

Choosing Technical Education and Vocational Training: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

Technical education and vocational training (TEVT) have been given a special place in the national development plan as well as in the educational policies of Nepal. The recent allocation of Rs. 1.38 billion by the government for the fiscal year 2019/20 for providing employment-related trainings and establishing technical schools in the country supports this claim. The government has recognized its potential in being able to alleviate poverty, improve livelihood strategies and provide employment opportunities. Adopting a narrative inquiry method, I interviewed three participants to explore the perception of youths towards this sector. The study revealed that one of the main barriers in choosing technical education and vocational training is the high value the society places upon general education in comparison to vocational education. It also revealed how we have been hegemonised by the ideologies flouted by the dominant class in society and readily give consent to these ideas. I argue that though the government has placed due emphasis on TEVT, its successful implementation can only be possible when the social perception on the divide between general education and technical and vocational education is brought to an end.

Keywords: *technical education, societal influence, hegemony*

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Introduction

I have often heard from the elders as well as neighbours during Dashain¹, 'May you study and be a great person, study higher and higher, get good grades, become a doctor, engineer, pilot, bank manager, earn a lot of money and maintain or uplift the dignity of the family'. Even though the blessing may differ based on the community which a person belongs to, generally the common notion behind these blessings is that 'you need to be a person who keeps up the dignity of the family'. As the custom, the younger members of the family take 'blessings' from elders, which is considered important. Almost in every family that celebrates Dashain, the same blessing is repeated upon the younger members of the family by the elders. This sentence, however, carries with it a social belief or a value system throughout the generations that values so-called 'dignified' or a 'white-collar' job. It even recognises that this is only possible with the help of education – academic education or higher studies. Acharya (2016) in his study regarding the expectation of the Tamang community about their children's education found that parents generally set a high and ideal level of an educational ceiling for their children initially. There is a deep desire within the members of the family to see the younger ones succeed heavily in the studies, in school and then see them as being 'dignified' person (according to the job or occupation) in society.

There is nothing wrong in actually having the desire for the younger generation succeed but the consideration here is it puts an implication upon the younger generation that they are to work hard in school, get better grades, secure a high-paying job and then maintain the dignity of the family. Lama (2016) argues that the existing social setup and people's perspective towards TEVT have often acted as barriers to the development of this sector. Further, Parajuli (2013) asserts that TEVT has always been taken as secondary to general education in Nepal and the least efforts have been made to establish TEVT as a preferred learning target. Why is there a differentiated line between general and vocational education? What compels the community to think that a particular 'job' as a socially-dignified one (Lama, 2016) and that other categorical 'jobs' are not dignified? What force makes the society think so and how cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) is taking place in such a setting? It is thus ironical that though a large number of graduate youths in Nepal are unemployed, a particular section of the society is still focused on pursuing general academic qualification.

As of now, in grade 6 to 8, a new subject 'Occupation, Business and Technology' is being taught to open up students towards future career prospects and providing technical and vocational soft skills in Nepal. In other words, it is supposed to be preparing them or orienting them towards technical and vocational education. However, is just orienting the students enough to attract them towards this sector and what about the social influence upon the children regarding their decisions? A study by Al-Saaideh (2016) revealed that social factors were one of the prime reasons for avoiding vocational education by young students which included their colleagues and family's negative attitude towards the vocational education as well as the family's unwillingness for the student to join vocational education. In schools, from the very early age, we are taught about various occupations and their contribution to the society, that all jobs or occupations are equal and respectful and that in the absence of a particular occupation, the society would be affected. Even so, there is still a distinction between what is taught in the classroom and what is practised in society (Lama, 2016). Here, in this issue of choosing technical and vocational education, it may seem to be a mundane decision for an individual but there is a lot of ambiguity or tension (as a result of 'social orientation – nurture, the values taught by the society') within an individual student when taking that particular decision of choice. Looking from beyond the personal, there are a whole lot of similar age group students experiencing the same social dilemma that tends to haunt them when they go for choosing technical and vocational education. In this context, this study seeks to explore the perception of young students in choosing TEVT and the reasons that act as a barrier for them from choosing this sector.

Technical and Vocational Education in the Nepali Educational Context

Technical Education and vocational training have been given a prominent place in the national educational policies of the country. Even within the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) implemented under Ministry of Education (MoE) for the period 2009-2016, one of the major goals set for the secondary education was to improve the relevance of the secondary education grade 9 and 10. This was planned to have been achieved by introducing and providing exposure to children on vocational and technical education programmes that would facilitate the transition from school to work (MoE, 2009). This policy represents the focus and orientation of the national education system towards producing skilled and qualified human resources recognising that a skilled workforce is eminent for the economic development of the nation.

Further, the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) which has been designed for the period 2016-2023 has continued along the line of SSRP. The SSDP focuses on building and improving pathways for students from more academic to applied focused education or providing options between technical and general secondary education (MoE, 2016). Therefore, the education policies of the nation have made its orientation towards developing a skilled workforce and has thus introduced the technical education sector in the education system of the nation. Further, Sustainable Development Goals which are the global agenda for all the nations have targets 4.3 and 4.4 specifically set to ensure access for all men and women to affordable quality technical and vocational education (National Planning Commission, 2015). From a broader perspective, the education system has acknowledged that a skilled workforce is important for society and the nation as well. The unemployment rate of Nepal was 11.4% (Ministry of Finance, 2017) and the successive periodic plans of the government have stressed on the production of skilled human resources and poverty alleviation as their objectives.

The statistics shows that 8,734 students appeared for technical SLC² in 2017 and 452,781 students appeared for regular SLC in 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2017) even though the total capacity for enrolment of students in technical SLC and diploma is 28,777. A huge gap can be seen in terms of young students preferring general education in comparison to technical and vocational education. The TEVT Policy 2012 has claimed access and inclusion, mass expansion, providing useful, relevant and quality TEVT programmes as its major objectives (Khanal, 2013) to pursue the goal of producing skilled workforces for the economic prosperity of the nation. Meanwhile, even though the government has been revamping the investments in the TEVT sector, the volume of investment is not yet satisfactory. Parajuli (2013) mentions that the share of TEVT programmes has seen no increment in the national budget. Though the government has pledged commitment to upgrading the TEVT system, it can be argued that the practice is in contrast to the promises.

The fact that even by 2017, out of 496 technical schools/institutions in diploma level or programmes in Nepal, 206 were in Province 3 and only 11 were in Karnali Province (Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training [CTEVT], 2017) shows the quantitative status regarding access and inclusion in the TEVT sector in Nepal based on geography. The ongoing emphasis on the relevance of the TEVT curricula and including aims such as producing and supplying skilled human resource

as per the market demand in the policy papers shows that the quality of TEVT is still under progress. My argument in such an avenue is in line with Parajuli (2013) that the state as such has not been able to make substantial efforts to establish TEVT as a preferable option for young students.

Societal Perception Towards Technical and Vocational Education

Vollmann (2010) asserts that one of the reasons students do not prefer entering technical and vocational education in the South Asian countries is due to societal influence as the society views pursuing general academic degree more prestigious than the manual labour and training. Similarly, a study by Ragojos, Singson, and Huppa (2016) on the perceptions influencing students' choice of TEVT suggest that parental influence was high in terms of students not desiring to enrol themselves in the technical sector. The same study also revealed that it was mostly the students of low economic status who wanted to opt for TEVT. Additionally, Lama (2016) mentions the influence of caste and class, prevalent in the Nepali society, on pursuing a particular vocation and occupation. The earliest records show that the caste system operated in the Kathmandu Valley during the reign of King Jayathiti Malla where 64 different castes were divided based on occupation/tasks and ranks in a hierarchy (Bennett, Dahal, & Govindasamy, 2008). People still believe that some specific occupations belong to a particular ethnic group or caste and when someone else would involve in that occupation, the individual would risk their reputation in the society (Lama, 2016). In such a scenario, even though the policies are heading towards producing skilled human resources to meet the market demands, the tradition societal orientation of 'education and work' are constantly in a clash with the idea of technical and vocational education.

Moreover, the economic condition of the family was also one of the main reasons for students joining technical and vocational trainings. A study by Ayub (2017) revealed that parents with low socio-economic status persuade children to pursue TEVT. This raises a serious question regarding the orientation of the society towards TEVT on the one hand and a rather more serious assertion that the notion of TEVT has been designed for a specific group or social class of people, on the other hand. The goal of technical education (to prepare 'skilled human resources') in policy as such is blurred by how the society perceives, compares and conceives TEVT with general secondary education as a symbol of societal prestige and recognition, a symbol of representing a

so-called 'well to do' family and continuation of a tradition of 'family of learners' or 'educated' ones.

Gramsci's Notion of Cultural Hegemony in Technical Education

The economic position was considered the central element that caused social differences under Marxism but with the development of societies, the social differences have become complex and neo-Marxists have pointed out to other factors causing such social differences. One of such elements is 'cultural hegemony' as pointed out by Antonio Gramsci. Using Gramsci's (1971) notion of 'hegemony', I have tried to explore how the dominant class exerts its social power over the dominated class which is rooted in the concept of 'coercion' and 'consent' (Stoddart, 2007). As such, I have used it as a lens to see our educational system and locate how we have readily been giving consent or internalized the ideas as flouted by such dominant class in the education system and how we have readily approved the notion that the general education and technical and vocational education stand in contrast to one another and the former is better than the later as also supported by Parajuli (2013). Stoddart (2007) argues that this process of hegemony is carried out through social institutions, which would allow those in power to strongly influence the values, norms, ideas, worldview and behaviour of the rest of the society. Further, ongoing social action would create and reproduce hegemonic power (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Stoddart, 2007).

As mentioned earlier, the 'consent' factor of Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony is not limited to 'being governed' but it refers to 'acceptance of the dominant group's intellectual and moral leadership' (Giardina, 2011). In other words, the social group adopts the ideology which is not their own. Rather, "the social group reaffirms it verbally and believes to be following it because that is considered as to be normal. This is when the conduct is not independent and autonomous but submissive and subordinate" (Gramsci, 1980, as cited in Daldal, 2014). This is equally true in Nepali society. The argument is that a section of the Nepali society, especially from the middle-class families (based on income), has been oriented towards the glory of achieving so-called 'dignified' jobs through higher education which is readily accepted by the youngsters (submissively) and think choosing any alternatives to the general academic degree (such as technical education) would be undignified for them and their family. This is evident in the actions as the students, even when they know that unemployment is rampant at even among educated people, would rather opt for general

academic education than technical and vocational education. In other words, it becomes common-sense to choose general education.

Hegemonising General Academic Education in Nepal

Hegemony is related to the idea of dominating class flouting their ideology which the dominated class readily accepts or provides consent to. It can be understood that the notion of hegemony is closely related to exercising domination upon the lower class by the higher class. In the Nepali context, the notion of 'pursuing general education' is so closely related to not being a 'good person' but '*thulo manche*' or 'a respectable person'. Gramsci suggests that the fundamental division into classical or general and vocational education came along with a rational formula that vocational schools were for instrumental or subaltern class and that the general education was for the dominant class and the intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971). It can be related to the Nepali society which relates technical education for those with lower economic and social background and general education for the middle and well-to-do families.

The notion that one of the prerequisites for being '*thulo manche*' is to pursue a general higher academic degree is the ideology flouted by the so-called 'learned' family in society. This has been so ingrained in the mindset of the section of Nepali society who wants to graduate from a so-called 'middle level' to a 'higher class' by making their children pursue 'general academic degree'. This claim has been supported by Parajuli (2002) and Ismail and Abbidin (2014) where their study explored that TEVT has been considered as the career choice for the less academically qualified, lower-middle-income families, school dropouts rather than an important complement to the general education. The concept that 'higher class' means 'educated people' is what has been hegemonised and is standing in the way for these children toward choosing vocational education.

It is interesting that the traditional Nepali society, divided into different castes according to their profession, just accepted this status quo (Lama, 2016). The so-called 'untouchables' in-fact would take themselves for 'untouchable' and even continued their generational occupation for a long time. Similarly, the status quo is reflected by the young students who have been 'brainwashed' with the notion that they are supposed to become 'doctors, engineers, pilots and so on' and how these young students including me provide 'consent' to their ideology and follow it.

Research Method

Choosing TEVT involves personal choices. Previous studies by Al- Saaideh (2016), Ragojos et al. (2016), and Ayub (2017) suggest that students are influenced by career counselling, orientations provided to them, family's education and socio-economic background as well as their personal interests which honour multiple realities experienced by each individual. These experiences, in turn, suggest the choices individuals make. Narrative inquiry is especially helpful for educational research which offers practical and specific insights for researches looking for personal experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2012). A narrative research method, using in-depth interviews, was used in my quest to explore the perceptions of young students towards choosing TEVT as it would inform me of the experiences of the research participants regarding their choices. I purposefully selected three participants – two students and a teacher from Kathmandu. I went for a two-round of interviews with each of the participants. The first interview focused on knowing the participants of my study and understanding their view on choosing technical education and vocational training. The second was a follow-up interview for further probing into the issues they shared previously. The data was recorded and then transcribed. Then the individual stories shared by the participants were coded, categorized and then themes were created as part of the analysis. The stories shared by the participants were then analysed through a theoretical lens.

Participants' Profile

All of the interviews with the participants of my study took place in the schools which I visited. I interviewed Ayush, a 14-year-old secondary level student who was studying in grade 9 in an institutional school in Kathmandu. I chose him as he was young as well as had the option to choose between general education and TVET. I also interviewed Ramesh, a 28-year-old secondary level teacher from a school in Kathmandu. His ideas and experiences would help understand how a teacher regards his students choosing technical and vocational education. The third participant was Hira, a 17-year-old higher secondary level student pursuing general education despite having the desire to choose technical and vocational education.

Perception Towards Technical and Vocational Education

Ramesh, as I mentioned earlier, is a teacher. He was a bright student since his childhood and went on to earn an MSc. in organic chemistry. He was from the outskirts of Kathmandu and his family was engaged in agriculture. Even though he used to help his parents in farming during the holidays or when it was time to sow or harvest the crops, his parents always encouraged him to engage in studies. He expressed that his career choice as being a 'Science graduate' was always encouraged by his parents. He shared that those who join TEVT are actually those who do not perform well in studies. He even shared some experiences in his family. His sister, Kala was an average student during her school days. After she completed her school, she was asked to study Community Medical Assistant (CMA) under technical education by her parents as she was thought of not being able to pursue general higher education. He further remarked, *“TEVT is chosen by those who cannot excel in education, do not have interest in school education and those who cannot pursue general education due to economic status.”*

His view confirms with the study by Ismail and Abbidin (2014) which argues that TEVT was thought of or viewed as being chosen by those who do not do well in general education or are school dropouts.

Ayush, who is a secondary level student, shared a similar story of his when he wanted to join a technical school and do his school graduation in a technical subject. Ayush was an average student at school and he did not particularly like Mathematics and so he thought of joining technical education. He shared that he was taught a subject 'Occupation, Business and Technology' since grade 6 up to grade 8 and that he had an interest in doing fruit farming; however, his parents discouraged him from joining the technical school after grade 8. Ayush shared:

TEVT is taken as a subject to be studied by those who do not perform well in their studies. My mother told me that studying such technical subjects would break her dreams of seeing me as a manager in a good company in future. She told me to take an example of her friend's son who was studying science in high school and that she wanted to see me do the same. It would be shameful for her to accept that I was studying a technical subject in front of her friends.

These views show that the perception towards TEVT is biased or the concept of TEVT is not yet clear among the students and parents in general. The government in its

policies (Education For All, School Sector Reform Plan, School Sector Development Plan) regard TEVT in high importance which can assist in the economic development of the country. Nevertheless, the viewpoint of parents here is rather different. I reflect upon the idea that when participants are sharing that people join TEVT due to being unsuccessful in general education, they are giving consent to an ideology that general education is better than the technical one and those who can pursue general education are rather intelligent, with better brains than those pursuing technical education. Hegemony, 'giving the consent to be governed by the ideology of a dominant group' (Stoddart, 2007) can be clearly seen here. Lama (2016) asserts that class has played a major role in dividing the Nepali society in terms of occupation as well as education. I find that the perception of parents in Nepali society is one of the major factors in guiding a child towards the career path and that the parents are still deprived of the orientation towards TEVT.

Pursuing General Education and the 'Pied-Piper of Hamlin'

In the famous story of 'The Pied-Piper of Hamlin', a folk-lore originally from Germany, the pied-piper was the one who blew pipes and when he blew it with the melodious enchantment, first the rats and then the children of the town of Hamlin followed him joyously. As I recall this story, the kids were overjoyed at what they heard but there was no obvious reason except the enchantment of the music that made those children follow the pied-piper. Ayush as well Ramesh shared that we must follow the society and we should go where the society leads us to. The participants' view that it is actually the society which dictates the decisions to be taken by individuals supports the claim by Ragojos et al. (2016) where students' decision was more guided by the parents' influence and the community's low regard towards the vocational education. Ramesh shared, *"Society is the apex body and the rules, regulations even the daily mundane tasks are the norms and we are to follow it quietly."*

In a similar line, Ayush said, *"Society is going one way and we have to follow it too. It is normal to do so. That is what we have been taught to do."*

Hira also shared that his parents told it to him once that one joins TEVT if she/he cannot study in school. Quoting his parents' words, he further said, *"You need to pursue general education if you want to establish yourself in the society. Society values the one who has achieved higher grades and has a university degree."*

In the context of TEVT, it can be seen that the dominating class has been very successful in creating a divide, a barrier between them and the so-called 'dominated class' in what it means to establish oneself in the society. What distinguishes is the level of education, income and economic status among others. Gramsci notes this as the fundamental division into classical and vocational schools, in which vocational schools was for the instrumental class or 'the subaltern class' and the classical schools for the dominant or intellectual class (Gramsci, 1971). This same ideology has been translated into this part of the eastern world that those with general education are superior to those who are pursuing vocational education. The society or the so-called 'dominated class' do not comprehend that they are being led unknowingly. They rather take it as common sense, to be dominated by the ideas of the few dominating ladies and gentlemen of the elite class.

Hira's father works as a driver in a school and is from the traditional so-called *Dalit* or 'an untouchable caste'. His forefathers were traditionally shoe-makers and Hira shares that:

My father often tells me how in the village we were regarded as untouchables and not allowed to enter the homes of those from 'high caste' or even draw water from the local well. My father moved out of the village to avoid such mistreatment. He often reminds me of his hardship and encourages me to study diligently. He wants me to become a teacher. He thinks that this way I and my family would be able to stand in the face of this evil caste-based discrimination especially when we visit our village. I often feel the stigma and it haunts me when I imagine myself doing some sort of vocational works like making pottery even though I have some fascination toward the vocation.

It is interesting to note how the dominant class have been presenting their ideas in a way that would seem normal and acceptable to others in society. Lama (2016) mentions how the technical and vocational education has been combating to slice through the prevalent socio-economic and contemporary set up to provide its best for the development of the nation. It is interesting how the notion of vocational education is connected to the social system of the Nepali society. Through various means, the so-called 'middle class' families are trying to reinforce this ideology of the superiority of educated people and comparison with technical education to maintain their status in

society. From the participants' view, it was clear that the families do not want their children to enrol in technical education and be labelled as unsuccessful or 'that of lower class'. Perhaps they too want to sow the same seeds of dominance upon others in the society like the ones dominating them.

Consent and Being Blind in Love or Lust of Social Prestige

"Second Class! This is what the society perceives those who choose vocational education", said Ramesh. He added, "This is the trend in the society. It perceives those who pursue general education better than those who choose vocational education. The society is driven by this notion and thus has asked individuals to pursue general education." It can be observed that it has been imprinted in our minds that general education is the best one. He further shared, "It is also about prestige and identity in society. Society thinks that those who have academic certificates are learned and value them more."

Ayush's father owns a bull-dozer and he shared that he often was fascinated by the way his father made those manoeuvres when levelling the land at the construction site. His father earned a decent income through this skill yet when Ayush too shared his opinion with his mother at home about his interest in joining TEVT, his mother had a different opinion. When asked about his mother's opinion, Ayush responded,

My mother told me that she did not like me to be like my father who does not have any academic qualification. She said that my parents had not invested in my education to be some kind of farmer, or a dozer operator or a driver. She always shares of the hardships they faced, how my parents did not have the opportunity to study like me, and how she imagined that I would one day work as an officer in a bank, own a car and a house. She often tells me that she wants me to be someone who has a degree and keeps up the dignity of our family.

Ayush's response was similar to that of Ramesh who shared that,

I think general education is the right path as my family wants me to study more, have a good job and a successful one. Even if I wanted, I would not be able to tell my parents my desire to join the TEVT because they have expectations.

It can be seen that there is an indirect pressure from the family to join general education and avoid TEVT as the family has a pressure from the society (Ismail &

Abbidin, 2014; Ragojos, Singson, & Huppa, 2016) to maintain its prestige. Hira told me that he was often told by his family to “do it and show to the society, study, get degrees and show them”. These are actually the wishes of the family rather than the individuals. They want to show the society that their son or daughter is doing well in their studies.

Ayush shared that even after completing high school, his cousin sister took a course of 'bakery training' under CTEVT³ and concurrently gave tuition classes to the kids in the neighbourhood. When asked by her neighbours, neither she nor her parents told them that she was taking training of a vocation. Rather, they said she was just giving tuition classes to the kids. When asked further, Ayush shared:

My uncle and aunt think that if they tell the neighbours that she is doing some bakery training, people would look down upon her and the family. But if they told that she was giving tuition, it would imply that she was actually a studious girl and could teach other children. Giving tuition sounds rather prestigious than going for bakery training.

It seems that families and community give consent to the notion that general education would provide them with power or prestige in society. It is actually 'acceptance of the dominant group's intellectual and moral leadership' (Giardina, 2011) that one needs to be educated and have a 'white-collar job' to be counted as powerful or prestigious in the society which guides the actions of the individuals to do the same.

Discussion

The participants' views on choosing technical education or vocational training revealed that their decision regarding their career choice was influenced by a) their family's expectations of them, b) the view regarding TEVT was less aspiring than general education, and c) 'misunderstanding' that TEVT is chosen only by those who cannot excel in general education or whose family income is low. Similar was reported by an earlier study by Ragojos et al. (2016) which explored that stigma related to blue-collar jobs, being rated as second best when compared to the general academic education were some of the factors that affected the student's choice. Further, the study revealed that most of the student's parents like that of Ayush and Hira wanted them to join general academic education and that the parents, as well as society, had a low regard for the vocational education. The 'stigma of the society' was reported by the

participants when they said that their parents viewed vocational education as second class and looked down upon those pursuing vocational education. Even when Ayush's father had a decent income through his skill-based work as a bulldozer operator, his mother wanted him to pursue general education just for the sake of upholding the dignity of the family. The parental pressure can be seen as the participants revealed that their parents too had a low regard for the vocational education and rather wanted to show off that their children were studying 'higher education' to their neighbours or the society in general. Again, Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony (Stoddart, 2007) helps us to see how society is stratified based on formal general education. The participants' views thus reveal that this stratification in terms of education is ingrained within us in a subtle manner which influences our choice regarding TEVT.

This stratification goes further back to the traditional practices of the society as well. Young students like Hira and his family still feel the brunt of it. "Nepali social structure was based on caste hierarchy system, which was closed system that determined the division of labour by birth" (Bista, 1961, as cited in Lama, 2016, p. 159) which meant that the people were divided or rather categorized based on their caste and within their caste hierarchy they were supposed to perform certain pre-determined occupations. The Brahmins, for example, were at the top of this hierarchal system who were to be learned or educated and who should carry out the religious functions of the society, the Chettris were taken as warriors, Vaishyas were those who carried out farming, trade or were merchants, and Sudras, who were at the bottom of this caste-occupation based hierarchy, were basically artisans, labourers, maids or blacksmiths (Subedi, 2010). Here, I connect what the society perceives as being educated as trying to go vertically upward in this hierarchal system today as the participants voiced that one of the reasons their parents wanted them to pursue general education was to 'exhibit' the achievement of a 'degree', and thus achieve a 'status' in the society. The dominant class has been able to successfully create the 'stigma' towards the blue-collar job and it has been hegemonised in such a way that the section of the society thinks it a 'common sense' to have such a biased feeling towards technical and vocational education. The caste-based discrimination or any other sort of discrimination is discouraged as stated itself in the Preamble of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 but still, the society wants to climb up in the hierarchy not through the caste-based organization but the pride in educational achievement.

Further, even though Hira and Ayush had studied the course 'Occupation, Business and Technology' in grades 6,7 and 8 as prescribed by the curriculum set by the government, the subject had introduced them to various technical and vocational occupations but it had not been able to provide them with the orientation that technical education or vocational training is not just for those who are weak in studies or from the low economic background. They further voiced that this was a particular reason for shaping the negative perception or low regard towards TEVT. My take is that apart from the lack of orientation, it is the hegemonic mindset regarding the general education which is creating a barrier for young students to choose TEVT and parents to facilitate or encourage their children to join TEVT. This study thus helped understand some socio-economic facets as to why students are yet feeling discouraged from entering the TEVT sector.

Conclusion

Family's perception was one of the major aspects when it came to choosing TEVT in the case of this research participants. When probed deeper, the participants revealed that such perception was informed by the low regard for TEVT and comparison with the general education almost as its binary opposite. In such a scenario, the success of TEVT in Nepal must also include the society, its perception and awareness regarding TEVT. The government has been trying to quantitatively increase the enrolment in the technical and vocational sector and there have been concerns over the improvement in the quality of the technical and vocational education as well. I argue that the success of the implementation and incorporation of TEVT into the education system of Nepal would be possible only when all sections of the society end discrimination based on occupation and educational achievement and readily recognise the contribution of every occupation to the society. The division created by the general education is so wide and stigmatising that many youths do not readily want to join technical education or vocational training due to the fear of losing their 'status of being an educated person' or due to family and peer pressure.

Thus, through the lens of cultural hegemony, it can be seen that the young students like Ayush and Hira, within a section of the Nepali society, have been hegemonised by the elders or parents into pursuing general academic education, directly or indirectly even through the traditional norms as mentioned above in the blessing given during the

festivals. It is interesting how these young students give consent to such ideologies and keep pursuing the dreams of their elders, unknowingly reproducing the cultural norms.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the inclusion of the technical and vocational education as a subject in the secondary curriculum is to dismantle the stratification in the society that has been encouraged by the general education. This study helped me view how we carry out various everyday functions and tasks in the society, how we manifest what we have been taught directly or indirectly by our family and society even without knowing whose interest we are serving and whether we are being dominated by some groups or not. It has made me rethink if the division of the Nepali society based on caste (occupation) was to flout the idea of the superiority of a certain group of the community over others and we quietly consented to it and still are being ruled by such ideologies. As mentioned in the beginning, the society believes and feels good if it sees a 'book in the hand' even when it knows that there is unemployment in the society than when it sees 'a tool in the hand' and knows that it can bring better outcomes for the society.

Thus, there is a need for the change in perception regarding TEVT and parents need to be oriented at large regarding the importance of TEVT to the whole country as well as its ability to provide a decent income, employment and employability. The government needs to bring about a structural shift in the thinking of the society through awareness that TEVT is not just for those who cannot excel in general education but it is rather a matter of choice to pursue one's interest, talent and skill. There is a dire need to break the concept that decent income and prestige can be earned only through general education. Then, young students like the participants in this study can voice their decision to choose TEVT without any stigma, fear or pressure and pursue their interest be it to 'carry a book in the hand' or 'work with a tool in the hand'.

Notes

- ¹ Dashain is one of the main festivals of Nepalis, especially Hindus, where young members of the family take blessings from their elders.
- ² School Leaving Certificate (SLC) is the examination held by the Nepal government for completing grade 10. It has recently been changed to Secondary Education Examination (SEE).

³ Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) is the national apex body responsible for the overall conduct of Technical Education and Vocational Training in Nepal.

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