- was also shut down. I was helpless since I could do nothing. Nor I could remain indifferent to their sufferings. Day by day, I started feeling more stressed and anxious. My helplessness, at one point, even provoked me to run away from home! (Kaushal, 2021 August 12)

Kaushal's experience was different from that of Ravi and Shrijana. Nonetheless, it was distressing enough. The way he narrated him feeling stressed, in fact, made me reflect upon the fear my child of eleven expressed, hearing his mother talking about continuous closure of her workplace and the dilemma regarding how the household expenses could be managed. The similar threat, if looked across the globe, reflects in the context of Bangladesh too, where a huge population was estimated to have been going through complex fear and mental stress due to COVID- 19 induced unemployment, deprivation, hunger and the social conflicts that could rise with the deprivation (Shammi et al., 2020). Economic turmoil caused adversity in the Nepalese context in the similar way, as discussed by Poudel and Subedi (2020), who have stressed on psychomotor excitement, fear, anxiety, panic attacks and suicidal deaths to appear with prolonged isolation (Brooks et al. 2020 as cited in Poudel & Subedi, 2020). Bringing the illustrations made by the studies with the narration of Kaushal, I could develop an insight that even the adolescents have been affected due to the economic hardships COVID- 19 has brought, while the hardship can bring greater degree of psychological risk, anxiety and trauma.

Apart from the adversities mentioned above, Ravi and Shrijana even narrated the risk they had been prone to because of their excessive engagement with internet and social networking sites. And, their narration, when I reflected upon my experience, was relatable to the vulnerability which I had been witnessing in my son. The vulnerability that I had found my son to be susceptible to, however, was a little different from that of Ravi and Shrijana. While my son's anxiety was getting exhibited in the form of restlessness, irritation and mood swings (Ramdhonee, n.d.) with each internet glitches, Ravi's experience of the adversities was more related to the risk regarding his exposure to violent, misogynistic and xenophobic contents which he considered to be capable of inciting disastrous effects (UNICEF, 2020). Shrijana's recollection of remaining insomniac for weeks, being haunted by the offensive messages from unknown individuals in the similar way reflected the risk of bullying and harassment (Sharma & Desousa, 2016). Bringing together the above-mentioned illustrations, I could legitimize my understanding that amid perception of the adolescents being facilitated with the use of ICT and online platforms, the vulnerabilities they have been facing are also not undeniable.

Denial to Indigenous Skills: An Intensifier to the Turmoil

In the narrations of Ravi, Shrijana and Kaushal, it was obvious that the pandemic outbreak had acted to result in, and intensify the turmoil. However, as the adolescents further stated, it was not only the pandemic that had resulted in adversities which they had gone through. In their stories, there were the reminiscences of the adolescents, while the reminiscences were more or less related to their parents' extreme dependency to formal education, and their denial to learning via indigenous skills they could have acquired from home. The reminiscence was very clear in Shrijana's account where she stated,

I belong to a darji (tailor)'s family. And, yes, I loved stitching clothes. I still remember that my mother never used measuring tape to make chaubandi cholo that would perfectly fit our bistas. And I learnt making frocks for small friends of mine, observing her. But, she always told me not to mess up with the needles and thread. She strictly wanted me to do something via school education, and be empowered. See, if I was given the opportunity to continue with tailoring apart from school education, maybe, I wouldn't have to grow anxious, thinking of how I would live if this lockdown continued! Maybe, I could have been less anxious as I could make clothes from my home too, as the sister next to my house has been doing these days! (Shrijana, 2021 August 14)

In Shrijana's expression, I could get reflection of the children of traditional Slovenian society, who, in the study made by Niskac (2013), were found to be learning through their observation and participation in the daily life, works and interactions of their community. The way she stated of 'loving stitching, belonging to tailor's family' even enabled me to reflect upon our embedment in the cultural diversity (Giri, 2020), where the choice we make in our works, and the knowledge and skills we exhibit in doing them, truly reflect our traditional social system (Parajuli, 2012). However, the denial expressed by her mother regarding her engagement with stitching clothes instigated me to understand that indigenous skills is still hesitated to be transferred by the older generations to the newer ones. This hesitation is explicit in a study made by Bhattachan and Chemjong (2006) among the *Surel*[3] people of Nepal, where the indigenous skills, such as honey hunting, bee keeping, fishing and bamboo basket making, are reported to have been ducking.

Similar to Shrijana, denial to continuity of skills acquired from indigeneity was recounted by Ravi as well. His recounting, however, was different from that of Shrijana since his story of being prohibited to engage in kitchen, as he stated, was related to conviction on gender rather than on caste or class. He noted,

I was very fond of cooking since my childhood. Besides, I loved knitting too. But, my mother and father never allowed me to do so. They wanted me to be an engineer

3 One of the indigenous groups living in Dolakha, the mountainous region of Nepal

which is actually preferred for boys by most of the parents from my hometown (Birgunj). During the lockdown too, I was not allowed to enter the kitchen in the earlier days since they wanted me to excel at computer engineering. But gradually, things changed and their mindset too changed! (Ravi, 2021 August 17)

Ravi's story, in fact, was very relatable to my experience as well! As Ravi's parents wanted him not to indulge in feminine affairs, we, as kids, were also repeatedly reminded by our grandparents to avoid football or video games, and focus on knitting and embroidering. As Ravi added that he had been reminded by his father to "study something good so that he would be able to feed his family after marriage", my grandmother would consider knitting and cooking as my preparation to becoming a good wife, and a daughter-in-law. The remarks Ravi and I received, strengthened my presumption that the skills that we acquire from our family and community are strictly tagged as the stigmatic stepping stone to good marriage (Calder et al., 2019), rather than considering them as pathway to securing better life! Similar to our community, studies have made it clear that gendering the skills is very common in different communities of Nepal, including the Kirat community where girls are expected to master at *thak thakma*[4] while boys are supposed to excel in artistries like making basket, winnowing tray and plough (Siddiqui, 2016). This gendered conviction about skills, as Ravi stated, might appear as an instigator to anxiety and frustrations among adolescents during the crises like pandemic since they might not be able to work on what they are expected to work on as adolescent boys or adolescent girl.

Kaushal's sharing about how easy the days during lockdown would be had his parents understood education not only as memorizing books and lessons was equally heart touching. Upon my query of what could have made his experiences relatively easier, he elucidated,

My father never believed that learning could take place without books, and we could excel even with skill-based education. I am a boy, and I am doing fashion designing. So, maybe, you can imagine how difficult it must have been for me to convince my parents. But, their concern has never been about making dresses as a boy. Rather, I have found them always concerned about whether I would live a dignified life without BBS or BBA or MBBS! (Kaushal, 2021 August 12)

All the three adolescents I interviewed had different stories about why and how they were not expected to adhere to the skills they could have excelled at, learning from their own indigeneity. However, the commonality they carried was that, despite the adolescents' orientation to the role of education in making life of an individual beautiful through the *manifestation of perfection already present in him/ her* (Swami Vivakananda as cited in Bhardwaj, 2016), they narrated that it took really long time for them to make their parents understand. Their parents' and

4 Skill of weaving clothes

their perceptions were different as per their narration, but they did not deny the role their parents had played in helping them cope with the adversities they had faced. Not only did they recollect their parents' support to them during the pandemic but also hinted their realization about the importance of skill-based learning which was implicit in the involvement they made.

Parental Involvement: A Mechanism to Bounce Back from the Adversities

Last night, when I had been reflecting upon the adversities narrated by Ravi, Shrijana and Kausal, I recollected the days during my adolescence where I also used to feel vulnerable at times. The vulnerability, nonetheless, would not last long since I used to get persistent support from my parents. While reflecting upon my experience as an adolescent, I even put together how I have been having frequent interaction with my son during this pandemic, which, he narrates to be really constructive. The reflection that I made in multiple levels enabled me to sense that parental involvement can make significant positive effect on children's adjustment (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). The sense that I made, however, was further reinforced by the story of encouragement and support which Shrijana proudly stated to have received during the pandemic.

If I have to acknowledge something for helping me cope with the adversity I had been going through, I choose to do so to my parents who were always there to support me. While I had been getting really frustrated, thinking of my career, they encouraged me with an assurance that I would ultimately be winning over the turmoil since they were with me. They sang for me; the father even played badminton in the morning. Not only this, I even learnt to make traditional Nepali cuisines about which I had not heard before, and gave different twist to this. Later, we arranged to take the dishes to our relatives which appeared as a good market! Now, all say, I will definitely shine as a hotel management student! I overcame depression in very artful way for which I am indebted to my parents! (Shrijana, 2021 August 14)

Shrijana's glowing eyes were evident that she had been able to bounce back from the challenges. And, the glee with which she considered her parents' involvement as magic allowed me to reinforce my conviction that parental involvement plays a great role in developing resilience among adolescents (Ungar, 2004). Further, Ungar (2004) mentions that adolescents who are at high risk want the adults in their lives, and the search for adults in the form of parental involvement was evident in Kaushal's experience too. He stated:

I knew my parents had been going through crisis and their anxiety was making me anxious too! However, I always expected them to be with me, and their interaction with me helped me a lot to manage the stress I had been going through! They helped me best utilize the days by talking of our

darji bhauju's story who used to stitch best clothes even without using a measuring tape. The father showed me his wedding dress, and I made similar one later. These things continued, and I finally came over the stress! (Kaushal, 2020 August 12).

Kaushal's experience, if related with Rutter (1979) resilience research, provides an insight that positive relationship between parents and their children (adolescents) enables children's ability to bounce back to normalcy. The role of parental involvement in helping the adolescents cope with the challenges can even be sensed in Ungar et al. (2007), which stress on developing children's resilience through his/ her relationship with close members within family. Apart from the roles Kaushal and Ravi narrated their parents to have played for managing their anxiety and stress, Ravi's recounting of how his parents helped him manage the threat of being affected by his excessive indulgence in internet also reinforced my notion that interaction with the parents can even help the adolescents counter the risk they anticipate due to lack of social interaction. Furthermore, the narrations even helped me get an insight that the role of parental involvement in coping the hostility and grow resilient has become even more important amid the COVID- 19 pandemic.

You can't stop the waves but
You can learn to surf
It's easier to learn to surf if you
Have a surfboard, a coach and a lifeguard

- John Kabatt - Zinn

Discussion

I allude to John Kabatt- Zinn, reflecting upon the stories of Kaushal, Shrijana and Ravi with whom I interacted during my research journey. From the stories of the three adolescents, I could understand that waves in our lives are unavoidable. They come to us as turmoil, but it is also true that we can bounce them back by using different mechanisms. Metaphorically connecting Kabatt- Zinn to Ravi, Shrijana and Kaushal, outbreak of COVID- 19 acted in their lives as waves, surf as resilience and the support of their parents in the form of lifeguard for them. Through their parents' involvement which I understood as coping mechanism for them, they were able to grow as resilient individuals.

Relating to the participants of my study, resilience connotes the strengths the adolescents demonstrated in coping with stress, anxiety and fear that were induced by COVID- 19 pandemic. It enabled them to positively adapt to the changes brought around them during COVID- 19 outbreak, while their positive adaptation was facilitated by their parents' involvement in their affairs. The discourse of rising from adversities is indicated by Rak and Patterson (1996) in their resilience theory where they have associated resilience to reduction in emphasis on pathology and increase

in emphasis on strengths. As this theory focuses on the capacity of individuals to face up to an adverse event, withstand mountain of hardship, and not only overcome it but also be stronger to survive and be safe, Ravi, Shrijana and Kaushal had been able to overcome the challenges in their lives which had hardly got visible to the ones living in their surroundings.

The notion on resilience, reflecting in Rutter (1987) prioritizes social and emotional well-being to be located at all levels of the individual's ecological social environment which helps them to grow resilient. To grow resilient, Lerner (2006) has further stressed on the interaction between individual and community. The ideas of social and emotional well- being and meaningful interaction were pertinent to the stories of Ravi, Shrijana and Kaushal. Their stories contained very clear instances of their parents having interaction with them, and their strength to positively adapt to the COVID- 19 induced changes getting reinforced. Through this development reflecting in the stories of the adolescents, I have been able to construct stronger insight that parental involvement can be a meaningful mechanisms to stimulate adolescents' resilience.

Conclusions of the Study

The study concludes that not only the children, women and the elderly people but also the adolescents, who seem to be standing firm and strong, have experienced adversities induced by COVID- 19 pandemic. The adversities they experience, nonetheless, are contextual and subjective. The adversities were capable of making them extremely vulnerable too. Nonetheless, they were capable of coping with the adversities with the involvement of parents through support, encouragement and interaction. This study has been made in limited duration of time while the engagement has been made with only three participants. Nonetheless, a more extensive study in the similar discourse may result in wider range of exploration regarding how the adolescents have been going through different hostilities amidst pandemic and how they can be facilitated to grow resilient through parental support. The study, hence, implies further research to be made in the very discourse. Furthermore, it even suggests the role of socio- economic environmental factors to be taken into account in the discourse of adolescents' well- being.

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Addressing Informal Skill Learners' Challenges in Skill Test in Nepal

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Abstract

In Nepal, more than eighty percent learners gain skills through work and experiences. The informal sector is dominant in the nation. If the skills acquired by the work and experiences are accredited through the testing authority, underemployment and underpayment can be addressed and decent employment and gainful income assured. The recognition of the informally learned skill will transform the path for the formal stream. Despite having the benefits of recognition of the prior learning and establishment of testing authority for forty-five years, the number of the informal skills learners appearing for the accreditation is not encouraging. In this context, this paper explains the challenges of the informal skill learners that encounter during the accreditation of their skills through the National Skill Testing Board. I came up with the qualitative research with seven participants, including informal skill learners and testing authority officials. As the informal skill learners explore the lack of information, awareness and orientation of the skill test system, the information provided must be clear, short, user friendly, precise and free from complexity. Similarly, the testing authority and informal skill learners shared that the skill-testing certificates are less valued by the employers during the recruitment.

Keywords: *Informal Skill Learners, National Skill Testing Board, recognition of prior learning, accreditation.*

Background

Nepal is a developing country where the informal economy is dominant. According to recent statistics, more than two-thirds of employment (69.7 percent) is in the informal sector, excluding the agricultural sector. If the agricultural sector is added, the figure for employment in the informal sector becomes 96.2 percent (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2017). Informal workers, who generally have very little formal education, acquire skills informally while working. Nepal has the practice of transforming skills from the senior member of the family to the new member in many

traditional occupations which share a large part of the total employment. Therefore, informal learning is the result of the day to day family-related work, work of interest, social and leisure activities. It happens, and is influenced by chance and need as well. Generally, the informal skills learners are those who have never visited the school or dropped their school education and started career without formal or non-formal skills training (Baral, 2021).

Most of the traditional occupations fulfill the skill of human resource with the skills transfer system from senior craftsperson to beginner skills learner. This is the established practice of skills learning in Nepal (Baral, 2020). Their skills are, however, not always formalized and brought to the formal stream through the certification and recognition of the skill. The recognition and certification of the skills acquired through informal means will boost the employment opportunity, increase rewarding employment, social recognition, and bridge the gap between supply and demand of the skilled human resource. Furthermore, the recognition and the certification will pave the path for the career of learner and credit banking of the skills.

Nepal has an authority to award the competencies certificate through the skill test to recognize the person's competencies. This recognition will integrate the gainful income and promote employability around the globe, which will contribute not only to their quality living but also to the nation's economy. Once the skills are acquired in the informal sector and learned through the experiences, and the Recognition of the Prior Learning (RPL) are certified, they are recognized as the skilled and competent to move upward through level 1 to level 8 in envisioned by NVQS. Similarly, the certification helps in acquiring the certificate of recognition for the national and international market, which results in lucrative income and the base for formal qualification stream. The competencies acquired through the experiences and work builds the frame of perspective to visualize the world in the different way. This perspective will transform the informal learners to sustainable employment, knowledge and skill to move in the formal stream (Mezirow, 1997).

As I am in the TVET sector for more than two and half decade, I am aware of the value of the skills acquired by informal learning and the tremendous contribution of informal learners in the employment sector. The employee is compelled to remain in the labour market as unemployed or underemployed and work with low salary due to the lack of the certification of the skills although National Skill Testing Board test their skills and provide certification which is both nationally and internationally recognized. I am groomed in this sector and knew that if the informal learners could be brought into the mainstream of the certification with recognition of their skills, the income of the informal learners and the vertical career path through informal learning could reach the highest degree of the skill. It would further

integrate with the formal degree. Having said, the pertinent queries that arise in my mind: what are the challenges informal learners encountering to integrate into the skill test and recognize their acquired skills through informal learning to the skill test system?

Some of the studies conducted could be exemplary to recognize the skills acquired by informal learners. In this regard, the study of Bangladesh concluded that TVET reform was unavoidable and can be reformed only through recognising informal skills learning in the informal sector (ILO, 2009). As per the study result, Bangladesh Government applied the recognition of informal learning through the certification where more than 25 thousand people have already been incorporated through the scheme (a2i, n.d.). Similarly, a study conducted by Smith and Clayton (2009) identifies the factors that hinder to uptake the recognition of the prior learning and the informal learning in Australia are: lack of awareness, orientation, difficult process to follow and the nature of the language used in the process. It also shows that learners are not confident with their own experiential learning and chose to undertake the training, rather opted for the skill test for their skill certification. Similarly, the study of Allias (2010) sought to discover- to what extent, employers are using RPL and the qualifications frameworks in their hiring decisions; to what extent, are national qualification authorities monitoring whether the qualifications they develop are being awarded and what difference these qualifications make to workers in the job market. Moreover, this research focuses on the impact of the RPL, but silent on why the informal learners are not going for the certification.

Nepal has been adopting this concept for four decades with the establishment of the National Skill Testing Board (NSTB) to conduct skill tests for both non-formal and informal learners (ADB, 2015; NSTB, 2018). The Skill Testing Authority (STA) was established in 1983, which got the responsibility of conducting skill tests and certification for skilled and semi-skilled workers. The scope of the NSTB is the identification of occupations, development of National Occupational Skills Standards (NOSS), conduct of skill tests, and distribution of certificates to the successful candidates (NSTB, 2021). To date (Jan, 2019), as many as 3,68,039 persons have passed the test and been certified by the board (NSTB, 2019). This number of skill tested people is low in comparison with the huge volume of youths working in the informal sector (World Bank, 2019). However, the concern is what the issue and challenges are before the informal learners to get integrated into the skill test system.

Likewise in NSTB's report, the total applicants for level 1, level 2 and level 3 of the year 2017 were 29037, 5571 and 540 respectively, while for the year 2018, the applicants were 51424, 9270 and 1330 respectively. Similarly, for the year 2019, the numbers were 44709, 12805 and 1275

for the level 1, 2, and 3 respectively (NSTB, 2021). This comparison shows a huge gap of applicants appeared in the level 1, 2 and level 3. The pertinent questions are why people are not encouraged to certify their skills despite the possibilities of certification for informal learning. This study encourages exploration of challenges the learners encounter to upgrade their skill although the recognition of the skill enhances the employability and ensures gainful income. Ninety percent of the employees of the TVET sector in Nepal are employed through informal learning (ADB, 2015). If these employees are brought to the formal recognition, the path for their progress through permeability will increase the income, thereby contributing to the nation's economy.

Despite having so many benefits of the formal recognition of informal learning, the data shows that people are the least encouraged to appear for the skill test. Therefore, the reasons behind not opting for the formal recognition of the skill and upgrading of the skill might be lack of awareness that recognition is available in the nation and this has a path for the highest degree from informal learning. The other could be- employer's value in the formal recognition of the certificate is low. The third might be the formal certification has not made any changes in the progression of their career.

In this context, the major concern of this study is to explore the challenges of the informal learners to recognize their skills learnt through informal learning despite having the quality that it leads to the formal qualification. As such, this study explores the challenges of accreditation so as to contribute knowledge to the policymakers and development practitioners who are in the qualification framework and the testing board.

Hardship of Informal Skill Learners

The Education Flash Report 2018/2019 showed the overall retention rate up to grade 10 was 58% while only 22% were retained up to grade 12 (Centre for Education and Human Resource Development, 2018). This shows that a large number of youth in Nepal is pushed out of the education system without properly preparing them for the world of work (Poudel, 2020). This large percentage of the youths enters employment without skills being part of the informal sector of economy. In Nepal, the informal sector, including various traditional occupations, has been in practice for generations which shares a large part of total employment. These Nepali youths, though competent with the skills, acquire informal learning and are least interested in the skill test of their skill via skill-testing authority. The total number of skill test as compared to the ratio of the learners in the informal sector is very low. On top of that, informal learners might have a desire to upgrade their skills and promote their career along with their skills enhancement and also integrate to the formal attainment of the education. Similarly, Government of Nepal (GoN), in collaboration with Swiss Development

Cooperation (SDC), has initiated the National Vocational Qualification System (NVQS) project to bring the informal learners in the formal education attainment. In fact, National Vocational Qualification Framework (NVQF) has been designed, and approved by the cabinet (Swiss contact, 2020) too. With this, Recognition Prior Learning (RPL) is expected to enhance the access of informal skills learners in recognising and certifying their skills. However, to pursue the goal of the NVQF, it is essential to understand the challenges that hindered the skill test of informal skills learners and explore the way to attract them to the RPL.

The pertinent question is why people are not coming for the skill test and why informal learners are least participated in the skill test despite having NSTB established for four decades and the provision of NVQF to recognize the prior learning of the skill.

The skills acquisition of the informal learners needs to be certified for the recognition of the national and international market. The recognition and certification from the testing authority paves the way for decent employment and gainful income, which will increase earning, contribute to the quality life and finally boost the national economy. The certification of the skill test brings the informal learners to the National Qualification Framework (NQF) for the attainment of formal education. If this problem is not addressed, the Nepali youths entering labor market are compelled to remain underemployed and involve in low-paying jobs. It is indeed resulted with the lack of recognition to and certification of the skills.

In such a context, few pertinent questions that could be raised are: Why is Nepal's testing authority not successful in bringing informal learners to the skill test certification? Why are the informal learners not interested to certify their skills? Have our policies recognized such need? If yes, why did such a policy not bring the result? The research carried out by Smith and Clayton (2009) in Australia highlighted the language and the process used for the RPL is not user-friendly and learners are unaware of the RPL and the benefits of the RPL. I have not found any research carried out of this nature to explore the possibility of validating informal learning in Nepal so far. Rigorous research of this type is essential in this field.

With this in the background, this study explores the challenges of certification so as to contribute knowledge to the policymakers and development practitioners who are in the qualification framework and the testing board.

Methodology

As per the purpose of the study, I have applied the qualitative research design to explore the challenges encountered while conducting skill testing of the informal skill learners. I assume that the main source of the knowledge is the skilled human resources, which have appeared in the skill test level 1, 2, 3 and participants who have not appeared in the skill test but competent workers. Similarly,

the TVET officials who are working in the NSTB are other key sources of information for this study. Therefore, I collected the information from these two categories of the people, 1) informal skilled learners appeared in skill test of level 1, 2, 3 and people who have not appeared, and 2) TVET officials working in the NSTB.

Under the category of informal skill learners, individual cases of participants whom I interviewed were developed. I interviewed 6 participants of different occupations and different level of skill tests they appeared. To maintain the anonymity of the research participants, I used pseudonyms of the participants and organization.

One of them is Shyam Bahdur Pariyar of 33 years and residing in Rajena, Banke. He is a tailor and dressmaker busy running his enterprises. When I talked to him he was very busy as the background sound of his clients could be heard and he had completed the skill test level-2.

Toran Nagarkoti of 50 years is another from Rasuwa who was hesitant to talk to me as he was least interested to accept the interview. Once assuring the ethical consideration and that the conversation would be kept confidential and used for only research purpose, he began conversation. His occupation is electrician. He even hesitated to say he had passed level 2 of building electrician.

Bharat, who, is 35-year-old from Dailekh is the conflict victim. He is the community livestock assistant who had passed the skill test level 1. He learned the skill working as an assistant to the senior VET doctors in the village. He is a freelancer and wanted to call him a self-employer and serving his community as the community livestock assistant. Being happy, he told me that he was known as the "*Pasu Doctorsaab*" which means veterinary doctor.

Aaita, who is 35-year-old, was working in a government office but denied talking in the beginning as he was busy providing the service to the public. He passed the skill test level 3 in structural fabricator. He earned the skill through non-formal training and was deputed as a foreman in Sindhulpalchowk as a government employee.

Krishna from Gorkha is a worker in one of the reputed construction industries of Kathmandu as mason. He was working in his construction site and instructing the juniors to build the wall as per the drawing and to make sure that it is in ninety degrees. Krishna passed the level 1 skill test as a mason.

Ram, working in the grill workshop, is 24-year-old. He is performing the arc welding to fabricate the channel gate. When I requested him to speak, he told me to wait as he had to finish the gate as per the deadline. After an hour, he spoke with me and told that he learned all the skills by working in different workshops for more than five years. But, he had not appeared in any skill test.

Among the TVET officials, Shiva was selected from the purposive sampling as participant. He has been in this field for

more than 20 years and has long experience in the assessment, evaluation and the result publication of the NSTB.

While selecting the research participants, I prepared the open-ended guideline for the interview (Burgi & Kemper, 2018). The interview was conducted as a conversation type interview and each participant's interview was for about an hour. The participants were contacted through telephone call for the prior appointment of the interview and interviewed through telephone. The observation was made in their workplace. The interview with the informal skill learners and NSTB official were recorded and the recorded interviews were transcribed and coded. The coding helped to draw two themes, which are elaborated in the following section.

Explorations

Based on the interviews with the participants and my reflective experience, two emergent themes have been identified: 1) lack of information and awareness of the skill test system, and 2) certificates are less valued. These are discussed along the following subsections.

Lack of Information and Awareness

This section discusses the information dissemination and awareness about the NSTB. The concept of skill test was traced in 1973 AD when King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev visited the Sunkoshi hydro project. During his visit, the skilled worker involved in the hydropower requested the King for the certification of their works and skills, arguing that they were competent and skillful to accomplish the technical work. It clearly indicated that the workers were in need of recognition of their skills for further career.

This is the first incident government realized the need for skill test system. But, the autonomous body named Skill Testing Authority (STA) was formally established in 1983 to provide certificates with recognition to the job seekers, skilled and semi-skilled individuals upon the attainment of specific skills. Later in 1989, it was placed under the umbrella of CTEVT as Skill Testing Division. Since then, it has been functioning as the secretariat of the National Skill Testing Board (NSTB) (NSTB, 2021). Though the history of skill-testing authority is of more than 45 years, Ram who is working in the metal industry as a metal craft artisan, dropped the school due to poverty and growing responsibility on him to support his family financially. He started his career as a helper in the Patan industrial area in the metal industry for two years. Once he acquired the skills working as a helper, he moved to the bigger metal industry as a metal craft artisan and has been in that industry for more than eight years. As per the owner of the company, Ram is the most competent worker in his industry. The company owner regretted whether Ram had certified his competency through a formal organization. He even showed unawareness if there were any provisions of such recognition in our country. More than 15 technicians were working in that company along with him,

he said, adding that no one in this industry knew about the provision of recognizing the informally learned skill. Being in the capital city, Ram is completely unknown about the skill test and recognition of the skill which they acquired while working. He highlighted that he never felt the importance of recognition while working. Laughing, he said his salary would not be increased even after he gets the certificates. Reasoning it, he did not feel its need.

The stories of Krishna, Toran and Bharat are similar to that of Ram. Krishna working in a reputed construction industry left school at Grade 6 due to poverty, which left him huge responsibility of looking after his younger sister. He came to the city from the remote village for searching the work and got an opportunity to work with a "*thekedar*", local contractor. As he did not have any skills, he worked as a labor helping the mason. He learnt to work as a mason, working with the local contractor and shifted to another reputed construction industry. He decided to shift to another work station after a local contractor did not increase his salary despite his enhanced skill as a mason. In the current construction company, he has been offered a higher salary than in the previous one. While quoting to the skill test level 1, where he is certified with the mason level 1 certification, he said that his company took the contract of construction of a building. In course of work, the office deputed him as a mason in one of the offices of CTEVT. The official saw his work and asked him where he got the training. He shared that he learnt all skills through the work. The official further told him that there was the provision of the certification and recognition of the skills he had learnt during the work. But Krishna responded to him that he was least interested in the test because he did not think it would be of any use. The CTEVT official informed him about many benefits and even brought him the application form. "In this way, I applied and appeared the exam and passed it. It has been eight years since I got the level 1 certificate but I haven't used this certificate once and I have not benefited from this certificate in this career," he said, sharing the plight, "*Sir, certificate le talab nabadhne rahe chha*" means this certificate is not contributing to increase of his salary in the organization. While asking him why he did not certify for level 2 and level 3, the answer to this was simple- he did not know where these facilities were and he did not see any benefit of that certificate either.

Similarly, Bharat's story also did not differ much from Krishna's. Bharat is working in the remote area of Dailekh district as a community livestock assistant. He got an opportunity to participate in the non-formal short course in the quota of conflict victim. As this was sponsored by donor agencies for conflict victim, they managed the test in the training centre itself after the completion of training, where he got the skill test level 1 certificate. When asked him why he did not opt for the level 2 test, he replied he did not know when the test was going to start and where it would take place. If the test was conducted he could not go to the centre of the district to appear in the test because it

would be costly as he has to manage the food and accommodation while travelling to the central district.

Similar story is shared by Toran. He is the level 2 certified electrician working in Trisuli. He is in this profession for more than 30 years. He has many building contracts with him and employed 12 junior electricians under him. He did not know about the skill test. One of the employees informed him about the provision of the skill test and appeared in the skill test and passed level 2 exam. As the researcher asked him about the provision of an upward ladder, he was unknown that there was level 3, where the test would take place and when. When asked about the skill test, he was almost unknown about it.

The above participants' views reflect despite 45 years of the establishment of NSTB, there is sheer lack of information and orientation to the target group. The difficulties of the process show that NSTB is not able to disseminate and orient the informal skill learners. The study of Smith and Clayton (2009) identifies the hindrances to uptake the recognition of the prior learning and the informal learning in Australia- lack of awareness, orientation, and the difficulties in the process to follow and the nature of the language used in the process in line with the current study. Similarly, many studies emphasize the individual's motivation is important to acquire the certification and the information. Acquiring the certification must be easily accessed and transparent along with individual responsibility that is incorporated into the recognition process to encourage the informal learners in the recognition frame (Duvekot et al., 2003; Gomes et al., 2007; Singh, 2009).

However, while interviewing the NSTB official, he denied the lack of dissemination of the information to the stakeholder. NSTB is the government body and whoever requires can come for the test, he added. After providing with him the evidence that a large number of informal skill learners did not know about the testing authority of the country- when, where and how the skill test was conducted, he then realized with hesitation that authority could expand the orientation, information dissemination through the province and local governments.

The above version shows the informal skill learners and the NSTB official have a common understanding of the lack of adequate dissemination of the information and lack of orientation about the testing authority. This is not only the case in Nepal but also other countries of South Asia. They have suffered the issue of the dissemination of the information and orientation to the stakeholders (ADB, 2019). In this regard, a study conducted by Smith (2004) highlighted the recognition of the informal skill learner's need that they be provided information in a clear, concise and jargon-free manner.

Certificate Less Valued

Krishna highlighted his company never valued the importance of the Skill Test certificate and there was no difference in his

earning with the certificate he got from the testing authority. The story of Toran is not different from that of Krishna, because he underscored that he never used that certificate after receiving it from the testing authority. In the case of Bharat, he is in confusion whether his certificate will have value in future as he has not yet used it for any benefits. But, he hopes if he applies it for foreign employment and maybe in the government sector, this will have the meaning. Till now, it had no use.

In this case, the NSTB official agrees that the private employers have not yet valued the testing authority certificate and the employers complain how the testing authority could assure that once they are certified, they could perform their work well. The private sector is not aware of the importance of skill test certificate. On many occasions, the government organizations do not accept the certificate of the NSTB during the vacancy announcement in technical positions though the testing certificate is implemented through the act.

The certificate is less valued and has little recognition in the market. As the demand side is indifferent, the government has to work actively to establish the value of the certificate.

Shyam Bahadur Pariyar of 33 year, residing in Kohalpur, has, however, different experience. He completed bachelor in education, but has been working as a tailor and dressmaker for 18 years. He learned these skills from his father from childhood. He is currently running his boutique and works in the training centre of Kohalpur as an instructor after earning the level 2 certificate. When he was asked how he came to know about the provisions of the skill test, he replied one of the officers of the small and cottage industry of the Surkhet informed him about the skill test. He did accordingly and got the level 2 certificate. He expressed he had a lot of benefits from the certificate. He was able to be the instructor. When he was addressed as 'Sir' by his students in the community, he felt proud and recognized by the society. But, without hesitation, he explained that recognition of the skills which he has acquired through prior learning has no meaning in his boutique. The certificate has no difference in earning at the boutique.

He further shared when a friend from similar occupation is met, the discussion on certified and non-certified surfaces. Non certified friends talk about the difference: "We are also running the boutique and you are also running the boutique. Do you find any difference between you having the certificate and us not having the certificate?" Shyam further highlights while running a business or being self-employed there is no value in the skill test certificate. He added this because people and the market had not understood the value of the certificate. He is, however, optimistic that the government could provide loan from the bank upon the submission of the certificate to start business, which, he believes, will lead to the recognition of skill learned informally.

The story Aaita has is: he joined the

Technical School Leaving Certificate (TSLC) in mechanical engineering 31 years back. He had adequate working experiences in the hydropower companies in the country and abroad as well. He finally joined the government organization. He said the certificate had great value for the promotion of his career, so he appeared the level 3 test and passed it. This will pave the way for his promotion, according to him.

The above discussion shows recognition of the informal skills through the national testing authority has less value in the private industries. The employers of the business and industries less appreciate the certification of the skill test, and never prioritise the certificate while recruiting the technicians. But, it has a great value working in the government organization. The private organizations even discourage the skill test certification with the fear of demand of high salary by the workers. They are happy to pay little salary for not having the certificate of recognition. Most of the government organizations give value to the certification of the skill test. Similarly, studies conducted by few researchers expressed the value of the certificate provided by the NSTB to the informal skill learners are less valued in the informal market by the employers (Baral, 2020; Regmi, 2009).

Conclusion

In Nepal, 80 percent of the workers work in the informal sector and the informal sector occupies a large volume and is dominant (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2015). Nepalis learn their livelihood skills and skills for the vocation through work. Current statistics shows 69.7 percent of workers is in the informal sector (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2017). This trend increases as thousands of Nepalis are returning from foreign employment due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The national economy is largely propped up by the skilled workers working in the informal sector. If these skilled workers were brought in the formal sector, they would secure the decent employment, and make handsome income, which ultimately addresses the underpayment and underemployment problems.

To bring the informal skill learners to the formal sector, the skills learned through the work need to be recognized and they should be awarded the skill test certificate. But, it is mentioned that it is not an easy task because the huge number of people working in the informal sector have little information about the provision of testing informal skill learners. The orientation and awareness of the importance of the skill test among the informal learners are slow off the mark because the stakeholders have limited knowledge and practices of the skill test. The importance of integrating formal education through informal learning is almost nonexistent.

The value of the skill test certificate is less appreciated by the private sector employers and never demanded such certificates while applying for the job there. Similarly, the people, who have received the skill test

certificates, have not used the certificate for any purpose. Despite 45 years since the establishment of NSTB, its access is not ensured to all parts of the nation. Therefore, to integrate the informal learners into the formal education system for the decent employment, gainful income and to eliminate the underemployment, massive awareness about the testing authority is imperative. The orientation on the benefits of the testing centre and dissemination of the information and process of the test need to be rigorously expanded to larger public.

The private sector should be brought under the scrutiny of the testing authority while recruiting human resources so that they would be accountable and begin recognizing the value of the skill test and ensure proper payment to workers.

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Occupational Shift in Semi-urban areas of Nepal: A Socio-cultural Dynamics

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Abstract

Occupational shift, people shifting from the traditional sector to the modern economic sector, is a global phenomenon. People in Nepal are also shifting away from agriculture to other economic sector. But in Nepal, the socio cultural dynamics is considered more vital in this shift. This paper analyzes peoples' perception regarding their experiences of occupational shift from sociocultural perspective. This study adopts a qualitative research design with narrative inquiry approach. For this, the experience of four research participants from Kathmandu valley were purposefully selected. In addition to listening and reflecting to their life stories about engagement to abandon agriculture occupation, their activities, emotions, and lifestyle were also narrated, observed and analyzed. The findings of this research indicate that several socio cultural aspects such as modernization, urbanization, industrialization had greater influence in this process. People in the name of being modern, were gradually shifting from traditional sector (agriculture) to modern economic sectors. The research hence concludes that potentiality of agricultural sector is still high for the country to generate employment and thus it is important to redefine the agricultural policy to attract youth towards it.

Keywords: *occupational shift, agricultural sector, non-farm sector, socio-cultural dynamics, urbanization, modernization,*

Introduction

Nepal has always been defined as an agrarian society since its origin. Agriculture is also the backbone of Nepalese economy along with the prime source of employment and livelihood. In the decade of 1980s, agriculture contributed 70-80% share in national GDP in Nepal employing around 76.1% of its total population (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 1999). With time, the dominance of agriculture contributing in GDP as well as providing employment opportunity has been gradually declined. Today, the primary economic sector of the country contributes only 27% to GDP employing 66% of total population (International Labor Organization (ILO), 2019, Ministry of

Finance [MOF], 2020). The third national living standard survey reports around 20% (from 53% to 35%) decline in wage earners from the agricultural sector during 1995/96 to 2010/11, whereas the same percentage (47% to 65%) of wage earners has increased in non-farm sectors (CBS, 2011). Once abled to positioned as a paddy exporter in the 1970s, Nepal, at present, imports every basic food items such as rice, wheat and many crops to feed its people (Chaudhary, 2018). In this paper, this declining status of agricultural sector has been viewed from the lens of occupational shift.

Anywhere around the world, the occupational shift from the agricultural. ILO (2006) says that the occupational shift from farm to the non-farm sector is considered as a normal trend in the development process of a country. The phenomenon of shifting from the traditional sector to modern employment is generally considered as a consequence of economic progress (Ghimire, 2016). The process of transition from farm to non-farm employment as a consequence of industrialization (ILO, 2006) and this process have occurred in society since the human evolution (Volti, 2012). The history of present developed countries shows that from agriculture to industry and then to the service sector, i.e., agricultural society to an industrial one and then the modern society. In those countries, industrialization acts as a drawing element of farm labor to other diversified productive sectors (Murata, 2008). As Lewis theory states (Todaro, 1977) the rationale behind this is the high productivity of non-farm sector in comparison to the traditional agriculture sector. So the labor force gradually shifts from the low productive sector to high productive sector. Meanwhile, in the United States of America, advancement in technology and information employed farm employees to non-farm employment. Likewise, in countries like Bhutan, Pakistan, Thailand, India, education seemed to be the driving force of non-farm employment (Rahut et al., 2017; Venkatesh et al., 2015). In sum, the occupational shift occurs primarily because of the economic development resulting from several associated events like technological advancement, industrialization, agricultural mechanization and so on. In many cases, fostering agricultural productivity inevitably led to industrial growth and the two distinct economies (farm and non-farm sector) naturally sustain each other during the process of economic development (Ghimire, 2016). Production of raw materials to run agro-based industries, income source to invest in industrial development through the export of agricultural products, surplus food to feed urban workers and through many other ways, agriculture can support industrial growth (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2017). This shows that, despite agriculture sector being a foundation for the development of other non-farm sectors, people engaged in agriculture sector gradually shift to other sectors in the course of expansion of other economic sectors.

Apart from this fundamental dynamics of the occupational shift in global development

history, Nepal experiences a different dynamics acting dominantly in Nepal's occupational shift from agriculture to non-farm sectors. Neither the agriculture productivity of Nepal has fostered well enough to support industrial growth via raw materials and surplus labor supply, nor has it sufficiently developed its industrial sector to attract labor. Achieving an average agricultural GDP growth rate of 2.9% in ten years of period (MOF), 2015) is not worth the efforts invested. Likewise, commercialization and agricultural mechanization is a new topic in Nepal. Nepalese agriculture possesses only 4% of commercialized farmers with big land holdings (2 hectares or more) and only 52% of farmers throughout the nation possess the most basic equipment (CBS, 2011). Despite functioning as a primary economic sector of the nation, agricultural productivity is declining with time. On the other hand, the increasing flow of people to non-farm sector is not drawing any significant improvement due to high economic growth. The economic growth of Nepal records only 5% over the last decade (MOF, 2020). In fact, industrialization is occurring sluggishly contributing only 14.3% to national GDP (MOF, 2019). This does not reflect to have followed world economic history of shifting agriculture labor to industry sector. Thus, the prime cause of the occupational shift from the agricultural sector seems to be vague in the Nepalese context.

Some literatures highlight the socio-cultural causes as prime force for the labor shift. Seddon et al. (1998) argues, Nepal is moving towards urbanization and monetization as reinforced by economic globalization and market enforcement (as cited in Paudel et al., 2014). This process has greater implications in terms of changing agro-based land use, livelihood and occupational shift. The occupation of people is aligned with their social life which is ultimately guided by prevailing values and norms of society. Education remained one such changing agent generating new social norms and values in Nepali society. When there was a lack of formally educated people till a few decades ago, getting government jobs was quite easy for most of the educated people in Nepal. Such jobs were table works and less laborious than agricultural works. Moreover, such white collar jobs were considered as the symbol of power and prestige by the society (Bista, 1991). Thus, despite the government's intention to expand school education was guided by development agendas and making people literate (Bhatta, 2009; National Planning Commission [NPC], 1980), the general people understood it differently. In fact, the common were not happy with their traditional occupation such as agriculture which needed hardship of labor. So, for people, schooling meant occupational mobility from their traditional, manual and hard type of physical work to non-manual and easy table work (Shrestha, 1998). These social values were acting dominantly in Nepal's occupational shift from agriculture sector.

The country for the last couple of decades has experienced permanent rural to urban migration of its formally qualified educated people. Such practices have developed a social belief among Nepali youth that agriculture is a job of uneducated and unskilled people (Paudel et al., 2014). Not only limited to formally qualified educated people but the trend of migration has also been accelerated among youth as well, seeking different facilities such as education, health, employment and ultimately a better lifestyle. In this process, many youths of the country, at present, migrated for foreign employment. This has ultimately taken away all the working age group out of the nation and no human resources are available for continuing farm work. Such situation has not only increased barren lands but is slowly threatening the existence of agriculture profession from the nation (Subedi & Dhital, 2007). In addition, foreign employment has developed a new fashion in society. The spouses in foreign employment would send the remittances to the family while the counterpart runs their livelihood from that money.

The aforementioned occupational shift of the agricultural workforce has generated several adverse effects in the country. The declining agricultural production has made us dependent on other countries. Visualizing the favorable agro-ecological system, potentiality and competitive advantage of Nepalese agriculture, there are lots of efforts being made right from the first five-year plan at national level (Department of Agriculture [DOA], 2018; Dhital, 1970). Each periodic and long-term plan includes at least few new programs. But, the agricultural productivity, competitiveness and earnings are at ground level. Rather than utilizing the boon of rich natural resources within the nation, the country has enforced its human resource to get employment in foreign countries. This is only wasting our precious resources and opportunities.

Methodology

Most of the existing literatures on occupational shift from agriculture to other sectors in Nepal seem more focused to explore the factors of occupational shift at macro level. But applying a qualitative research approach with an interpretive inquiry strategy, this study concentrates at people's experience and their perspective. Since the main purpose of this study was to understand the socio-cultural dynamics of occupational shift from agriculture to non-agricultural sector, it analyzes the people's experiences and stories. The rationale behind choosing interpretive inquiry approach is to describe, understand and interpret the experience, perception and interaction of people behind their action of occupational shift Lichtman (2013) Here the peoples; experience has facilitated to understand how the meaning and interpretations were made by the research participants in their occupational shifts based on their lived and told stories and their perception about the stories (Cohen et al., 2018). This approach helped me to understand the contextual and

individual meaning of occupational shift based on the life and livelihoods-related stories of my research participants in that specific context.

The research participants of this study were purposefully selected from the northern part of the Kathmandu Valley. The two localities; one of Gokarneshwor and another of Kageswori Manohara municipality were selected as the research sites. The rationale behind choosing these areas was the special characteristics of the nature of these places. Gokarneshwor municipality had been experiencing a rapid occupational shift of labor from farm to non-farm economies in the last two decades. Likewise, Kageswori Manohara municipality has been following a similar path since last one decade.

Kanchha Magar, Suntali Bhauju, Master Babu and Bhagyashali are the four participants of the study. The stories of these four participants were adequate to understand the socio-cultural dynamics of occupational shift in the research site. These are the dummy names given to them. In this regard, selection of two males and two female participants was not only to maintain gender balance but it also remained meaningful for the study to understand the different decision-making process for these two genders. Along with the in-depth interview, the detail observations were made on participants' day-to-day lives, behavior and surroundings. Several round field visits were made in the study adopting a circular and iterative process (Walliman, 2011).

Occupational Shift from Socio-Dynamic Lens

The stories and experiences of four different participants derived a clear picture of why and how occupational shift in Nepalese context is occurring. The interaction with these participants thus, portrayed four major dynamics behind the phenomenon elaborated in further sections.

Changing social norms, values and culture

The stories of my four participants reflected the change in their occupation was aligned with the transformation of society from traditional to a modern one. There were many events as a result of this transformation that guided not only the occupation of people but their culture and life as a whole. The modernization theory fundamentally explains how an old, rural, agricultural society transforms into a materialistic, urban and industrialized society (Kumar, 2020) in a uniform modality globally. There are some distinct features of modern society that define society as modern if it possesses those characteristics. The components such as individualism urbanization; changing from extending family to small and nuclear family; determining individuals by their property holding, occupation, and education level are some other distinct features of modern society (Kumar, 2020). I could visualize all these features of modern society in my research areas and these elements were strongly associated with the phenomenon of my participants' occupational shift.

One of the consequential event of modernization was the change in family nature. The traditional society was basically composed of large or joint family and each member in the family would engage in farm works. With time, the composition of family changed to the nuclear one in a modern society. This is believed to be the consequence of modernization (Ibrahim et al., 2011). The nuclear family as a result of modernization is a concurrent event of urbanization. The youths migrate to urban areas in search of high-earning employment opportunities and a better lifestyle leaving old members in the family (Mayowa, 2020). The tendency amplifies once an individual is engaged in multiple economic activities other than agriculture at diverse locations. This is visible in the lives of my research participants as well. Bhagyashali who came as a bride to the family of around 10-12 members during 2045 BS, has only four of them left in her family at present. Her husband lives in the quarter of the central office for being a government official, all the six children are in abroad for higher education. Only her handicapped mother in law, asthma patient elder sister in law and her brother in law were there at her house. She mentioned the sort of human resource to be the prime issue for not being able to cultivate their lands and lend all of them on lease.

A young, strong, and active participant of the study Kanchha Magar narrated similar experience about his family history. Around the 1990s, agriculture was everything for Kanchha's grandparents; their work, occupation, source of income and their mainstay of survival. At that time, not only his grandparents, even the small children at house supported in farm work. Little Kanchha and his siblings had all the responsibilities of rearing livestock and looking after household chores when their guardians worked day and night on field. Slowly while coming to the period of his father around 2030 B.S., other alternatives were explored. The, his father completely left agriculture and started working at some construction company far from his house. Their ancestral agricultural lands were being managed by Kanchha himself even during his father's period. Kanchha frankly expressed that he felt his father's job to be much more productive, easier, and better than what his grandparents did during their time. The newer opportunities kept attracting youths and pulling them away from agricultural occupation. Just like how both of the Kanchha's daughters are planning to settle abroad, or Suntali Bhauju's grandson getting approval for PR in Australia, the younger generations in the family are migrating to other nations in search of better education, employment and ultimately the lifestyle. Meanwhile, the older members of the family like Suntali bhauju, Master babu's couple are left alone at home. They are physically weaker and unable to engage in the laborious tasks of agriculture. Then, due to a shortage of human resources to engage in the field, the agricultural occupation as a whole is at risk. Such a phenomenon is gradually pulling people away from the agricultural occupation.

Connecting to the first issue of changing socio-cultural aspect in the society brings another event i.e. foreign migration, either for work or education. Despite having four spouses (three daughters and one son), Master Babu felt lonely to live in his new house with his wife. In a heavily decorated, modern concrete house, there were only two people living there, Master babu and his wife. Deep down, he wished his children to return to Nepal. But he was frequently trying to hide that feeling by describing the luxurious and happy lifestyle of his son in the USA. Big house, cars and trucks, excellent job, handsome salary and quality lifestyle of his son looked pretty attractive for him. Likewise, Suntali bhauju despite of spending her entire lives in farm works seem to be proud of her grandson for holding Australian PR. In fact, she bravely addressed that she had kept her hardly earned land holdings as a security deposit in bank while sending her grandson abroad. Despite of being unsatisfied with their decision of settling in abroad, my participants expressed the matter of having their children in abroad as their pride and prestige. However, my research participants were not happy and wished to have at least some successors to take care of their ancestral lands and properties. To justify the need of going abroad, they used to argue that no career and employment opportunity was possible inside a country having a disgusting political environment. The sense of loneliness and the pain in their eyes were frequently reflected while interacting with Master Babu, Suntali Bhauju and Bhagyashali. Their wish was to have their children return home and take responsibility for all the properties and land. But their children never returned after their education as they permanently settled there. Those youths were hardly found worried about their parents and their interests. Their priority was to enjoy a modern and luxurious life abroad, rather than valuing the family, culture and tradition in the home country.

The third thing that became trending with the changing norms and values was desire for luxurious, modern and so-called high standard lifestyle. This is because, determining an individual's status by their property holding, occupation, and education level is another feature of modernization (Kumar, 2020). Historically, peoples' status in the research area was judged based on the landholdings and quantity of grains harvested. Now in modern society it all depends upon their education level, their achievement in non-farm sector, income level, their clothing, food habits and so on. And my participants couldn't find all these pro-status features to be possible by engaging in agriculture. Kanchha Magar, Suntali Bhauju, Master Babu as well as Bhagyashali, all felt this in one way or the other. This doesn't appear to be happening all of a sudden, in fact it is groomed as a culture slowly with time and transformation in society. Despite of spending their entire lives and investments in farm, neither the Kanchha's grandparents nor Suntali bhauju, Bhagyashali's father in laws nor Master babu's parents encouraged their future generation to continue agriculture.

They always worked hard and earned to educate their children so that their children would not have to live a laborious life being into agriculture. The future generation always got something more and better than their forefathers. The same Kanchha who got new clothes once a year started buying new clothes for his daughter once a week. Spending entire lives by eating *dhido* so that they could save paddy to sell and make money for livelihood, Bhagyashali's or Suntali bhauju or even Master babu always tried their best to give high standard, luxurious lifestyle to their children of course with better education. So, the hard work, labor, patience, the risk incurred in this occupation is unfamiliar to the new generation. No doubt that they were made so by their surrounding culture at home or the lessons they got in life.

The culture that parents fulfilling each and every demand of their children at any cost slowly became an established norm in the society. This led to the situation of youth members dominating the family. How sad was Suntali bhauju when she talked about how rudely her son and daughter in law treated her when they saw her going to work in farm. Still she was forced to obey them and stay at home leaving all her work. Likewise, when Bhagyashali asked her small daughter to help in farm works, she always denied saying that it was none of her concern and her studies was something different than agriculture. The culture of following elders, respecting their thoughts or obeying them faded with time. Now, the youths who grew up in modern culture and thoughts possessed individualism. Chiswell and Lobly (2018) explain individualism to be a prominent character of a modern societies of developed countries. The Western world is largely characterized by dominant modern theories where individuals are considered free and autonomous (Soars, 2018). Regardless of judging this feature as wrong or right, I found, especially the youth from the family of my research participants possess this character. Individualism is the attitude of human beings that emphasizes the importance of the self and individual actions are guided by the motive of self-benefits (Soars, 2018). One could find a drastic change in the society that along with the attitudinal change from collectivism to prioritizing individualism, greatly supported the process of occupational shift in the society. The narrations of my research participants signified that these new generations were usually talking about their rights and never fulfilling their responsibilities. Parents were compelled to fulfill any demands of their children and the children had a perception of enjoying a luxurious life. Thus, the agricultural land which was previously a place to work has now become a means of earning easy money for luxurious life. Today, the future generation of all my participants were planning to rent the land to commercial businesses like party palace, shopping malls, apartments, and earn easy money from it. Interestingly, I noticed that this was the same agricultural land that made the life of my research participants distressful and difficult during the past and it

was transforming to the means of enjoying a luxurious life at present.

Agriculture as a Low Graded Occupation

Agriculture was taken as a low-level and less prestigious occupation right from the participants' forefather's period. Despite relying solely on agriculture for their survival, they never prioritized agriculture over any other occupation. In the past, all my research participants relied on the agricultural sector to make money and run their livelihood. They worked hard on this occupation but these efforts were made not to foster the occupation. Rather, their hidden interest was to pull back their children from it. And one of the strong strategies for this was to educate their children. Its driving force was the belief that education could get them a respectful and clean table works, unlike laborious and dirty agricultural occupation.

Agriculture occupation being considered as a disrespectful occupation is a worldwide phenomenon. One of the studies conducted in a rural area of Indonesia revealed that youths have a negative perception of agricultural occupation (Widiyanti et al., 2019). It was guided by their interaction with friends and schoolmates. Moreover, their teacher also directed them towards other alternatives which seemed more respectful than agriculture. Khanal et al. (2021) obtained similar findings from a study in the Lamjung district in Nepal. Especially youths were abandoning agriculture occupation due to social beliefs of taking agriculture as a burdensome occupation done mostly by the aged, under-privileged and uneducated people. They consequently found very little contribution from youths in agriculture; 45% of youths among the surveyed ones had negative opinions towards agriculture and were out of it.

The society where my participants lived believes agriculture to be an occupation of the poor and uneducated people. Hence, they or more strongly their children grew up constructing similar mindset. Moreover, the hardship and losses expressed by their parents became even more convincing for them to deviate from agriculture. Having said this, Suntali Bhauju, who spent her entire life in agriculture, belongs to the older generation. The rest of the participants were in a transition phase. However, regarding their future generation, they were very sure that they would completely abandon agriculture as an occupation. Widiyanti et al. (2019) supports the similar thinking of the older generation in society being obstructive for youths to be into agriculture. Thus, I understood this phenomenon of the occupational shift was due to socio-culturally constructed mindset which got stronger along the new opportunities created with time after each generation.

In Nepal at present, common people are not happy with their traditional occupations such as agriculture and animal husbandry which are considered quite laborious. At the same time, formal education has led occupational mobility from their traditional type of manual and hard physical work to non-manual and

easy table work (Shrestha, 1998). However, the judgment criteria of society upon the status of the family still includes landholdings. But, the eye of judgment behind it is different today. Holding more land being a source of higher agricultural production previously has changed to a high source of money today. Likewise, people with white-collar jobs are considered as superior over the inferior occupation of agriculture. Acquiring education has been highly valued considering it as a strong source of more power, property and prestige (Bista, 1991). Thus, in the name of becoming modern, people and societal values are changing regarding ownership of more property, acquiring higher education and engaging in a white-collar job. All these changing values have speeded up the occupational shift in society recently.

Role of Nepalese Educational System

Nepal holds quite a short history of formal education. If we go just seven decades back, there existed a very few schools in Nepal. Almost 98 percent of the population was illiterate and depended upon subsistence agriculture for livelihood, so there were merely 300 college graduates in the entire country (United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2001). After the downfall of the Rana regime in the early 1950s and then of donor agencies, the country entered a new course of modern development with periodic plans. But there were very few educated people in the country. Thus, at that time even those school graduates of that period got employment in some administrative work due to scarcity of educated human resources in the country. The life of these government employees was much attractive than that of the agriculture life in many ways. Just like how Master babu started his career in government job right from his early age (around 2030 BS) was quite attractive and supportive to his family. Such events were remarkable milestone for society in developing educational perception on education in many ways. This was also the starting point of an occupational shift from agriculture to non-farm sectors in the country.

The administrative work was much easier than the physically tough work in agriculture. The same Master babu was even complaining about how laborious agricultural tasks and working barefoot on frosty fields during their young age is causing various illness at present. People conceived that they get an opportunity in such works only if they attained formal education. That must be reason why Bhagyashali's father in law always cursed his fate for not getting access to education and always focused on educating all his five children. More than this, the government people had a different social status with their important role and scope. This created a kind of hierarchy where the government jobs remained at the top over other occupations, eventually the result of educational attainment. Hence, education became a symbol of power and prestige in society (Bista, 1991). But the government job and that also the educational institutions were available only in the capital

or cities. Thus, it led to the peoples' mobility from rural to urban areas. The government employees migrated from the rural areas with their families. Thus, this was, eventually, a starting point of the occupational shift from agriculture to the non-farm sector in Nepal. These phenomena established new norms and values towards education in the society that schooling meant occupational mobility from their traditional, manual and hard type of physical work to non-manual and easy table work (Shrestha, 1998). These values continued in society till today in one or another way.

Along with the planned development activities of the country, the government expanded its various development activities. The process of industrialization and opening new avenues of business and service continuously demanded the educated human resources in the country. Again, all these changes occurred in the cities which drove the flow of people to urban centers. Some were in pursuit of higher and better education while some were in seeking different occupations. People could migrate but they couldn't take their land and agriculture occupation along with them. Thus, the meaning of education as an occupational shift from agriculture to other sectors became a permanent social structure. Here also, the interaction between structure and agency made the occupational shift as a social structure.

After the 1990s, this practice of pursuing higher education extended to foreign countries as well. Especially the middle and upper-middle-class people started to send their children to foreign universities. From among my research participant's at least one of their children were in the USA or Australia for higher education. Thus, agricultural activities no longer exist in their families. Thus, the occupational shift has become a deep-rooted phenomenon of our community in search of better and higher education to get better jobs in other non-farm sectors. The statistical data also yield the reverse order of educational development and peoples' engagement in agriculture occupations. While comparing the literacy rate, it has increased from two percent in the 1950s to 70 percent at present, while the people's engagement in agriculture reduced from 98 percent to 60 percent at present (USAID, 2001; MoF, 2020).

Formal schooling enables an individual for occupational mobility from traditional, manual and hard types of physical work to non-manual and easy table work. Sometimes it results because of our educational system. Our society has a perception that once people get educated, they should not engage in agriculture. Even the people having higher education in the agriculture stream are found looking for white-collar jobs. "*People who have no interest in soil are the ones who get degrees in agriculture sciences*" (Bista, 1991, p.132). The experiences show that parents educate their children because they want to take them out of agriculture occupation. At present, despite people's perception of the meaninglessness of formal education for their life and livelihood, their priority is to

educate their children with the hope of a better future. As Bista (1991) claims, despite the school and college education as less meaningful, people seek to get educational degrees just to acquire higher status in society. So the question is how to make those degrees meaningful.

Likewise, our education system hardly prioritizes the technical and vocational education and training (Parajuli, 2013). It has always been regarded as the second option for people or as the sector meant for socio-economically disadvantaged group. With the formulation of Constitution of Nepal 2072, nation has been prioritizing technical education for fostering the economic development (Nepal Law Commission, 2015). However, the red book of different fiscal years show that share of TVET in total educational budget had been declining from 4.6% in 2015/16 to 4% in 2016/17 and then to 3% in 2018/19. It is only after the formulation of new educational policy that budget allocation to TVET sector slightly raised to 5.19% in fiscal year 2019/20 (MOF, 2015/16-2019/20). The new educational policy "National Educational Policy 2076" focuses on producing educated, skilled, competent tech-friendly, human resources for transforming Nepal into prosperous nation (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2019). Ultimately, it intends to enhance citizen's employability for having nation's economic progress. Thus, after formulation of new educational policy in 2019, the budget allocation in TVET seems to be slightly risen, i.e. 5.19% in fiscal year 2019/20. However, the rise is quite negligible.

Even within the technical education, plans and programs seems more focused towards other sectors like engineering, IT and hotel management. The new dual vet apprenticeship program has also been designed for mechanical, electrical, automobile engineering, hotel management and IT (Boli, et. al, 2019). Its focus on agriculture seems null. The informal sector barely recognizes the farmer's knowledge and skill who does not have formal education. Society hardly gives respect to the farmers even they possess excellent knowledge and skills in this sector. However, with the new strategy of recognition to prior learning (RPL) and new national vocational qualification framework, there is a new ray of hope to retain people in agricultural sector (CTEVT & NVQS, 2019). If this concept could be practiced, it would give honor and self-respect to those farmers which would motivate them to continue their occupation.

Conclusion

The study was undertaken to explore socio-cultural dynamics behind the phenomenon of occupational shift. It explored the complex phenomenon explaining how the socio-cultural dynamics functions to deviate people from agriculture to other sectors. Despite of being established as a natural process during the course of development globally, the pace and modality of occupational shift varies with the context of different countries. Generally, people shift from agriculture to

industrial and then to service sector with the economic progress. The phenomenon of occupational shift in Nepal is different from the experience of the developed countries. In developed nations, the shift from agriculture to other sector was associated with the agro-based development of industries and service sector where resources and raw materials from agricultural sector is utilized to foster other sectors. But in case of Nepal, people seem to be simply escaping the agricultural sector and moving to other sectors without proper plans and vision. The phenomenon is thus, bypassing the people in Nepal instead of benefiting them. This is not only causing loss of foundation for industrial growth but also making people ignore the most potential sector of the nation, both nature-wise and resource-wise.

The study hence concludes that, the globally occurring phenomenon of occupational shift would be beneficial to people if it is taken in a natural way by utilizing agricultural sector to construct a strong foundation for development of other economic sectors and enhance their productivity. This can be eased with the meaningful implication of technical education in agricultural sector to enhance the employability and productivity of farmers. Simply, with the support of technical education, the indigenous skills and knowledge of farmers could be recognized hence acknowledging the value of agriculture to develop our nation.

Since the agricultural occupation is less valued in our society and considered the income source of poor and uneducated people. So, the overall educational system needs to be remodeled in such a way that it values our traditional occupation such as agriculture. The awareness of its potentiality, contribution and essence in the lives of Nepalese people and, Nepal as a whole, should be highlighted right from the primary level of education. In addition to this, a negative feeling of value to work is developed among future generations. This could also be supported by agricultural practitioners and social activists. Demonstration of its worth in economic growth and even development of other sectors like industry, manufacturing and service can be highlighted by the agricultural practitioners. It may contribute to reduce the agro trade deficit which is related to the income and social status. Once people find their improved social status, other people may also follow it. Meanwhile, the social activists could refer to the study for understanding the social dynamics of occupational shift so that they would be aware of such phenomenon and help in reviving our agricultural sector.

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Instructional Leadership Behavior among Principals of Two Schools in Lalitpur, Nepal

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Abstract

Instructional leadership is the position in any educational institute that can utilize individual skills and knowledge to ensure the academic performance of students with necessary support for all teachers, students, and school staff. There are various components and dimensions of instructional leadership, such as planning, curriculum design and development, training delivery and professional development, evaluation and monitoring of teachers, and assessment of students. The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of school principals about instructional leadership and narrate their experiences. The research adopted a qualitative research method in which principals of renowned schools of Lalitpur district of Nepal were interviewed as the participants. The study shows that principals of high-performing schools possess certain qualities as instructional leaders. Since the study was conducted with limited participants, it can be further taken to larger extent to explore additional details and dimension about instructional leadership.

Keywords: *Instructional leadership, principal, leadership,*

Introduction

Instructional leadership, in general, is taken as the management of curriculum and instructions by a principal in a school. The idea of instructional leadership emerged as a result of research connected with the successful school development of 1980s (Gumus et al., 2018), that revealed principal's role as the key component of successful schools' behaviour. The instructional leadership notion has lately been expanded to encompass more distributed approaches, such as transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and shared leadership, that emphasize distributed and shared empowerment among employees in the schools.

Wieczorek and Manard (2018) claimed that school principals are usually connected with instructional leadership since they are in-charge of curriculum, funding, and scheduling as well as the progress of each student in their schools. Such leaders often

work to enable teachers to become leaders, sharing the vision and mission of the school and serving as role models for learners. As a principal is the guideline, change agent, role model, director of educational institution, and manager of human resources at every school, they clearly have more impact on the behaviour and academic outcomes of children than other coworkers and employees (Bhujel, 2021).The school principals carry the torch for their institution's ethics and behaviors. Each school tries to build its unique learning environment. As a result, the contact between the principal and the teacher promotes the creation of a learning environment and the maintenance of quality in school performance.

As a scholar of educational leadership and a teacher for over two decades, I also experienced that the principals possess key responsibilities in making schools successful. Every successful school has the principal of dynamic behaviours. School leaders have a crucial role in establishing direction, fostering a positive school culture, and supporting and boosting staff motivation and dedication (Day & Sammons, 2013; Dinsdale, 2017). These qualities in school leadership enables schools cope with difficult situations and continue growing and becoming successful. However, in Nepal's context, I felt that the principals are administrators rather than instructional leaders. In the same regard, Kafle (2013) also claimed that rather than practicing instructional leadership , principals in Nepal are confined to the narrow functions of day-to-day administration. Concerning instructors' professional growth, except for a few teachers whom I worked with, most of them think that their leaders do not support them sufficiently. Actually, teachers need leading support while performing their work (Bayler et al., 2017). Principals are in the position to foster higher collaboration among teachers and such relationship mostly leads to improvement in teachers' instructional practices, and those practices enhance students learning (Leithwood, 2005). But, in the context of Nepal, I feel, instructional leadership in school is not happening as anticipated. It seems that principals and leaders are not that qualified for carrying instructional leadership in their institution. Most of the leaders whom I worked with are neither from the management and educational nor from the leadership background. Consequently, they may be lacking knowledge about instructional practices to be carried out in the schools. The concept of research on instructional behaviour of principals in successful schools therefore came from my instance and experience as a teacher and teacher leader in various institutions. There seemed many problems existing in those schools due to the inexperience- and no relevant educational background of the principals. This research helped me understand and explore the instructional behaviour of two successful schools in Lalitpur district of Nepal. The behaviour of the principals explored here can be implemented to the other schools which are trying to upgrade themselves as successful schools.

The purpose of the study was to explore the concept of instructional leadership behaviour of school principals in the schools of Nepal. The research was conducted with a research question: How do principals of successful schools share their experiences as instructional leaders.

There are various dimensions of instructional leadership like planning, curriculum design, training delivery and professional development, monitoring and supervision, students' assessment and evaluation, resource allocation, and understanding and response to the larger societal context. Among them, my focus is only on perception on instructional leadership, curriculum design, teachers' professional development .

Methodology

The purpose of my qualitative study was to understand and explore various elements of instructional leadership of principals in Lalitpur district of Nepal. This study adopted an interpretative study method where Lalitpur district was selected as the site of my study. The principals of successful schools possess diverse knowledge of such systems and provide us with a different form of information that helps us generate our new concept of instructional leadership (Rigby, 2014). Hence, I conducted in-depth interviews with two school principals of Lalitpur which were selected purposively based on the relationship of the researcher to the participants. The paper's quality standards were maintained by honouring the 'responsible practice of research' (Dhakal, 2016). Unethical procedures were avoided in this study with the highest regard for honesty and sincerity in the research investigation. Themes were meticulously developed through the sharing of information and review in relation to the findings.

Instructional Leadership: An Understanding

One of the major themes that appeared from the data analysis was different dimensions of instructional leadership. One of the participants, in an informal talk, told that she had no such idea about instructional leadership, but she knew more about various types of other leadership styles, such as democratic, transformational and transactional. The other participant was well aware about the instructional leadership, and he could define and talk about its various dimensions, too. The former participant mentioned that she has been undertaking various roles besides instructional leadership. She said;

"*Principal is taken as the focal person in the school system. As a principal, I need to look after overall activities of the school and especially as a principal, need to focus on teachers' work and students' learning. There are also financial and administrative duties to him/her. I think instructional leadership is how to instruct our subordinates, our colleagues to work together for the betterment and to achieve the goal and vision..*"

The excerpt from the interview shows that

principal is the leading person in the Nepali schools, and they have to undertake various other roles as administrators besides looking after academic attribute in the school. Jackson and Parry (2011) define leadership as a process in which leaders utilize their knowledge and skills to lead and take a group of staffs in the anticipated direction that is relevant to their organization's goals and objectives. So, in this context, the principal can be taken as a good leader but not as an instructional leader because she herself was unaware about instructional leadership. But at the same time, another participant has different view, for he was looking after more academics in his school. He claimed:

"*Instructional leadership, in my perspective, is happening in three stages in my school. First stage is the class teachers and subject teachers themselves and they are themselves the instructional leaders. They are further supported by the head of departments who supervise and provide further support to class teachers and subject teachers. And head of departments is further supported by the academic coordinator and principal."*

From the above excerpt, it is clear that the principal is acting more as an instructional leader rather than as the chief of overall activities within the schools. Here seemed a mixed view related to the roles and responsibilities of principals in the school, but it also showed that there are many similarities in their work as instructional leaders. According to Oznacar and Osma (2016), instructional leadership has changed the traditional role of the administrative approach of the school administrator and its basic point of start is the realization of education. Furthermore, Polatcan and Cansoy (2019) believe that the school principal, as an instructional leader, is expected to promote student achievement through behaviors like sharing of mission and vision of the school with employees, taking part in the instructional project, and creating the environment conducive to learning. From this perspective, the principal, here, seems to be undertaking the role of instructional leadership. Moreover, as the school is adopting three layers of instructional leadership from grade teachers or subject teachers, head of departments, and to the academic coordinator or principal, there appeared to be the concepts of having distributed leadership role which permits a school to become an effective educational organization. The collective effort of leaders pulls all in the same direction with the guidance of same vision and mission along with values towards a common set of goals and objectives (Solly, 2018).

The former one seemed to carry out the responsibility as both an administrator and instructional leader, whereas the latter one seemed to only act as an instructional leader.

Instructional Leadership: Curriculum Design and Development

Curriculum design is one of the important elements of instructional leadership. From the collected data, it was one of the major components that emerged as one of the

themes. When the curriculum guides and assessments are prepared and readied for execution, leaders show their focus on the curriculum by providing opportunities, resources, and tools for all the teachers to understand and apply the new curriculum and assessment documents (Ruebling et al., 2004). In both, the schools' design and development of curriculum were happening. Both the schools were adopting the curriculum designed by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), Nepal Government with some modifications as per their situation, students learning achievements, and the feedback from teachers, parents, students, and experts. One of the participants said:

"In our school, we look after the children from age 5 to 16 years. We are very much focused on the development stages. What we believe is that as per age group, there are lots of changes and according to which we have to work. We are following government curriculum. For the preprimary section, we are following the curriculum from the Early Childhood Development Center integrated with the Finnish curriculum. Whenever we design any activities, we always focus on the development of the age group of the students."

The excerpt here claimed that they used the government curriculum and the activities needed to deliver the curriculum. They focus more on the developmental stages of different age groups of students. A school curriculum is the combination of subjects studied in a year as the learners move through the educational system provided by the school (Cambridge University, n.d.). Hence, it can be claimed that the principal is aware of designing the curriculum at her school with necessary improvement in the curriculum from the government or others as per the need and requirements of different age groups of students in the school. At the same time, the other participant is clear about designing and developing curriculum in his school. He stated:

"In my school, we basically use the government curriculum. But, we feel none of the curriculum in itself is complete. In a sense, it needs to be challenging and it should, in a way, encompass all kinds of learners. Considering this, we have designed our own school-made curriculum. With this, what we do is we integrate school-made curriculum with the government curriculum, which we hope, suits all kind of learners, makes learning more practical, more project-based, more inquiry-based. As a result, learning itself becomes more inquisitive and more interesting with the varied learning environment to learners."

From the above points, it can be said that curriculum development in both the schools was happening through a rigorous process even though they were using the government curriculum of Nepal. Both the schools were integrating such curriculum with their curriculum which they prepared to support all kinds of learners in their schools. Curriculum planning involves the development of the course and assessment plans for different

subjects and also involves more detailed plans for learning units, individual lesson and lesson sequences (UNESCO, n.d.). The leaders were found to be more concerned about the development and design yearly and terminal curriculum plan accompanying with unit and lesson plans with various activities to be executed suitably to all types of learners in the classroom.

Instructional Leadership: Teachers' Professional Development and Training

Teachers' professional development and training is another important component in carrying out instructional leadership in a better way. It is considered that the teachers need to be more professional and be well aware about their subject matter and methods of delivering it. Moreover, teacher education and training can support teachers to "develop the ability in their students to analyze, pose questions, and take action on the diverse social, political, cultural, and economic contexts that influence and shape their lives" (Dhakal, 2017, p. 54). Therefore, training, and professional development programs certainly help teachers to develop them further. Here, in both cases, principals were very clear about the importance of providing such training sessions in their school. Their claims are presented here.

Participant 1

"I am emphasizing the work on perspectives of teachers' professional development, teachers' development, and teachers' knowledge is highly important for the students' development. So, in preprimary section, every teacher needs certain training from Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC) in play-way method and in primary section, we send the teachers to Rato Bangla for getting training; some teachers are doing Primary Teacher Training Program (PTTP) and doing short term courses from there. Besides that, every week, we have a day, Thursday, to plan for different sessions for teachers. Sometimes, teachers themselves develop the session and sometimes administration will provide the content and the session. Similarly, every month, there is training and we hire the trainer from outside. Our teachers also take sessions for the teachers from other schools too."

Participant 2

"In my school, teachers' professional development is happening in both ways: we broadly divide into two categories, let's say, one is pre-service training, and one is in-service training. So, pre-service training usually happens before we start the academic session where we revise the curriculum, and take some training on new pedagogies, new strategies, or learning from each other. Even the motivational sessions are held to refresh our teachers at the beginning and end of the academic session. Now, in in-service training, we provide not only training by ourselves but also take the training from different institutions like Kathmandu University School of Education, and Rato Bangla Foundation. Some trainings were provided by Nisarga Batika, British Council, and NELTA too."

From the excerpts afore mentioned, we can say that both the schools were emphasizing the professional developments of teachers and they believed that such trainings certainly enhance the quality of education and promote the students' development. It was found that in both the schools, the principals were emphasizing teachers' professional development and training for them. Instructional improvement is about staffing a school with professional teachers and providing suitable support and resources to be effective in the classroom (Horng & Loeb, 2010). They felt that if teachers are well trained, they can certainly deliver their instructions well in the classroom. They were providing lots of opportunities for teachers' professional development, and they were leading in such a way that their teachers also became able to train teachers from other schools.

In addition to these dimensions of instructional leadership, participants also talked about the scope of instructional leadership, such as assessment systems, and evaluation and monitoring of the teachers. One of the participants' remarks has already been included in the previous section of instructional leadership which clearly referred to the evaluation and monitoring of teachers through various levels of steps from peer observation of class, supervision, monitoring, and support by the heads of departments along with academic coordinator and principal himself. Furthermore, as a form of monitoring and evaluation, the heads of departments had to prepare a report on the teachers of their respective departments, provision of a self-evaluation system, provision of appraisal forms, etc. which shows that supervision of teachers in the school was happening.

Regarding the assessment, it seemed that both the schools were adopting both forms of assessment system (viz. formative and summative). It was found that in both schools, the continuous assessment system (CAS) was applied more in the junior classes- till grade three along with some formative assessments too. For three to seven, they have adopted CAS and end session examinations were credited equally. Similarly, from grade eight to ten, they were assessing through end term examination with weightage around 75 percent and 25 percent through CAS, including projects, practical, experiments, participation in different activities conducted in the classroom during the teaching-learning process.

The school principals are at the focal point in the success of schools in delivering quality education to students. Niqab et al. (2014) advocate the concept of leadership as the pivotal role in the functioning of the school. Similarly, EL-Nashar (2016) believes that school principals have a great impact on the school's effectiveness as they are considered as the steering wheels of the school. The findings showed that both the schools have shown strong instructional leadership qualities though in one condition, the principal herself was not aware of what instructional leadership actually is, but

from her expression, it was clear that she was showing some qualities of instructional leadership in her school and running the school as an instructional cum administrative leader. In the next case, the principal appeared to act as a complete instructional leader from the perspective of the dimensions taken as the study of my research. He was not only leading the institution as the instructional leader but also working to produce other leaders in the school.

The attributes and traits that make someone effective as a leader are known as leader behaviours. Leaders use their actions to direct, guide, and influence their team's work (Western Governors University, 2020). Although there are many natural features that boost leadership behaviour, there are techniques and actions that leaders can apply to improve their conduct and effectiveness. Leaders who use their actions to express a vision, encourage teams, and ensure that everyone is as productive as possible are essential to the success of any organization (Western Governors University, 2020). Leaders in the study are somehow found to be acting as instructional leaders. Their behavior and traits have helped their subordinates foster better in terms of assessment of students and value the professional development of teachers in their schools. Moreover, they are often offering the development programs in their schools and sending their teachers to various training and professional development programs.

Conclusion and Implication

The study points out that in a successful school, school heads or principals' leadership plays a vital role in the academic achievement of the students. Their role as instructional leadership has helped to enhance the effectiveness of the teaching-learning activities in those schools. Since the study was conducted only on the two renowned private schools, further research can be conducted on these issues in a larger scale for exploring the broader view about instructional leadership and its dimensions. Leaders in high-performing schools mostly focus on planning, curriculum design and implementation, teachers' professional development, evaluation and monitoring of teachers and students, and assessment for further improvement of instruction to deliver in the classroom. It is clear that if the principals are well aware of improving the instructions through implementation of all components of instructional leadership, leadership thrives. To some extent, this study proved wrong my perception of principals in private schools of Nepal. It showed that, in recent years, principals in schools are more sincere and serious about their knowledge and skills to enhance the academic quality of students. This, in fact, would lead our education system to a new height in the days ahead. This study has certain implications that it has helped me understand better the dimensions of instructional leadership. This study will make school administrators and other stakeholders know more about how the improvement in instructions can be carried

out and educational excellence promoted. For building a successful school, the dimensions of instructional leadership studied herein, and others can be replicated.

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

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Abstract

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

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

Introduction

In Nepal, a developing country, the need of technical human resources is far more than the human resources with general education for the socio-economic development. The technically skilled human resources are required not only for earning livelihood to the increasing number of unemployed and under employed people but also for economic development of the country. Throughout the present decade, the Government of Nepal has

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

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

Practices of Employers' Engagement in CTEVT Technical Schools

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

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

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

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

The technical schools/institutes under CTEVT are organizing industrial exposure visits to their trainees in order to expose them in the real work of world in the country. Industrial exposure bridges the gap between theoretical training and practical learning and thus, helps TVET trainees to apply their technical knowledge in a real-life environment. It broadens the outlook of trainees towards different workforces among various industries by alerting them on different rules and regulations as well as varieties of industrial practices outside the classroom. It familiarizes with manufacturing, designing, testing and analysis, products, and automation etc.

The CTEVT constituted technical schools/ institutes are practicing joint management committees, which consist of representatives from private and public sectors. In the same way, some technical schools owned by private sectors are also involving representatives from the public sector in their school management committee (www.ctevt.org.np). Similarly, some of the CTEVT Technical Schools are also practising Enterprise Advisory and Partnership Committee (EAPC) where more employers and employer associations are members of the committee in order to link the school's programs to the local employers, especially in the organization of On-the-Job (OJT) Training program for the schools' trainees.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some Practices and Initiations of Strengthening Employers Engagement

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

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

Promote Training Relevance, Access, and Quality

At the local level, identifying demand of local skills and customizing learning resources to meet those needs helps to make training more relevant to local enterprises. Constant feedback from employers is the primary inputs to updating curriculum, while graduates can provide inputs on the relevance of their institution learned skills to performance requirements. These practices and initiations are, however, seen minimum in the real ground of CTEVT's technical schools. For these reasons, SEECS intends to engage employers in the pre-training phase. Thus, CTEVT schools develop collaboration and partnership with employers and employer associations to further verify the needs of the skilled human resources before conducting training programs for the same, so that more and more graduates will get employment and self-employed after training. In this connection, the school will also form a team for local market survey and conduct the survey for this purpose. Different approaches, such as rapid market appraisal, local training needs analysis, employer survey and assessment of the needs of local communities will be conducted in this stage to promote market and employers' relevant skills. Assessing the real needs of business, industry, or community is one of the most important tasks for any technical training organization (Shrestha, 2016). The trainings are only successful if the needs assessors have managed to identify the real demand on the job market. The training programs, which focus on the needs of users, will be more successful (International Labour Organization, 2016: Labour Market Information: Guide to Anticipating and Matching Skills and Jobs Volume 1). Thus, conducting some form of needs assessment is usually the first step when designing a training course. The success of the training depends on the success of training needs assessment. Timely revised curriculum in line with the demand of job market attracts both trainees and employers towards vocational training programs (ILO, 2013). This process not only adds the locally demanded skills preferred by employers but also provides occupational interests of local youths.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

instructors at industry workplace will be organized to upgrade their existing occupational skills and knowledge and proficiency by working in their trade specific workplaces like industries, workshops, and firms. For these purposes, skills gap assessment of instructors will be conducted in coordination of Employers Information and Counselling Committee (EICC), school and instructors. The mutually agreed skill upgrading list will be developed among themselves. A customized course will be developed for the selected instructors to equip and enhance with gap competencies. Then, industry placement will be organized for the instructors at the actual workplace in close coordination with EICC. A tripartite agreement along with roles and responsibilities will be made among industry, technical school and the instructors. Placement is made at such industry. A skill upgrading diary will be maintained by the instructor and employer, specifying the skills-one that have been improved and the others which need more practice. A self-assessment of occupational skills will also be maintained by the instructor himself (TITI, 2008). Skill upgrading assessment/evaluation will be done by the employer based on set criteria. OSU training will be like well-known program as "Industrial Attachment for Instructors in TVET Delivery". According to Bax and Hassan (2003), industrial attachments usually refer to the formal placement of trainees in the workplace to facilitate the achievement of specific learning outcomes that would potentially lead to their employability upon the completion of the training program. Industrial attachments typically involve training providers and industries (through employers and employer associations) forming partnerships to offer situated teaching-learning opportunities in the workplace so that learners and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) practitioners would have access to authentic experiences that only the workplace-based training can offer (as cited in Choy & Haukka, 2009).Similarly, the schools also invite employers to deliver the sessions and share what industry expects from the graduates. The schools also get feedback from employers on the strengths and weaknesses of employed graduates and recommendations on competencies they need.

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

Promote Employability Skills of the Trainees

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

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

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

Promote School's Governance and Coordination

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusions

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

Disclosure of Conflict of Interest

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

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Experience of Violence due to COVID-19 among Returnee Migrants of Far-Western Province of Nepal

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Abstract

Migration has been a main pillar of the nation as well as the household economy of Nepal. However, COVID-19 has caused stigma and discrimination and increased risks of violence, disrupting GBV prevention and response mechanisms. The objectives of the study are to examine the prevalence and determinants of experience of violence due to COVID-19 among returnee migrants of the Far-western province of Nepal. Data for this survey were collected through a cross-sectional research design using quantitative methods in the Far-western province of Nepal. A total of 1182 respondents were surveyed to gather quantitative information. Univariate, Bivariate and multivariate analyses were applied to data. In addition, multivariable analysis was used to identify whether independent variables affected the risk of Gender-Based Violence. An overwhelming majority of returnee migrants were male (94.2%), while about 6 percent were female. One-third of respondents were youth aged below 25 years. Thirty-two percent of them had primary or below education. Eighteen percent of returnee migrants do not have food sufficient for a month in their household. Three in five returnee migrants (60%) reported that they had experienced violence. Multivariate analysis shows that female migrants were more likely to experience violence (aOR=2.1, 95% CI=1.02-4.3) than male migrants. Older age migrants were more likely to experience violence than younger migrants aged below 20. Migrants from poor households were more likely to experience violence (aOR=4.5, 95% CI= 3.1-6.7) than rich households. Physically disabled migrants were 4 times more likely (aOR=4.5, 95% CI= 2.6-7.5) than those who are not disabled. Experience of violence is very high among returnee migrants of Sudurpashchim province of Nepal. Our study found that female migrants, physically disabled migrants, who had elderly in their houses, and migrants from poor households were more likely to experience violence. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive awareness program and services that can help to prevent violence among returnee migrants.

Background

Migration has been a main pillar of the nation as well as the household economy of Nepal. It is also the fifth most remittance-dependent economy in the world. (IOM, 2020) According to the Government of Nepal's report, remittance accounted for 26.5 % of the GDP in 2019. (The World Bank, 2020) The Nepal Rastra Bank's annual macroeconomic report 2020 has revealed that Nepali migrant workers sent home Rs 875.03 billion in the last fiscal year. (IOM, 2020) Moreover, the Department of Foreign Employment has issued over 4 million labor approvals since 2008/09, reflecting the dependence of Nepal's economy on migrant workers. (MoLESS, 2020; IOM, 2020) However, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has been affecting 220 countries and territories, migration in Nepal, one of the major contributing factors for the nation's economy, has been severely affected (IOM, 2020). As new cases of COVID-19 started to rise exponentially, many migrants working in India lost their jobs, due to which Nepal began to see a substantial influx of migrant returnees. About 200,000 Nepali migrant workers in India had returned to Nepal just before the national lockdown, while the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) reported that 700,000 migrants returned home from India during the lockdown. (IOM, 2020) Meanwhile, according to COVID-19 Crisis Management Centre statistics, more than 52,000 Nepalis have returned home, and the majority of them are from the labor destinations UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Malaysia as of August 24, 2020 (The Kathmandu Post).

COVID-19 has caused stigma and discrimination linked to caste/ethnicity and gender, threats to women's economic empowerment and livelihoods, migrants workers, inaccessibility to sexual and reproductive health services, increased risks of Gender Based Violence (GBV) disrupting GBV prevention and response mechanisms, etc. (UN Nepal, 2021) Besides these some of the issues faced by the migrants' workers includes: increased exposure to violence particularly domestic violence and GBV, mental health risks, consequences of social adjustments due to COVID-19 on migrants and persons in need of protection, livelihoods including bonded and child labor, child marriage and family separation as well as escalated vulnerability to discrimination, violence and exploitation and the threat to the livelihoods of the most vulnerable households (IOM, 2020 & UN Nepal 2021). Previously, the pandemic situation caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome-coronavirus-2 (SARS-COV-2) and, especially, home confinement measures followed by the pandemic has favored a series of factors that may have precipitated or worsened situations of GBV (Rodriguez-Jimenez, 2020). Likewise, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are indications of a potential rise in violence, as seen earlier in other crisis contexts, such as earthquakes. (Gelder, 2020; & Bell, 2016).

Furthermore, cases of domestic violence

numbers are also increasing globally. Food insecurity, loss of livelihoods, especially for daily wage workers, reduction in remittances, return of migrant workers have heightened risk of physical and emotional abuse. During the pandemic and lockdown, gender violence was largely surfaced in Nepal (Chaudhary, 2020). Following the COVID-19 pandemic, various social adjustments such as lockdown measures have globally resulted in increased cases of gender-based violence and escalated gender inequalities (GESI Checklist, 2020). Besides these, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of Nepali migrant workers working outside abroad have faced multiple forms of risks and challenges, especially their human rights and security (Nepal et al. 2020). The objectives of the study are to examine the prevalence and determinants of experience of violence due to COVID-19 among returnee migrants of the far western province of Nepal.

Methodology

Data for this survey were collected through a cross-sectional research design using quantitative methods. The study was conducted in the Far-western province of Accham, Doti, and Kailali Districts. A total of 1182 respondents were surveyed to gather quantitative information. A set of validated structured questionnaires were developed to accumulate quantitative information about the violence experienced due to COVID-19. Telephonic interviews were conducted with returnee migrants due to COVID after taking verbal consent from the respondents.

The independent variables were districts, sex of the respondents, age group, level of education, family size, disability status, presence of elderly/single women, health problems, and household economy, whereas the experience of Gender-Based Violence was the dependent variable.

Univariate, Bivariate (Chi-square test_ and multivariate analyses (logistic regression) were applied to data. Initially, univariate or descriptive analysis was used to describe the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. Then, after controlling for the socio-demographic variables, multivariable analysis was used to identify whether independent variables affected the risk of Gender-Based Violence. For the analysis, a statistical package for social science (SPPS-26 Version) was used.

Results

Background characteristics of the respondents

An overwhelming proportion of returnee migrants were male (94%). More than one-third of the respondents (34%) were from youth below 25 years. Almost a third (32%) of the respondents had below primary level education. Meanwhile, nearly two out of five (37.3%) respondents were head of the household. Regarding family size, 61 percent of respondents had more than 5 family members in their house. More than one out of ten (11.4%) respondents had a physical disability. Besides these, more than one-fourth (26.6%) of the respondents have

at least one elderly at the household, while nearly one-tenth of the respondents (9.7%) have at least one single woman in their household. Two-fifths of the respondents (40%) were from poor households. Almost one in five households (18%) had no food stock or had food sufficient for less than a month.

Table 1 Background characteristics of the respondents

		%	N
Districts	Achham	33.5	396
	Doti	33.3	394
	Kailali	33.2	392
Sex of the respondents	Female	5.8	69
	Male	94.2	1113
Age group	Less than 20 years	4.8	57
	20-24	28.8	340
	25-29	23.4	276
	30-34	13.7	162
	35-39	12.7	150
	40-44	7.4	88
	45-49	4.5	53
	50 or above	4.7	56
Level of Education	Primary or below	31.5	372
	Lower secondary	36.7	434
	Secondary	16.2	192
	SLC and above	15.6	184
Head of Household	No	62.7	741
	Yes	37.3	441
Family size	Up to 5 members	39.1	462
	6-8 members	47.3	559
	9 or more members	13.6	161
Physical disable	No	88.6	1047
	Yes	11.4	135
Have at least one Elderly in Household	No	73.4	868
	Yes	26.6	314
Have at least one single woman in the household	No	90.3	1067
	Yes	9.7	115

Poor Household	Yes	40.0	473
	No	60.0	709
Current food stock enough for	No stock/Food sufficient for less than a month	18.0	213
	Food sufficient for less than 6 months	77.7	918
	Food sufficient for more than 6 months	4.3	51
Total		100.0	1182

Socio-economic correlates with the self-reported experience of violence.

Notably, 60 percent of returnee migrants experienced violence due to COVID-19. Bivariate analysis showed a significant association of with experience of violence with districts, sex of respondents, age group, level of education, household head, family size, physical disability, presence of elderly and single women in the household, the economy of household, and duration of their current food stock.

An overwhelming majority of the migrants (87.1%) who lived in Achham than Kailali (48.2%), and Doti (45.2%) had experienced violence due to COVID-19 ($p<0.001$). Likewise, a significantly higher proportion of females (79.7%) than males had an experience of violence than males ($p<0.01$). Likewise, more than three-fifths (66.8%) of respondents whose educational level was lower secondary than those who had primary or below (46%) have an increased risk of GBV due to COVID-19 ($p<0.001$). A higher percentage of migrants who were not head of the households (63%) than those who are head of households (55.1%) had experienced violence ($p<0.01$). A significantly higher percentage of respondents who had a physical disability (79.3%) than those who are not disabled (58%) had experienced violence due to COVID-19 ($p<0.001$). Similarly, a higher percentage of migrants who had elderly in the household (77%) than those who do not have elderly in the household (54%) experienced violence. Experienced violence is significantly lower among the migrant whose houses had single women (59%). Besides these, a significantly higher percentage of migrants from poor households (85%) than rich households (44%) experienced violence due to COVID-19.

Table 2 Background characteristics of respondents by perception on the risk of GBV due to COVID-19

		Risk of GBV due to COVID-19				Total	
		Not increased/ Don't know		Increased Risk		%	N
		%	N	%	N		
Districts ***	Achham	12.9	51	87.1	345	100.0	396
	Doti	54.8	216	45.2	178	100.0	394
	Kailali	51.8	203	48.2	189	100.0	392
Sex of the respondents**	Female	20.3	14	79.7	55	100.0	69
	Male	41.0	456	59.0	657	100.0	1113
Age group**	Less than 20 years	57.9	33	42.1	24	100.0	57
	20-24	44.4	151	55.6	189	100.0	340
	25-29	38.4	106	61.6	170	100.0	276
	30-34	39.5	64	60.5	98	100.0	162
	35-39	31.3	47	68.7	103	100.0	150
	40-44	35.2	31	64.8	57	100.0	88
	45-49t	41.5	22	58.5	31	100.0	53
	50 or above	28.6	16	71.4	40	100.0	56
Level of Education***	Primary or below	54.0	201	46.0	171	100.0	372
	Lower secondary	33.2	144	66.8	290	100.0	434
	Secondary	37.5	72	62.5	120	100.0	192
	SLC and above	28.8	53	71.2	131	100.0	184
Head of Household**	No	36.7	272	63.3	469	100.0	741
	Yes	44.9	198	55.1	243	100.0	441
Family size ***	Up to 5 members	47.0	217	53.0	245	100.0	462
	6-8 members	34.3	192	65.7	367	100.0	559
	9 or more members	37.9	61	62.1	100	100.0	161
Physical disable ***	No	42.2	442	57.8	605	100.0	1047
	Yes	20.7	28	79.3	107	100.0	135

Have at least one Elderly in Household ***	No	45.9	398	54.1	470	100.0	868
	Yes	22.9	72	77.1	242	100.0	314
Have at least one single woman in the household*	No	38.6	412	61.4	655	100.0	1067
	Yes	50.4	58	49.6	57	100.0	115
Poor household ***	Yes	14.8	70	85.2	403	100.0	473
	No	56.4	400	43.6	309	100.0	709
Current food stock enough for***	No stock/Food sufficient for less than a month	54.9	117	45.1	96	100.0	114
	Food sufficient for less than 6 months	36.2	332	63.8	586	100.0	99
	Food sufficient for more than 6 months	41.2	21	58.8	30	100.0	541
Total		39.8	470	60.2	712	100.0	1182

Note: ***=Chi-square test significant at p<0.001, **p<0.01 and *= p<0.05

Multivariate Analysis

Multivariate analysis shows that districts, sex of the respondents, age of respondents, level of education, Physical disable, presence of elderly in the household, presence of single women in the household, and poor household were significant predictors for experiencing violence returnee migrants in Nepal. It is found that migrants of Achham district were about 4 times (aOR=3.8, 95% CI=2.3-6.1) more likely to experience violence than migrants of Kailali district. Female migrants were more likely to experience violence (aOR=2.1, 95% CI=1.02-4.3) than male migrants. Older age migrants were more likely to experience violence than younger migrants aged below 20. Unexpected results were found in education and experience of violence. Migrants who have lower secondary were about 4 times (aOR=4.1, 95% CI=2.8-6.0), secondary and SLC and above about 3 times more likely to experience violence than those who had primary or below education. Notably, respondents who were physically disabled were about 5 times (aOR=4.5, 95% CI=2.7-7.5) more likely to experience violence than those who were not physically disabled. The presence of the elderly in the household increases the risk of violence. For example, those households with elderly in their household were about three times (aOR=2.7, 95% CI=1.8-3.9) times more likely to experience violence than those who do not have elderly in their

households. Those respondents who had single women in their households were less likely to experience violence (aOR=0.413, 95% CI=0.25-0.69) than those who do not have elderly in their household. Respondents of poor households were more likely to experience violence (aOR=4.5, 95% CI=3.0-6.8) than rich households.

Table 3: Adjusted Odds Ratios (aOR) and 95% Confidence Interval (CI) of the perceived risk of GBV due to COVID-19 among returnee migrants in Nepal

Selected predictors		Adjusted Odds Ratio	95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
Districts	Achham	3.757***	2.309	6.114
	Doti	0.795	0.554	1.142
	Kailali (ref.)	1.00		
Sex of the respondents	Female	2.088*	1.021	4.269
	Male	1.00		
Age group	Less than 20 years (ref.)	1.00		
	20-24	1.646	0.815	3.324
	25-29	2.448*	1.184	5.062
	30-34	2.646*	1.195	5.856
	35-39	6.125***	2.731	13.738
	40-44	5.211***	2.081	13.048
	45-49	3.490*	1.266	9.625
	50 or above	7.929***	2.849	22.068
Level of Education	Primary or below (ref.)	1.00		
	Lower secondary	4.129***	2.833	6.019
	Secondary	3.077***	1.864	5.079
	SLC and above	3.138***	1.896	5.195
Head of Household	No (ref.)	1.00		
	Yes	0.684	0.465	1.004
Family size	Up to 5 members (ref.)	1.00		
	6-8 members	1.175	0.850	1.624
	9 or more members	0.638	0.394	1.034
Physical disable	No (ref.)	1.00		
	Yes	4.453***	2.653	7.474
Have at least one Elderly in Household	No (ref.)	1.00		
	Yes	2.680***	1.840	3.904

Have at least one single woman in the household	No (ref.)	1.00		
	Yes	0.413**	0.248	0.689
Poor Household	Yes (ref.)	4.542***	3.036	6.796
	No	1.00		
Current food stock enough for	No stock/Food sufficient for less than a month (ref.)	1.00		
	Food sufficient for less than 61 months	0.698	0.475	1.025
	Food sufficient for more than 6 months	0.589	0.264	1.313
Constant		0.124***		
-2 Log-likelihood		1133.82		
Cox & Snell R Square		0.319		
Nagelkerke R Square		0.432		

Note: *** p<0.001, **p<0.01 and * p<0.05

Discussion

Our analysis shows that self-reported experienced of violence among returnee migrants is high (60 percent). However, a very high prevalence of violence was found in other countries, such as Cambodian migrants who work as fishers in Thailand found a high prevalence (93.5%) of physical violence (Surtees, 2014). Similarly, another study reported a higher prevalence of severe violence among Myanmar trafficked fishers (67.3%) in Thailand. Another study conducted in Thailand found that a lower percentage of migrants from Cambodia (26.3%) experienced violence (Baker, 2015). On the other hand, the relatively low prevalence was found in a study conducted in Thailand shows that 51 percent of male migrants and 48% female migrants had experienced violence (Meyer et al., 2018)

Our study found many predictors that contribute to the risk of violence. Districts, sex of the respondents, age of respondents, educational level, physical disable, presence of elderly in the household, presence of single women in the household, poor household were the significant predictors for the risk of gender-based violence. A similar result was observed in North India, where higher socio-economic factors were found as associated factors of violence. (Koenig, 2006).

Similarly, the study also revealed that the district (place of residence) and educational level of the respondents were associated with the risk of violence which was consistent with the study conducted in Ethiopia where

the majority of the respondents lived in rural areas (Semahegn, 2013) and similar to study conducted in Syangja, Nepal where more than half 57.7% (116) of pregnant women had secondary education level due to which they were able to share their experience regarding violence. (Gurung, 2016). In contrast to our findings, a study conducted in Bardiya, Nepal, shows that illiteracy and economic dependence are the main factors of violence (Khatri, 2013). NDHS 2016 report has shown that the likelihood of experiencing physical violence declines with the level of education. More than one in three women (34%) with no education have experienced physical violence, compared with fewer than 1 in 10 women with SLC or higher education (8%). However, in this study, unpredicted results were seen in regards to educational level. Migrants with lower secondary were about 4 times (aOR=4.1, 95% CI=2.8-6.0), secondary and SLC and above about 3 times more likely to experience violence than those who had primary or below education. These findings contrast with a study done in Dharan and Parsa District, where illiterate victims experienced domestic violence than literate victims. (Regmi, 2018 & Pradhan, 2011)

In this study, age was found to be highly significant to gender-based violence, which was similar to a study conducted in Dharan, Nepal (Regmi, 2017) and in contrast with the study conducted in Parsa, where the age variable had no association with the experience of gender-based violence (Pradhan, 2011)

As the World Report on Disability highlights, people with disabilities are at greater risk of violence than those without disabilities which is in line with the findings of this study. Disability was also found to be a risk factor for violence in a study conducted in England (Khalifeh, 2013) where people with disabilities were at increased risk of experiencing violence. Similarly, a study on violence and disability reported similar findings: adults with disabilities were at a significantly higher risk of violence than non-disabled adults. (Hughes, 2012)

Our study shows that the migrant who had the elderly in their households were more likely to experience violence. In general, low income, unemployment, economic stress, depression, emotional insecurity, and social isolation are some of the major risk factors of violence against partners. Many of these factors may worsen in the context of COVID-19, resulting in escalated incidents of different forms of violence (CDC & Godin, 2020)

Moreover, several kinds of literature have revealed showed that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, various cases of discrimination and social stigma (ILO 2020c, The Business Standard 2020), and violence against migrant workers (Kuo & Davidson 2020) had been reported, which makes them feel unsafe and insecure (ILO 2020c). Furthermore, a crisis created by COVID-10 has widened inequality, poverty and has a disproportionate impact on the vulnerable population such as migrants. In the context of Nepal, gender violence was

largely surfaced during the pandemic and nationwide lockdown (Poudel, 2020)

In conclusion, the experience of violence is high among returnee migrants of Sudurpashchim province of Nepal. Our study found that female migrants, physically disabled migrants, who had elderly in their houses, and migrants from poor households were more likely to experience violence. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive awareness program and services that can help to prevent violence among returnee migrants.

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COVID-19 and Its Association with Psychological Health of Children, Adolescents and Young Adults

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has been causing a severe threat to multiple sectors, including people's psychosocial health. The main objective of this review is to identify the association of COVID-19 pandemic with the psychological health of children, adolescents and young adults. Total 18 primary studies, including most of the studies being cross sectional descriptive studies, were included in the review. The review found that the prevalence of anxiety levels among children ranges from 23.87 % to 38%. Similarly, in adolescents, it ranged from 29.27% to 31% and depression level ranges from 22.28% to 44.5 %. The prevalence of depression in young adults was found to be nearly 82 % while the prevalence of anxiety was found to be nearly 88 %.Most of the studies identified COVID-19 as major factor contributing to anxiety, depression and sleep disorders in children, adolescents and young adults. In the review, almost half of the papers described the factors associated with mental health status due to COVID-19 pandemic. The major factors to increase anxiety and depression were found to be restriction on movement, social distancing, closures of schools, little interaction with peers, educational status, smartphone and internet addiction, frequent watching, listening, or reading news related with COVID-19. Thus, efforts must be initiated to improve services within the country to overcome the increasing mental health problems in these groups. The findings of this review would be relevant for all health professionals, medical persons, and educational institutions to sensitize them about the prevalence of psychological problems among children, adolescents and young adults in terms of overcoming and addressing this pressing issue.

Keywords: *COVID 19, psychological health, children, adolescent and young adults*

Introduction

The word coronavirus was derived from Latin word corona meaning crown. It is a group of RNA viruses that has ability to cause diseases in mammals and birds. In humans and birds, they cause a range of respiratory tract infections which range from mild to lethal. This virus has ability to cause mild illness like commoncold to more lethal varieties of diseases like SARS, MERS and COVID-19 (Liu et al., 2020).

The most common symptoms are fever, cough, body pain, diarrhea, vomiting, headaches, nausea, confusion, sore throat, chest pain and difficulty in breathing. This virus is airborne so that it can be transmitted through droplet infection. Primarily, COVID-19 is transmitted from one person to another from infected people when they have symptoms and can also happen just before they develop symptoms when the infected people are in close proximity with others (Poudel & Subedi, 2020). Corona Virus Disease-19 epidemic was reported first in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan, China. The unusual cases of patients with pneumonia, high fever and breathing difficulty were caused by COVID-19 and the disease was transmitted globally, thereby affecting more than 36 million people across the world, while the number of deaths reported to be 1,061,806 as of 8 October 2020 (Worldometer, 2020). People with underlying chronic diseases were found to have experienced more severe disease than those who are healthy. Severe cases of the disease had led to heart and respiratory failure, acute respiratory syndrome and even death. COVID-19 had physical as well as mental health problems in people who are infected and have mental health issues-, stress in infected person's family and other people as well (Torales et al., 2020).

The outbreak of COVID-19 has been declared a public health emergency with international concern as it caused the deaths of millions of people. However, there is little known about the disease. The disease is novel with less evidence base to formulate correct clinical decisions and every human being of any age and both sexes are equally susceptible to the disease. It has been increasing and spreading continuously despite various strategies and plans are put in place across the globe for preventing the disease outbreaks and reducing its impact (Administrator, 2020). Despite travel restrictions and countrywide lockdowns, the disease has spread in many countries of South East Asia, Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, Africa and the United States of America. Up to mid-September, one Asian country (India) and European countries as Spain, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, France, Switzerland, Turkey, Russia and the American countries- US, Mexico and Brazil- are the most affected countries by novel COVID-19 (Worldometer, 2020).

The coronavirus was found to have less effect on children as it has less symptomatic action in children, adolescents and youth. However, indirect effects other than direct diseased condition were found to be more in these age groups. The impacts on these age groups are multifaceted like psychological, mental, physical, social and cultural. Not only the health and wellbeing of these groups are affected but also the education, safety and psychosocial environment which again had direct effect on mental health condition of this population. Different studies had expressed their concern on heightened anxiety and stress on these age groups due to COVID-19. As they argued it may lead to an exacerbation of mental health problems in them (*Connecting with Children and Adolescents via Telehealth*

during COVID-19, n.d.). The disease has ability to carry a long lasting impact on behavioral and psychological consequences in human existence. Current death toll will create millions of orphans and homeless people. Parentless children, adolescents and youths are easy victims for abandonment, child trafficking, sexual exploitation, begging, child labor, malnutrition, hunger, teenage pregnancy, rape, child marriage and even death. There will be also the chance of juvenile delinquency, crime, unwanted pregnancy, unplanned abortion, substance abuse, self-harm and suicide (Usher et al., 2020).

Worldwide, 10-20 % children and adolescents suffer from some form of mental health problems (*Child and Adolescent Mental and Brain Health*, n.d.). It is reported that 1 in 10 children experience mental health problems globally. Mental health conditions account for 16 percent of the global burden of disease in people of age 10-19 years old (Sun et al., 2020). According to the National Mental Health Survey-2020. nearly 11 percent of the adolescents and 10 percent of adults is suffering from some form of mental health disorder in Nepal (*National Mental Health Survey, Nepal-2020 Fact Sheet*, n.d.).

The life of children, adolescents and young adults are full of emotional ups and downs. It is the age where external environmental changes have huge and immediate impact on the state of emotional and mental health. Bad temper and mood swings are common on these ages. COVID-19 might have increased these states of mind, causing different mental health problems (*Common Disorders in Young Adults | Dual Diagnosis*, n.d.). Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (Cho et al., 2021).

Childhood, adolescence and young adulthood are the most influential time for development of human mind. These phases of life are distinctly celebrated as the most important phases for learning social norms, and values, morals, principles, commendable social prototype, which are completely restricted by the pandemic situation. Children's brain, and brain of adolescents and young adults are rapidly growing and are easily affected by the environmental adversities resulted from the pandemic situation (Veer et al., 2021). When these groups of people are kept in restricted environment it can cause damages to the care and bonds necessary for the quality of healthy growth and development. Due to COVID-19, changes might have occurred in physical, social and emotional environment, including the increased risk of exposure of children, adolescents and young adults to abuse, violence ultimately leading to mental health problems (*How Teenagers Can Protect Their Mental Health during COVID-19 | UNICEF*, n.d.). The growth and development of these age groups people in affective social environment has been limited because of the lockdown.

The lockdown and restricted mobility of children, adolescents and youths has tendency to cause irregular sleeping habit, unfavorable diet plans, sedentary life styles and longer digital exposures, which have great impact on physical and mental health,- frustration, depression, obesity, etc. The pandemic had induced forced homestay and routine lifestyle which too had impact on mental health.

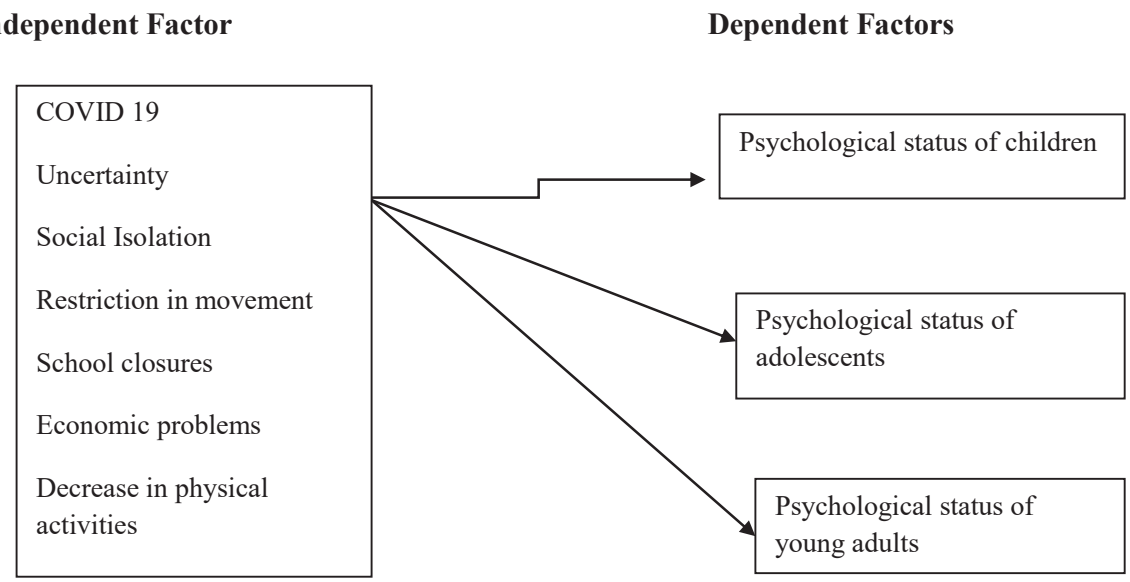
Significance of the study:

In the context of Nepal, 11.8 percent of the total population comprises adolescents where five percent suffered from anxiety and seven percent loneliness (*Mental Health Status of Adolescents in South-East Asia: Evidence for Action*, 2017). Adolescence is the period between 10-19 years which is the age of transition from child to an adulthood (Kaiser et al., 2021). In this phase, there are more chances of being mentally ill due to certain changes in the external environments, including the crisis like COVID-19 pandemic. So, this scoping review was done to find out about the impact of COVID-19 on mental health status of adolescents. All together 18 articles included the effects of pandemic on adolescents' mental health.

Due to pandemic and for lack of access to information, technology, employment opportunities and alternate forms of education, the young adults might be more vulnerable to anxiety, depression and other forms of mental illnesses (Reilly et al., 2021). In the study, we had taken age group from 20-29 as young adults. The COVID-19 pandemic became a triggering factor for the young adults who were already in vulnerable situation. This is the age where most of the young adults begin their career, enter adulthood responsibilities and due to the pandemic situation, the employment opportunities had decreased, thus causing stress, anxiety, depression in these people (*Common Disorders in Young Adults | Dual Diagnosis*, n.d.).

The COVID-19 pandemic is undoubtedly huge public health crisis. Children, adolescents and young adults are more vulnerable group of people because of their limited understanding of the disease and the panic caused by the pandemic. These groups of people have limited coping strategies, so they are more prone to be mentally ill. These groups of people might have less ability to communicate their feelings and problems with their seniors or parents (*Helping Children Cope with Emergencies | CDC*, n.d.). Because of the restrictions of mobility, their contact with peer group, to whom they share their feelings, might be less resulting into different mental health issues. The crisis created by COVID-19 has negative impact on psychological health and wellbeing of children, adolescents and young adults (Dalton et al., 2020). Thus, this study identified the prevalence of factors associated with mental illnesses among children, adolescents and young adults due to pandemic. Even the major types of mental illness have been identified to this regard.

Study Framework



Method

Search Strategy and selection criteria

Articles related to COVID-19 and its impacts on psychological health of children, adolescents and young adults were searched in Google Scholar, Pubmed, Litcovid, WHO COVID-19 Database and UNICEF Database. We used the terms Novel Corona Virus, Children, Adolescents, Young Adults, Impact, Psychosocial Health of Children, Adolescents and Young Adults in freely accessible research domains Lancet, Google Scholar, Pubmed. The data searched were done in 19 August 2020. All the articles from December 2019 till the date were searched. Articles with English language were included in the review work. We focused on children, adolescents and young adults from age 3 to 25 years old in the review.

This review article is based on the method of rigorous review of the literatures related to the impact of COVID-19 on children, adolescents and young adults. The articles were selected on the basis of the objective of review by reviewing their title, abstracts and full text. We included following types of studies in the review: cross-sectional study, case control studies, Cohort study design, descriptive study and longitudinal study. Screening on the basis of title and abstract were conducted independently by two researchers. A third researcher was involved in classifying those articles in line with the study objective. All the researchers were involved in full text review and data extraction. After reviewing full text by all the reviewers, the data extracted were compiled, summarized and necessary conclusion drawn from rigorous discussion.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The articles related to COVID-19 and children, adolescents and young adults were found very diverse. It had been difficult for us to cover all aspects of the impact of COVID-19 on children, adolescents and young adults. So, we had prepared inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria for the scoping review were, a) studies with primary data (empirical articles including quantitative studies, cross-sectional studies, longitudinal studies, Cohort study), b) focusing on children above 3 years, adolescents from 10-19 years and young adults from 20-25 years, and c) written in English language. For describing psychological health, we included anxiety, distress, depression, anger, frustration, loneliness, low motivation, insecurity, post traumatic distress and insomnia in the articles. Similarly, exclusion criteria were systematic review articles, meta-analysis articles, clinical cases, opinion papers, letters to editors and commentaries. Mental health articles, including study groups other than children, adolescents and young adults below 3 years and above 25 years were excluded in the study.

Results

Characteristics of Included Literature

In the scoping review, the search for the articles was done in search engines like Google scholar, Pubmed and litcovid. A total of 13,107 articles were gathered (7460 from Google scholar, 673.from Pubmed, 4910 from litcovid, 14 from JAMA and 24 from Chest). As many as 1941 articles were removed for being duplicate articles. Among 13,107 articles 18455 articles were removed because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Similarly, 60 articles were removed after reviewing full text articles, and 18 articles were removed for they were review articles. Finally, 18 articles were included in scoping review. As the COVID-19, a new disease emerged at the end of 2019, it was found that all the research works were conducted after the outbreak of disease. All the articles were found to be published in 2020 onwards.

Prevalence of Mental Health Illnesses

Children, adolescents and young adults have felt more isolated, anxious, bored and uncertain. Homeless, disabled, malnourished children, adolescents and young adults are at higher risk of getting infected with COVID-19 and are at greater risk of negative mental health outcomes.

It was found that the prevalence of anxiety levels among children ranges from 23.87 % to 38%. Similarly, in adolescents, it ranged from 29.27% to 31 % and depression level ranges from 22.28% to 44.5 % (Lopez-Serrano et al., 2021; Qi et al., 2020). The prevalence of depression in young adults was found to be nearly 82% while the prevalence of anxiety was found to be nearly 88 % in the review (M. A. Islam et al., 2020a).

It was found that in one of the studies, male adults had higher prevalence of depression and anxiety level (67.35%, 66.33%

respectively) than female (32.65%, 33.67% respectively). Also the adults with no physical exercise had both depression and anxiety (62.24% depression and 61.95% anxiety) (M. A. Islam et al., 2020b). Adults living in urban areas had higher level of depression and anxiety than those living in rural areas (47.5%-65.05% depression range, 40.4%-53.21% anxiety range) (Cao et al., 2020; M. S. Islam et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2020). With the increase in age, the anxiety depression symptoms were found to be increased i.e. the anxiety depression symptoms was found to be higher in young adults from age 20 to 25 than in adolescents and children (32%, 49%, 59% depression in children, adolescents and young adults respectively, 28%, 41%, 53% anxiety in children, adolescents and young adults respectively) (SJ et al., 2020). The prevalence of insomnia symptoms was 23.2%. The symptom was higher in young adults than adolescents, and higher in adolescents than in children (18%, 25.3% and 25.7% insomnia in children, adolescents and young adults respectively) (Davin-Casalena et al., 2021).

It was identified in one of the studies that children were misbehaving more since COVID-19. Irritability, restlessness, boredom, sadness with no reason, fighting with siblings, diminished trouble handling behavior, quick frustration, sleeping and eating disorder had increased after lockdown (Carroll et al., 2020).

Factors Associated with Mental Health Illnesses

During the COVID-19 pandemic, children, adolescents and young adults might have been exposed to direct and indirect factors that could have impact on their mental health illnesses. Mental health is considered as the most essential condition for quality life. We tried to identify different factors which might have influenced the mental health status of adolescents, children and young adults. In the review, almost half of the papers described the factors associated with mental health status due to COVID-19 pandemic. The major factors that have tendency to increase anxiety and depression were found to be restriction on movement, social distancing, school closures, low interaction with peers, educational status, smartphone and internet addiction, increased use of digital screens, continuous watching, listening, or reading news related to COVID 19, urban residency, family members or friends infected with coronavirus, being children of frontline health workers, level of anxiety, fear-physical injury fear, fear of separation, employment status, type of occupation, female gender, low social support, exposure to COVID-19 (Cohodes et al., 2021; Qi et al., 2020; Terzioğlu & Büber, 2021).

Discussion

Due to pandemic, community based mitigation strategies, such as restriction in social gathering, closure of parks, zoo, playgrounds have disrupted children's usual lifestyles which has potentially promoted

distress and confusion. Home confinement has made these age groups more demanding, thereby exhibiting impatience, annoyance and hostility. Overly pressurizing parents had unknowingly been pushing their children, adolescents and youth into the way of mental disaster. Stressors such as disappointment, lack of face-to-face contact with classmates, friends, relatives, dear ones, inadequacy of personal space at home and family's financial losses had potential to trigger troublesome and prolonged adverse mental health consequences.

The pandemic created the crisis on educational system. School is not only for children's education but it is also a second home for them where they interact with peers and seniors, and share their issues with each other. At school, they learn a lot like importance of personal hygiene, physical activity, healthy food, and healthy habits. Prolonged pandemic and subsequent lockdown and school closure had direct impact on child psychology. Millions of parents have been struggling for maintaining their livelihoods and for managing basic needs. This gap further increased because of unemployment resulted from COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, children are forced to stay inside home. All the normal daily activities like going to school, playing outdoor, going to parks and roaming around, outside home are interrupted. Moreover, when anyone in family and relatives suffers from infection or passes away, and the isolation and quarantine become mandatory, there will be more chance to be depressed, anxious or mentally ill (M & D, 2020).

The drastic change in lifestyles of children and adolescents- being confined in home with physical inactivity- has led to immediate and lingering psychosocial health issues. Children's wellbeing depends not only on health care, nutrition and parental care but also on social interaction with peers, physical activities outside home, school going, sharing of their activities with friends and companionship. Getting detached from peers and friends, watching fear-filled news in social media, and fear of getting infected, isolation and detachment from parents and near ones created everlasting psychiatric consequences including post traumatic disorder, anxiety, psychosis, depression, delinquency and even suicidal tendency (Humphreys, 2018).

Psychological wellbeing of children, adolescents and youth is mostly associated with the social, home and family environment where he/she enjoys upbringing. During lockdown, children spend more time in digital technologies like mobile, TV, and other gazettes and some children might experience cyber bullying or age inappropriate materials and advertisement. This might cause different psychological problems, leading to sleeping disorder, bedwetting, unusual food behavior, difficulty in attention or concentration, unexplained body aches and headaches in these age groups (Buheji et al., 2020).

Children, adolescents and youth of marginalized communities are the most vulnerable to COVID- 19 and other problems associated with COVID-19. As many as 33 million children were found to be living as migrants and refugees in 2019 as a consequence of conflict, violence, disasters and displacement. The pandemic has threatened to bring even more uncertainty and harm to the lives of those children. In low and middle income countries, children are living in slums while many are refugees, living in deprivation, in the overcrowded camps, where they lack adequate health care services, clean water, sanitation and personal hygiene. Because of this, they lack proper hand washing facilities like clean water and soap. Social distancing is also impossible. This may lead to greater chance of getting COVID-19 in addition to other infectious diseases like tuberculosis, dengue, malaria, ARI etc (Mari et al., 2021). Such children are at higher risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. Girl children are facing heightened risk of gender based violence, early marriage and teenage pregnancy. Discrimination and stigma related to COVID-19 have further resulted into crisis on protection of children belonging to the marginalized community.

Conclusion

This review paper gives insights on overall impact of COVID-19 on children, adolescents and young adults. The paper provides the guidance for the policy makers to develop a framework to help children overcome the difficulties and consequences following the pandemic. The whole world is learning a lesson that allow individuals, family, community, health care systems and educational system to revisit the services they currently are delivering and thus making them more efficient and effective that would combat the future crisis with less effect on children.

In further studies, it is recommended to include the assessment of the psychological impact of COVID-19 on three categories: psychological impacts of COVID 19, i) in children, adolescents and young adults who are COVID-19 patient and are isolated, ii) in children, adolescents and young adults whose parents are affected by COVID-19 and are isolated and lastly iii) in children, adolescents and young adults who are in home quarantine because of lockdown, school closure and restriction in social movement.

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Skilling People in Nepal: Reality Vs Dream[1]

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Abstract

Skilling people is channeled through formal, informal or non-formal education systems in Nepal. Formal education includes structured curriculum and mode of delivery where knowledge and skills are acquired in a hierarchical layer. Non-formal education includes the skill development activities in a less structured patterns, whereas imparting knowledge and skills from generation to generation falls under the category of informal mode of education. Similarly, skills development in formal system includes four different types of programs in Nepal. These are short-term training program, professional development program, secondary level technical and vocational education program (including diploma level program) and technical higher education program. This paper opens discussion on these programs, uncovers issues and challenges and suggests some measures for the improvement of program design and implementation.

While preparing the paper, secondary documents are analyzed. In some cases, author's experiences are also used. This article is expected to contribute knowledge to the skill development efforts in Nepal.

Key words: *apprenticeship, employability, skill testing, TVET, world of work.*

Introduction

Skilling people is prioritized in policy documents in Nepal. Almost 16 different ministries of Government of Nepal and its agencies are being involved directly or indirectly in the process of skilling people (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MOEST], 2076BSa). After the federalization, the involvement of provincial and local governments in this sector is also increased. In addition, the involvement of

1 *The ideas expressed in this paper do not represent the institutional representation as these are authors' personal opinions.*

non-governmental organizations and donors has also been continuing in this sector for many years. Despite this, the implementation of the programs remained fragmented and always experienced budget deficit and inadequacy.

This paper uncovers the status of skilling people in Nepal, maps out the components of skilling people, issues and challenges, and measures to be taken for betterment in future. Secondary documents are analyzed while developing this paper. It is hoped that this paper will be useful and relevant to those willing to begin or explore more on skilling process in Nepal.

Context

Skilling people has a long history with formal and informal approaches in Nepal. Formal approaches, through public policy and programs since 1951AD, include the interventions from the government together with the donor support channeled through the government mechanism. During this journey so far, interventions range from policy declaration to enactment of acts to the creation of new institutions to the formulation and implementation of new programs. One of the objectives of the education relating to skilling people in the 15th periodic plan is to expand the inclusive and equitable access to quality technical education and vocational skills development (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2020). Likewise, another objective relating to the higher education is making higher education scientific, innovative, research-oriented, technology-friendly and employment-oriented by expanding its access and enhancing quality for the development of knowledge-based society and economy (NPC, 2020). Both the objectives aim to equip people with necessary knowledge and skills that are relevant to the market, both national and international. The plan also includes the strategies and working policies which aim to facilitate the skill development process. In the same manner, *National Education Policy 2076* also includes the objectives of expanding and developing technical vocational education and training, and technical higher education in the country which are similar to the objectives of the 15th periodic plan (MOEST, 2076BSa).

The budget speeches of the Government of Nepal have also continuously highlighted the need for expanding the technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and development of higher education in the country. In FY 2078/79, the government shows its commitment to implement the concept of 70% enrollment of students in technical and vocational education and 30% in general education at the secondary level (Ministry of Finance, 2078BS). In addition to the government's efforts, several activities in support of non-governmental (both national and international) were implemented during the period. However, the available figures on labor force participation and employment are not encouraging (Dhital & Sharma, 2022).

Table 1: Labor Force Participation and Employability

Indicators	NLFS I	NLFS II	NLFS III
The labor force participation rate (15 years and above)	85.8	83.4	38.5
Percentage of currently employed aged 15 years and above	84	81.3	34.0
Time-related underemployment rate, as a percentage of currently active population aged 15	4.1	6.7	4.0
Labor underutilization rate	NA	30	39.3
Percentage of currently unemployed aged 15 years and above	1.8	2.1	11.4
Not in labour force (outside labour force)	NA	NA	61.5
Employment to population ratio (15 years and more)	84.3	81.7	34.2

Note: The results of NLFS I and NLFS II are comparable but NLFS III are not comparable with previous NLFSs due to the change of concepts and definitions.

(Source: Dhital & Sharma, 2022, p. 288)

Defining Skills

The term 'skill' is linked to the ability to do something which certainly comes after some sort of knowhow or knowledge. As per the Cambridge English Dictionary, the term skill refers to the ability to do an activity or job well (dictionary.cambridge.org). Therefore, skill is the ability or capacity of an individual which can be narrated in various ways. TVETipedia Glossary includes several definitions of skills which are relevant to the Nepali context. Some example of the definition retrived from the webpage of UNEVOC UNESCO sources are given below (unevoc.unesco.org):

- *"A bundle of knowledge, attributes and capacities that can be learnt and that enable individuals to successfully and consistently perform an activity or task and can be built upon and extended through learning" (Source: Towards on OCED Strategy, OECD, 2011).*
- *"The ability to do in context which is described using learning outcomes (Comment: Influenced by work-based learning: linking of education and training systems with the labour market and employability. Main types of skills include foundation, transferable, technical and vocational)" (Source: Level setting and recognition of learning outcomes: the use of level descriptors in 21st century. UNESCO 2015, Global).*

While defining skills, Armstrong (2010) refers to the Bloom's taxonomy of education which highlights the relationship with the knowledge as below.

The framework elaborated by Bloom and his collaborators consisted of six major categories: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. The categories after Knowledge were presented as "skills and abilities," with the understanding that knowledge was the necessary precondition for putting these skills and abilities into practice.

Sometimes, skills are linked to the job and employability. The assumption is that employability is based on the ability to perform a particular physical or mental activity that may be developed or acquired through training or practices. Adams (2011) linked the skills to the employability and earnings because these are closely associated with the market demand.

From these definitions, we can infer that skills are a set attributes that can be developed through planned or unplanned interventions or practices. Human acquired skills from trial and error method in the beginning of their civilization. They learned through observation, imitation, practices and challenges they encountered during their life spans.

In this way, some skills are transferred from the generation to generation in the human history. Later, more structured approaches, both informally and non-formally, are adopted to develop skills. Such approaches are embedded into formal system.

Hence, skill development is a process where learners and workers are systematically provided learning opportunities or qualification for a job or range of jobs (unevoc.unesco.org). In this way, skills are developed or acquired through non-formal or informal or formal mechanisms. These three mechanisms are inter-related. In this paper, skill development only through formal mechanisms is discussed.

Skilling Efforts Through Formal System

In the formal system, skill development efforts in Nepal can be categorized broadly under four major layers (MOEST, 2075BS) which are given below. It means skilling people in Nepal are planned through:

1. Short term training program
2. Professional training program
3. Secondary level or diploma level education program
4. Technical higher education level education program

Under each category, the discussions on the meaning, concepts, existing status, challenges and way forward are discussed in the coming sections.

Skill development through short term training program

Short term vocational training is the provision of providing need-based training in specific skills through non-formal means to the target population so that they can improve their performance in the workplace or improve their living standard with the maximum

utilization of local resources. Similarly, short term training is employment-based training to develop competencies in specific occupations (Sharma, 2005).

The short term training in TVET enhances performance in specific skill gaps and allows trainees to acquire new skills for new occupations that can enable better employment. Several training providers/ institutions implement short term vocational training. In some trades, even polytechnics provide short term training programs in Nepal. Constituent technical schools affiliated with the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) also provide short term vocational training (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2015).

The short term training is implemented in most of the developing countries with an objective to link with the employment and contributes to the quality of life and the national economy (Hartl, 2009). Nepal is also the country that emphasizes short term training to enhance employment. In Nepal, 50,000 youths are trained every year through short courses (CTEVT, 2021). These trainings are implemented by several ministries and their constituent organizations. Likewise, non-governmental organizations are also being involved in such activities but the pertinent question is whether these trainings contributed to the youths for employment and met the demands of the employers. The short term training in Nepal focuses the traditional based occupations, but lags in market demanded occupations like artificial intelligence-driven occupations.

CTEVT, an apex body of TVET has developed 260 short term curricula and 304 national occupational skill standards (CTEVT, 2021). The short term training is designed to meet the skill demanded by the market and employers so that trainees could be linked to employment in a short period. These short term trainings are coordinated by CTEVT and implemented through 676 public training providers and 1,370 affiliated training providers (CTEVT, 2022). These short term trainee's skill test is conducted by National Skill Testing Board (NSTB) which is in operation for almost four decades for both non-formal and informal learners (ADB, 2015; NSTB, 2018). Its responsibility is to conduct skill tests and certify skilled and semi-skilled workers. The skill test will pave the path for the career through the informal and non-formal stream of education and assure the decent employment.

Public and private training providers, affiliated with the CTEVT system, run the short term training programs. But, several non-governmental organizations, registered in District Administration Office or Social Welfare Council, also run such short term training programs. However, they are not included in the number given below.

Table 1: Short term training providers and skill standards

1	Number of Vocational Curriculum	260
2	Number of Skill Standards	304
3	Public Training Providers	676
4	Private Training Providers	1370

Source (CTEVT, 2022)

The above statistics show that private sector affiliated short term training providers are double the public training providers. A huge number of technical training providers (TTPs) have not been registered or affiliated with the CTEVT. The expansion of TTPs is increasing in recent years- the short term training TTPs totaled 1,131 last year (CTEVT, 2020) alone. Although the nation's objective is to provide TVET access to all local levels, these 1999 TTPs are located mainly in the urban areas. The objective of the short term training is to link the training directly with the livelihood of the people and enhance the gainful income (Von Kotze, 2010).

Therefore, the skills acquired through training should directly contribute to the income of people, otherwise the training is worthless. But, the concern here is to what extent the existing training offered by the providers match the actual needs. The quality of the training provided by several training providers is yet another concern. If training may not help participants to develop their skills, it may not contribute to improving the income of the participants. In these cases, the value of the training will be low.

Different 16 ministries are running these types of short courses (MOEST, 2018). Due to the involvement of several governmental and non-governmental agencies in this program, overlapping in program design, duplication of the training, repetition of trainees for different occupations are traced in these short course programs (MOEST, 2076BSb). During the design, it is claimed that these training programs are highly demand-driven, but in actual practice, these are concentrated in supply-driven modes, as these are mainly focused on the traditional occupations. In most cases, there may be poor linkages with the actual needs of the community people. Indigenous skills practiced in the community are almost on the verge of extinction, and the modernization of the existing short term training program is hardly focused. Because of the absence of a common framework, these training programs may vary each other in terms of duration, coverage, implementation modality and scopes.

Skill development through professional courses

Before talking about the professional development course, it is important to explore the meaning of the professional development. An opportunity to learn and apply new knowledge and skills that can help people in their professions, or job or further their career has been becoming important and demanding. It is obvious that continuous learning leads to better performance. Similarly, learning can happen throughout the life span of an individual. As the pace of the technology is rapid in every profession, demand and update in the latest knowledge and skills is becoming mandatory. Such demand can be fulfilled through professional development courses. Antley (2020) defines the professional development as education and learning in a continuous manner in order to be updated in the latest knowledge and skills relevant to the professions or jobs. He further defines the professional development

in the following manner: "Professional development refers to continuing education and career training after a person has entered the workforce in order to help him/her develop new skills, stay up-to-date on current trends, and advance career" (para. 3).

In this manner, any sort of education, training or program that aims to support anyone willing to develop some knowledge and skills relevant to his/her profession or job can be kept under the professional development course. This is taken as ongoing process of developing, maintaining and documenting the professional skills (www.skillsyouneed.com). A person can acquire such skills formally through the courses or training or informally through practicing or job placements or observing others. This course is often named as continuing professional development.

By nature, professional courses are aimed at enhancing the professional capacities and competencies of an individual but the scope, coverage, duration and implementation modality may vary each other. The course may depend upon the interest of the participants and nature of the skills required to the market. These courses are mostly non-credited and can be run by academic institution and private companies as a modular program. Mostly, professional organizations offer such professional development courses.

The professional courses help to add "modern skills" (www.teachhub.com) components within an individual that may range from basic to the higher level skills. The debate on such modern skills is focused on the 21st century skills. In this regard, the 21 lessons outlined by Yuval Noha Harari in his book *21 Lessons for 21st Century* (Harari, 2018) are also worth for enhancing the skills required for the 21st century.

At present, most of the professional programs are managed by the private sectors in Nepal. The companies working in the education and training related professions offer professional development courses of varying nature and attributes. However, there are some professional courses under CTEVT, aiming at developing skills for those who are already in jobs or searching for jobs. The professional courses conducted by CTEVT are of 1,696 hrs. which consist of 164 hrs basic module, 956 hrs. professional module and 576 hrs. On the Job Training (OJT). There are 13 professional courses, which are Professional Welder, Professional Vehicle Body Repair Technician, Professional Plumber, Professional Motorcycle Mechanics, Professional Mason, Professional Light Vehicle Mechanic, Professional LCD, LED TV Repair Technician, Professional Cook, Professional Carpenter, Professional Building Electrician, Professional Aluminum Fabricator, Professional Telecom Technician and Professional Computer Hardware And Network Technician (CTEVT, 2022). In the context of Nepal, such courses are limited in number and some of the courses are highly valued. They are becoming competitive and constantly changing (Trevor, 2020). Institutions offering professional courses usually provide certificates to the graduates of the programs.

Skill development through secondary education (including diploma level program)

Because of the universalization of basic education and improving the transition rates from basic to secondary education, the enrolment in secondary education has increased in recent years. This is becoming like a massification of secondary education as mentioned by Pavlova and Maclean (2013). Secondary education in Nepal includes three streams, these are general, technical vocational and traditional (Curriculum Development Center, 2076BS). In this way, Secondary education in Nepal has two purposes, first, preparing students for the higher education, and second, equipping graduates with the relevant skills and competencies that allow them to enter into the world of work. The aims of these programs are to equip secondary level age group students and make them able to contribute to the economy by utilizing their skills and competencies as middle level skillful people. In this way, secondary education helps to prepare the middle level work force where general secondary education helps to equip students with the foundational skills. Similarly, technical secondary education contributes directly to enhance the technical skills.

Technical secondary education consists of three different programs which are given below:

1. Pre-diploma including apprenticeship
2. Grade 9-12 program
3. Diploma level program (after grade 10)

Pre-diploma (TSLC program)

The aim of the TSLC program is to produce basic and middle level competent human resource required for the country and the world (CTEVT, 2022). At present, the list of Pre-diploma (TSLC) programs providers (public and private) is as follows:

Table 2: Pre-diploma (TSLC) programs by public and private institutions

SN	Programs	Providers	
		Public	Private
1	Engineering	141	117
2	Hospitality	2	3
3	Agriculture	244	63
4	Health*	5	147
4	Others	3	14
	Total	**395**	**344**

*The health program in pre diploma has been phased out.

Source (CTEVT, 2021)

The gap is being observed in capacity to enroll students and actual intake. However, in-depth analyses are yet to be carried. Capacity in terms of enrolment and existing intake are given below: The statistics shows the intake is in the decreasing trend as compare to the enrollment capacity. This brings the picture for the discourse that having the demand of these technical human resource in the market but the trainees are least interested to pursue to enroll in the pre-diploma course. Therefore this gap needs to consider while implementing the policy.

Table 3: Enrolment capacity and intake

SN	Programs	Enrolment Capacity	Annual Intake
1	Engineering	13191	5213
2	Health	9390	0
3	Hospitality	250	79
4	Agriculture	14484	4871
5	Others	670	153
	Total	**37985**	**10316**

Source: (CTEVT, 2022)

The pass percentage of the last three years shows that pass rate is in between 77% to 81%. The pass rate of the pre-diploma should be higher than this as its composition of the curriculum is 20% : 80% of theory and practical with the OJT. Pass percentage of three educational years are as follows:

Table 4: Pass percentage of three educational year in pre-diploma level

Academic Year	Registration	Graduation	Pass (%)
2073/74	24167	19728	82
2074/75	24268	18607	77
2075/76	27967	22519	81

Source (CTEVT, 2021)

Two arguments revolve around this program which often contradicts each other. First, some argue that such program should be phased out or upgraded in equivalent to the diploma level program in order to meet the middle level human resource requirement of the country. For example, *Rastriya Chikista Shiksha Ain [National Medical Education Act] 2075* clearly includes the provision of either phase out or upgrade of the health related pre-diploma program (www.lawcommission.gov.np).

Second, the existing programs are relevant to the country; therefore they should be run in

as of it. For example, the graduates of this program are working in health posts located in remote parts of the country. The graduates are working as the backbone of the basic health (and other sectors too) services system of the country. The report published by the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) on *National Strategy of Health Workers in Nepal* highlighted the existing midwife and Auxiliary Nurse Midwife worker are 18632 and projected the requirement of these worker will be 64764 by 2025 and projection for the 2030 will be 81360, which indicates that by 2030 the requirement of such workers are 4 times then at present (MOHP, 2021). But the question is government has phased out the production of these human resources. There is no institutions which offer PCL miewife program, so discourse is how nation meets the demand of the market.

The available statistics show that these programs are limited in number and beyond the reach of many young people and rural parts of the country. In order to accommodate the large share of those with basic education, there is a need of massive expansion of the providers in the rural regions. The target groups of this program are those young people (after age of 13) who do not continue their education (especially secondary education) because of family's financial and other personal matters. The majority of providers fall under the category of private which charges fees from students. The total share of enrollment of the pre diploma by the private organization is 19834 out of 37985 which is 52.22% of the total enrollment (CTEVT, 2022). Such direct cost associated to the program made difficult for the poor family to pay fees. In addition, other logistics as indirect costs also became burden to such families. Hence, despite being a useful program it is limited in number.

Grade 9-12 program

Secondary education in Nepal is four to five year program for the age group of 13-17 years, depending upon the general secondary, and technical and vocational education. This program includes general education program, technical vocational education program, Sanskrit education program and some religious streams. Secondary education prepares students for both higher education or for the world of work. Of them, Grade 9-12 technical vocational education is one. This program only includes five different disciplines as civil engineering, computer engineering, mechanical engineering, agriculture and Veterinary science.

Till now, 484 public secondary schools run these programs covering altogether 425 local levels of the total 753 local levels (cehrd.gov.np). These programs are running only in public schools and do not charge fees from the students.

The total number of schools by discipline, enrollment capacity and pass percentages are as follows:

The capacity in terms of enrolment and existing intake are,

Table 5: Number of Schools by Discipline and Enrolment capacity

SN	Programs	Number of Schools	Enrolment Capacity
1	Civil Engineering	129	24768
2	Electrical Engineering	35	6720
3	Computer Engineering	100	19200
4	Plant Science	178	34176
5	Animal Science	42	8064
6	Music Education	1	192

(Source: cehrd.gov.np)

In terms of pass percentage of grade 9-12 programs, the data received from National Examination Board looks as below;

Table 6: Pass percentage of 9-12 program

SN	Year	Number of Students	Pass percentage
1	2074	2575	18.52
2	2075	1941	11.43
3	2076	1859	7.20
4	2077	4969	23.52
5	2078	5749	72.39

In letter grading system those students who are eligible for transcript are considered as pass for this calculation purpose.

The relevance and effectiveness of the programs are yet to be assessed. However, argument is that the graduates of the program are willing to go for further study and are less attracted or motivated to go to the work. This may be either because of the unavailability of the jobs in the market or mismatch in the selection of students for the program. Those, who can afford higher education as a continuous manner after completing secondary education, do not need to go to the technical vocational education. Such students get enrolment in general secondary education and after its completion, they can join higher education.

Schools with this program do not have adequate lab and equipment. The ample of the practical work needed to accomplish this program is weak which makes the enhancement of the skill on graduates are not as demanded by the employers. The availability of the qualified teachers is another concern. Even the support mechanism and monitoring are also not so robust, thereby affecting the implementation of the program. However, the objective of the program is to expand the coverage of the program in the remote parts of the country, thereby increasing accessibility of the targeted groups. Still, the industry-institute linkage is elusive.

Diploma level program

This program is secondary level equivalent program governed by the CTEVT. It has been running in four different types of institution. First, CTEVT's constituent technical schools and polytechnic are the public institutions where programs under different disciplines are being run. Second, private company also offers diploma level program. The programs

in these institutions are managed from the student fees.

Third, public secondary schools also offer diploma level programs. Till now 472 schools run diploma level programs (named as TECS) covering 321 local levels out of 753 local levels; such public schools are simply the venue of the program and increase the number of TECS school (CTEVT, 2022).

Fourth is CTEVT is running 42 partnership modality schools.

Though quality, relevance, education and employment linkage is missing, they still receive token support from the government (CTEVT, 2021). Many schools run their program from student fees. Private companies also run diploma level programs. There are altogether 429 affiliated (private) schools that run diploma program in health, engineering, agriculture, hospitality and hotel management. The total share of enrollment of the diploma by the private providers is 14758 out of 45584 which is 32.03% of the total enrollment (CTEVT, 2022). Therefore, these institutions charge fees under the concept of the cost recovery principle.

The number of programs, enrolment and pass rate are as follows:

Table 7: Diploma level by public and private institutes

SN	Programs	Providers	
		Public	Private
1	Engineering	34	103
2	Health	174	37
3	Hospitality		15
4	Agriculture	7	62
5	Forestry	2	24
6	Others	1	13
	Total	**218**	**254**

Source: (CTEVT, 2021)

The capacity in terms of enrolment and existing intake are given below:

Table 8: Enrolment capacity and intake

SN	Programs	Enrolment Capacity	Annual Intake
1	Engineering	19002	8655
2	Health	13662	11212
3	Hospitality	520	118
4	Agriculture	10440	5130
5	Forestry	1880	864
6	Others	80	8
	Total	**45,584**	**25,987**

Source (CTEVT, 2021)

Pass percentage by programs are as follows:

Table 9: Pass percentage of three fiscal year in diploma level

Academic Year	Registration	Graduation	Pass (%)
2073/74	18067	9945	55
2074/75	24279	11550	48
2075/76	26122	14420	55

Source (CTEVT, 2021)

The graduates of these diploma programs enter into the market as they are expected to possess relevant skills for the market. However, mismatch between the market demand and supply visibly appeared in the surface. As a result of the low investment in education and little priority to practices, diploma level programs are limited in few places- mostly concentrated in urban areas. The schools which are located in rural setting do not have adequate lab facilities, equipment, qualified teachers and support mechanism.

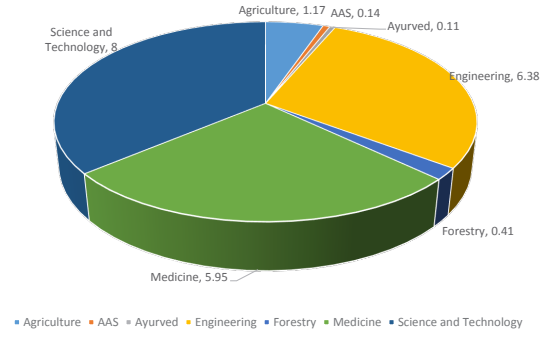
Diploma level programs are for those students who cannot continue their higher education because of the financial constraints facing the families. Such programs should largely be based on the involvement of students in practical work- either in workshop or field or in a company. In some cases, schools used more theoretical discussion in teaching and learning rather than engaging students in practical sessions. This might be because of unavailability of relevant lab facilities, equipment, teachers' attitude and motivation. The absence of monitoring and follow up also contributed to school's non-performing in practical session. In a few cases, no differences are observed in the teaching and learning of general and technical vocational schools.

Skill development through technical higher education

The aim of the technical higher education is to produce graduates with higher level skills and competences in the areas of science and technology, information technology and technologies. As one of the branches of the higher education, technical higher education is being managed by the higher education institutions, especially by the universities and academics.

Currently, technical higher education includes the disciplines of engineering, medicine, agriculture, forestry, health profession, information technology etc. University Grants Commission ([UGC, 2019/20) provides the composition of student enrollment in different disciplines of the higher education. The report further states: The enrollment proportion in terms of the field of the education is 77.83 percent of the total enrollment (466,828 students) in general program and 22.17 percent in technical program. This share is further disaggregated this way:

Chart 1: Share of students in different disciplines of technical higher education (total students 4668282)



(Source: UGC 2019/20)

Both skills and knowledge are considered the driving forces of the economic growth the social development (Sachan, 2017). Such skills and knowledge can be provided with the provision of higher education, especially higher technical education in the country. But the above situation indicates that the situation of higher technical education is limited in number, their coverage and capacity. In order to equip students with market and life skills, relevant skills, the focus should be given in skill development activities from early schooling to the higher education.

Concerns and Roadmap Ahead

What proportion of students should go to the technical and vocational secondary education after completing basic education (grade 8)? Likewise, what proportion should go to the technical higher education? Pavlova and Maclean (2013) mentioned about the participation of students in pre-vocational or vocational programs from the developed countries as follows:

In most OECD countries with dual system apprenticeship programs (Austria, German, Luxemburg, Netherland and Switzerland) and in Australia, Belgium, The Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Norway and Slovenia, 55% or more of upper secondary students are enrolled in pre-vocational or vocational programs. However, countries like Canada …. Japan, Korea ……., the United Kingdom……. Israel, 60% or more of upper secondary students are enrolled in general programs even though vocational programs are offered.

In case of Nepal, about less than 2% of the students of secondary enrollment are enrolled in technical vocational education program. In order to accommodate 50% of the secondary level enrollment, more than 7,000 public schools should run such program with full capacity of intake. For this, a huge investment is required to run the program in 7,000 plus public schools. In addition, a large number of teaching and non-teaching personnel is required.

The technical and vocational education is costlier than the general education. The concern is how we afford the cost of massive expansion of technical vocation education in secondary level. Patrinos and Psacharopolous (2020) argued that the vocational education costs about twice that of the general education whereas the graduates of general and vocation education have more-or-less equal earnings. From the above situation, we came to know that technical vocational education is more expensive as compared to the general education because

of factors such as smaller classes and the cost of tools and equipment and consumable learning materials supplies as discussed by Pavlova and Maclean (2013). It indicates that general secondary education is more profitable than vocational education in terms of the rate of return. In some cases, the costs of the vocational education programs grossly exceed the benefits.

The cost to provide skill training to large number of youth and adults is another concern of skilling people in Nepal. Similarly, the expansion and development of technical higher education is costlier than the costs associated in above programs.

The concern at this point of time is how we can afford the costs of expanding skill development in Nepal. Are we able to manage such costs? For this, long term plan is necessary. Huge costs are required from public funding for the expansion of skill development in Nepal as the fund should go from the public sources.

Similarly, adequate attention is required for the design and implementation of skill development program in an integrated manner. The restructuring of the existing program and institution is necessary. The question is how and who can do it. Skills are developed by engaging participants in works or jobs, or practice. In order to do so, combination of both theoretical and practical components is required in the curriculum. Even more important is to apply the practical component in the actual practice. Do we have patience and passion to accomplish all these? If not, the outputs may not be salable in the market. Once the participants do not practice in real world setting, the skills and competencies are not embedded with him or her. Engaging students in practices as demanded by the curriculum, teachers' dedication and motivation matters are must.

Teachers/instructors, head teachers/principals and schools must be made accountable for enhancing skills in students and effective teacher support system must be in practices which consists of refresher training to teachers, exposure to the industry, logistics to carry out the required activities, and discussion with supervisor, experts etc. The expansion of skill development activities from level 1 to the higher technical education given above are entirely running in the absence of proper planning, mapping and demand analysis. Skill development programs should be developed and implemented in such a manner where nobody can raise a question about the use of scarce resources. All these should be done with proper analysis and rationale. Hence, the integrated policy framework is required that guide and coordinate the skill development activities.

The annual intake in secondary level TVET program does not seem as per the capacity and the pass percentage in this level is also weak. The result does not provide the encouraging scenario in technical higher education as well. All these indicate the low efficiency and low quality of the program to some extent. The measures to improve the situation should also be kept in high priority. The discussion on TVET fund and the

measures alike do not address the concern of integrated skill development framework. The linkage between the diploma and Grade 9-12 program with the higher technical education must be explored and implemented so that they provide the measures to utilize the existing resources i.e. laboratory, human resources and equipment.

The secondary level education program must be considered as a feeder program of the higher technical education program. For this, technical higher education program should be revisited to make them relevant to the human resource requirements of the national development rather than focusing only on single disciplined technical higher education. In order to address the shortage of qualified instructors/teachers and teaching and non-teaching staff in skill development program, measures to utilize the existing human resources and graduates as interns should be explored. Lab facilities can also be shared so that it may minimize the costs to some extent. Linkages between different programs must be established. The existing secondary level program must be clustered under the jurisdiction of the existing higher technical education institutions. The academic supervision should be kept within the responsibility of these institutions which can train feeder school teachers, provide academic guidance, monitor the performance and suggest measures for improvement. The existing programs, status of lab, equipment and human resources, support mechanism and linkages with market and industries must be reviewed and taken concrete steps for their improvement. Time bound action plan is needed to upgrade them with necessary resources. Moreover, an investment plan must be put in practice.

There is a need for expanding the coverage and reach of the program which must be based on the need, fulfillment of the standard and requirement. In some place, more support might be needed.

The incentives to students of secondary level technical vocation education and technical higher education program are required. Support should be designed in such a way that should cover both the direct and indirect cost of education. In order to make program responsive and accessible to the targeted group only tuition fee waiving may not be adequate as they need support for indirect cost as well. The scholarships for the meritorious students can be the schemes to attract bright students. And, there must be a mechanism of linking school with the industry and market. Pavlova and Maclean (2013) discussed about the rate of return on investment in vocational education which largely depend upon the stage of development of a country. They suggested that in low income countries primary education is the best investment, the expansion of secondary education may give high social return for middle income countries and return may be greatest in higher education in high income countries. So this should be considered while making decisions on investment across the different sub sections of education. During this process, demand driven approaches to vocationalization must be linked with the

stage economic development that may yield the high return from the public investment.

Conclusion

Because of the universalization of compulsary and free basic education and improved efficiency of basic education system, more students enter into secondary education, thus making a move towards the massification of the secondary education. As nation is looking to increase the ratio of TVET participation in the secondary education to make the dream reality quality TVET education, education employment linkage at local level, industry experienced instructors and path for the further career needs to be assured. Likewise to contribute in the nation's economy number of the Efforts of skilling people in Nepal are implemented from various ways for many years. However, inadequate access, low quality and relevance, limited participation, and fragmentation in the design and implementation are some of the issues which are being observed in most of the cases. For improving the situation, investment in education, especially in skill development programs, should be increased together with the development and implementation of integrated framework in the skill development efforts. Before putting these interventions in practice, urgent actions for the mapping of the existing provisions and upgrading their situations are necessary.

Massive efforts for the pre-vocationalization of basic education and vocationalization of secondary education in line with the social, economic and technology rationales are imperative. This will help to produce the quality graduates who can engage themselves in self-employment or in job market. Such skill development efforts must be linked with the economic and social development policy. So, skill development does not work in isolation, rather it is directly linked with the economic development of the country and cultural traditions. More holistic approach is useful for skilling people in Nepal rather than compartmentalization into different components or programs which will assure the dream of making nation prosperous through the TVET.

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