

Are Informal Skills Learning valued?

Positioning informal skills learners in the TVET system of Nepal



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More than eighty percent of all employees in Nepal works in the informal sector. These workers generally lack formal skills training and acquire skills while performing the work under the guidance of skilled workers. Despite the long history of TVET, the system rarely recognizes such informally learnt skills at work. The paper explores the position obtained by informal skills learners in the existing TVET system of Nepal. It concludes that informal skills learners are not getting appropriate position and the main reason for this situation is the prevalence of a phenomena called Pervasive Loitering Syndrome (PLS) across different layers of the society.

Introduction

Skills transfer system from senior crafts person to novice skills learner is the rooted practice of skills learning in most of the traditional occupations in Nepal. Even in the sector of other modern (non-traditional) occupations similar practice can be seen. However, such skills acquisition practice is not incorporated in the mainstream TVET system.

Skill testing and certification practice exist in the country since four decades. Till date, about 500 thousand people participated in skill test (NSTB, 2018). This number indicates very less attraction of youth towards skill test in comparison to the proportion of workers (more than eighty percent) working in the informal sector (NSTB, 2018; World Bank, 2019) and learning skills informally. Similarly, multiple TVET providers including government, non-government and private sector are focussed on formal and non-formal education and training.

Realizing the vitality of apprenticeship training in Nepal, Industrial Trainee Training Act, 2039 (1982) was formulated and enacted even at the decade of nineties (Government of Nepal [GoN], 1988). However, the Act was not implemented and thus, informal skills learners could not be the target of national TVET system.

In this context, the paper explores and analyzes the position that informal skills learners are getting in the existing TVET system of the country. The argument is that the main reason for getting less value by informal skills learners is rooted in the existence of a phenomenon I call "pervasive loitering syndrome" towards valuing skills, work and occupations. Such phenomena exist among different tiers of Nepali society starting from an individual person to family, society, private sector as well as civil society and ultimately the polity of the country.

Informal Skills Learners: Are They Getting the Position?

Based on the information received from the research participants, from both TVET experts and informal skills learners, it was found that the informal skills are not counted by the TVET system of the country. Other two problems associated with this situation found that there is lacking awareness raising and motivational programmes targeted to informal skills learners. Furthermore, they also found dissatisfied with the government's



working approach that it is neglecting their concerns and continuing their focus on formal and non-formal trainings.

Informal Skills Learners: Victims of Pervasive Loitering-Syndrome (PLS)

It is evident that the situation for informal skills learning is unfavorable because all levels of social actors including family, society, private sector and the government are less valuing informal skills, work and occupations. It ultimately hinders informal skills learners for getting appropriate place in the national TVET system. Why skills, work and occupations are not getting appropriate value and thus why informal skills learners are not getting sufficient opportunity for progressing their career? Based on the findings, the answer is drawn that the society and ultimately the TVET system is not doing what actually have to do.

To express the phenomena of 'not doing what actually have to do', a Nepali word "Baralinu" is used which is more nearer to 'Loitering'. This word 'loitering' is used in both day-to-day language as well as in academia depending upon the context and field. Nevertheless, this is mainly used for denoting an undesired behaviour of people. Those people who have either "abundance" of time or do not value time and spend their time in public spaces with activities such as gossiping, watching, wandering to being aligned with committing petty criminal activities is generally understood as loitering (Jabar, Abdul Razak, Syed Wahid, Abdul Rahman, & Paino, 2012; Ener, 1999; Amsa, 1986). Here, an appropriate phrase 'pervasive loitering syndrome' (PLS) is used which is found prevalent not only at the individual or family level but also at the society, business and industry as well as in the government level. As the phenomena of loitering is spreading at all levels of the Nepali society, the adjective 'pervasive' in front of the word 'loitering' is used. Similarly, the word 'syndrome' is used for expressing the 'undesired' symptoms.

Regarding prevalence of pervasive loitering syndrome in different layers of Nepali society, multiple examples can be found. Actually, Nepali are hard-working people but they are influence by the prevailing norms of the society. The expression of one journalist seems convincing that "Nepalis are said to work hard, but only when they are outside Nepal. At home, manual work is regarded as shameful" (Chitrakar, 2018). Seeing the Jagire (white collar) mentality and the nature of average youth spending time in unproductive activities such as playing cards and carom neglecting work at their own home, supports the assumption being in a situation where one does not need to be involved in manual labor for living (Chitrakar, 2018). As Bista (1991) mentioned, the "white-collar" mentality of Nepali society is associated with the historical occupational hierarchical system. Even those groups of people who were practising traditional occupations since generations have also nowadays started to divert the occupation of their children (Chapagain, 2000; Chetry, 2010). For advocating recognition of informal skills learners, the private sector also is not playing proactive role and their contribution is generally limited to operating private technical institutions (SKILLS, 2016). Furthermore, numerous civil society organizations, which are mostly located in urban locations, are also not contributing in favor of informal skills learners (Sharma, 2012, as cited in Bhatta, 2016, p. 81).

The role of the government not only in the past but also at present is continuing its ritualistic practice of conducting formal and non-formal TVET activities. Even after the political transformation to the federal system, the state is failing to provide the desired services to the people (Nightangale, Bhattarai, Ojha, Sigdel, & Rankin, 2018). Changing the



work culture and value system seems inevitable in Nepali TVET system as ILO (2016) recommends.

TVET in Nepal: Inevitability for focusing on informal skills learners

The paper sheds light on the present situation of informal skills learning and the position obtained by informal skills learners in the TVET system of Nepal. It concludes that valuing skills, work and occupation is the prerequisite for the establishment of a broader system of recognizing informal skills learning. However, it was found lacking in the context of Nepal in a broader sense. One of the reasons behind this situation is the Pervasive Loitering Syndrome (PLS) existing across different levels of the society and amongst youths. The paper concludes that the informal skills learners will get appropriate recognition when they are valued by the TVET system including individual and the society. This is only possible when national TVET system massively targets its activity to informal skills learners.

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