

'Confined Dreams' of Informal Skills Learners: Can TVET Widen Their Aspirations?

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Abstract

More than eighty percent of youth in Nepal are estimated to be learning their livelihood-skills through work. Generally, those informal skills learners either never visit a school or discontinue their school education and start a career without formal or non-formal skills training. Adopting the qualitative research approach, and underpinned by career development theories, I argue that those people have to confine their aspirations due to unfavorable TVET system. I also use poetic inquiry to analyze and present the information. I also discuss how the country's TVET system can support such a massive number of informal skills learners. The research is based on in-depth interviews conducted with six youth and adults working in three different trades— pottery, fast-food, and motorcycle service mechanics located in Kathmandu Valley. It is concluded that the struggle at school and the path of work faced by those adolescents and youths for getting a job are diverse. It is also found that informal skills learners have aspirations, mainly limited to either establishing or extending the existing enterprise with their competence acquired through workplace learning. The paper concludes that the state should facilitate fulfilling the aspirations of those informal skills learners.

Keywords: Informal skills learning, Confined aspirations, TVET

Introduction

Nepal is a developing country where the informal economy prevails. According to recent statistics, more than two-thirds of employment (69.7 percent) is in the informal sector, excluding the agricultural sector. When the agriculture sector is added, the figure for employment in the informal sector becomes 96.2 percent (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2017). This situation also reflects the country's educational

scenario where access to education for many groups is limited. More than one-third (34 percent) among the children of school-going age never attended the school (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2012). Among those who enter the school drop schools in between not completing tenth grade. A recent government report states that class five's survival rate is only 88.3 percent (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

[MoEST], 2018). From this figure, it is clear that more than one-tenth of students leave before completing the primary level of education. Those people who either didn't enter or drop school earlier (early school leavers) join the labor market and start their career as workers but indirectly as informal skills learners.

Youth unemployment in Nepal is more significant than the overall employment rate of the country. About one-fifth (19.2 percent) of the population from 15 to 29 year age group was unemployed, which is much higher than the overall unemployment rate of 2.7 percent of the population age fifteen years and above (Serrière, 2014). It shows that the youth population is more vulnerable concerning employment. There might be several reasons for this situation. But, "increased detachment from the labor market" is one of them (Serrière, 2014, p. iii) from which those youths do suffer. How those youths get access to jobs and how they envision their future career prospectus remain a pertinent area of research, the literature on which are scarce, particularly in Nepal's context.

A study conducted by Mussida et al. (2016) on early school leaving and work outcomes in ten developing countries, including Nepal, found that early school exit on work outcomes is generally favorable. It means early school leavers also do get jobs. However, the work outcomes were mainly unpaid jobs or self-employment. The study alarmed that the women early school leavers are more victims

considering work outcomes. It suggests the formulation of policy targeting reducing early school dropout of females.

Similarly, an ILO report mentioned that "male youth has a much higher chance of completing the transition than female youth" (ILO, 2015, p.28). The report also state that the demand for high-level jobs is less than low-level skills demanding jobs. Acharya (2014) conducted another study under the UNESCO Nepal upon grade ten school students and working youth focusing on gender, jobs, and education and found male employment higher than female employment. This report also stated, "the traditional gender stereotypical roles and responsibilities of women and men in society" (Acharya, 2014, p. VII).

These studies on student dropout and job-transitions focus on a quantitative approach where a deep understanding of how early school leavers strive to get access to work and how they aspire to their future based on skills learned during the career seems less elaborated. This study explores the difficulties faced by some adults and youth who either did not attend a school or left the school earlier and entered a paid or unpaid informal job. It also attempts to explore how those informal skills learners see their future to be. For this, the study intends to find the answer to how early school leavers get an informal job and how those workers with their informal skill learning aspire for their future?

Early school leavers are those boys and girls who could not complete school-level education due to different reasons such as lacking financial resources, geographical isolation, and so on and dropped in-between. Similarly, informal workers are workers working in the condition where "employment relationship is, in law or in practice, not subject to national labor legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits" (Husmanns, 2004, p.6). Aspiration is a qualitative term with multiple meanings such as "goals, ambitions, purposes, objectives, aims, yearnings, intuitions, plans, dreams, cravings, desires, longings, and designs" (Cobb et al., 1989, p. 12). It shows that the meaning of aspiration has multiple meanings but all associated with future wellbeing. In this research purpose, I have used two terminologies—dreams and aspirations—interchangeably, which is the future goals set by a person; in the particular case, informal skills learners.

The overall purpose of this paper is to explore the struggle pathways of informal skills learners the discuss how they have to compromise with their aspirations or dreams. I also provide some insights into how the TVET system of the country can support in fulfilling their future dreams. To do so, after this section, I first provide the methodological premise of this research paper. Then I present three thematic sections, entitled: 1) Journey to confined dreams starts at school, 2) Zigzag journeys of getting a job, and 3) Aspirations of informal skills learners.

Then I discuss and argue that informal skills learners are not getting significant support from the national TVET system so that they could fulfill their aspirations. This part of the section will be presented under the title: Confined dreams of informal skills learners: What can TVET do for widening aspirations? Finally, I provide my concluding statement towards the subject.

Methodology

The paper is based on the qualitative information obtained from six workers as informal skills learners from three small-scale enterprises (two from each)-motorcycle service mechanics, fast-food café, and pottery located inside two districts of the Kathmandu Valley. It included both traditional (pottery) and modern (fast-food café and motorcycle workshop) occupations. Among six participants of different age groups ranging from twenty-two years to about fifty, two workers from the fast-food occupations are female and all other four research participants are male. I performed more than three visits to the site of these research participants and conducted at least two interviews with each of them. I recorded the interviews using my audio-recorder of mobile phone after obtaining their consent. I transcribed and translated the interviews from Nepali to the English language. I also prepared reflective journals based on the field notes. The obtained information is clustered under three themes (as mentioned above), and findings are presented and discussed. I also used the poetic inquiry

method, considering that it is well-accepted research methods these days that can be used as a "response to the crisis of representation" of those whose voice is rarely talked and listened to (Prendergast, 2009, p.561). Finally, I have presented the conclusion and recommendations based on the obtained information and my work-experiences.

Journey to Confined Dreams Starts at School

Completion of school education is not favorable for most Nepali adolescents and youth. Of course, there might be multiple reasons for abandoning the school earlier; one of the primary reasons for the abandonment seems the family's weak economic condition (CBS, 2012). Particularly such phenomena prevail in those youth and adolescents who directly jump to the world of work where they acquire occupational skills while performing the job.

Research participants of this research range from lacking school-education to college-level education. However, the case of the participant with college-level educational qualification is the exceptional one. The story of the lady who is working as a self-entrepreneur running a fast-food café (about whom I mention in the paragraphs below) seems a bit different than other informal skills learners, particularly considering obtaining an educational qualification.

Moti Kutu is about forty at present. He is from an ethnic Newari community of Thimi Area of Bhaktapur District. He dropped his

school when he was in grade eight. Though he mentioned the reason for dropping school as a "*family circumstance*," from his expression, it was clear that the interruption of the educational journey was due to the family's weak economic condition. The family of Moti was following vegetable farming since history. His father did work in the farmland and sell produced vegetables on the market, carrying them on the *Kharpan*.¹ As the family was big, Moti's father needed help possible only by Moti as a grown-up son among the other three brothers. So, Moti started to help his father by selling the vegetables together with his father. During the conversation, Moti mentioned that:

Due to domestic problems, I could not continue my study. We are four brothers from our parents. Among the four, two brothers could not enroll in the school, but I could join it. The father was a farmer. Together with my brothers, I helped my father sell green vegetables and carry them to the market and support him in other farm-chores [Interview, October 2018].

The situation expressed by Moti is understandable that one of the reasons for abandoning school education for more than one-fifth of Nepali children (22 percent) is due to "help needed at home" (CBS, 2011, p.83). Moti could not continue supporting his father as he aspired for his career in the automobile sector. His journey to the labor market in the automobile sector started with one of the relatives' help.

1 Traditional double cage- carrier used by the farmers Newari community in the Kathmandu village.

The story of another nineteen-year-old boy, *Yuvaraj Shah*, was different, while some of the occupational features were identical to Moti. Yuvaraj is from a rural village in Tarai (Nepal's southern plane) near the Indian Border. His family didn't have irrigable land and so worked in the land of other lords. The earning made by his parents was scarcely running the family. Being the elder son, Yuvaraj had to think about his family. Though Yuvaraj had not to pay the school fee as it was the government school, he had to think about the family and his younger brothers and sisters. So, he decided to drop school when he was in grade eight and moved to India, searching for a job. "I went to a government school in my village. I continued till eight class, but..." he could not tell further and stopped during the interview. When I requested him for completing the sentence, he continued with his faint voice:

I was a brilliant boy in my school. Teachers were happy with my study and hard work. I was eager to continue my education at the school. My family could not afford it after that class as I had to earn for the family. My small brothers and sisters also could not work and earn. The amount made by the father was not sufficient for feeding the whole family. So I left school and moved when I was seventeen [Interview, October 2018]

The expression of Yuvaraj indicates that only not paying school fees does not mean that one can continue his or her school. As he mentioned, the family could not afford the school education because he had to work and earn money for his family, which was impossible at the school classes. Such a

situation is typical for average rural youth for leaving school earlier (CBS, 2011). Further, the problem faced by Yuvaraj seems evident being a youth from a disadvantaged Dalit community from the rural village (ILO, 2015).

Not only those people who have to abandon school education adopt the informal learning path. Those people who have a favorable situation can continue not only school-level education but also higher than that. As one of Nepali youth's problems is unemployment (ILO, 2015), educated people can also follow an informal working and learning path. The case of another research participant, presented further, represents such a situation.

Anita KC is in her forties at present. According to Nepal's hierarchical caste system, she is from Chhetri community, known as among the higher caste (Bennett et al., 2008). Being born into a well-off family, Anita never faced a problem of education both in school and college. However, her struggle started when she got married and became *Buhari* [daughter-in-law] of another *Chhetri* family (about this, I provide the story in the next section).

Devika Sharma, the next research participant of this study, is a twenty-two-year-old girl. Her family is from Makawanpur, the Inner Tarai-Region of the country. When she was quite younger, her mother had to leave the native town and move to Kathmandu due to family circumstances. Devika's mother started to perform domestic works in the house of Anita (the research participant

mentioned above), where they got a tiny room for residence. The house-lord of Devika's mother enrolled Devika in a public school near to the home. Devika completed her school education and obtained the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) qualification from that school. As she was now grown up, she started to work in the Café shop of Anita, where her mother was working as a cleaner cum helper. Thus, the journey of Devika towards work started but continuing the education in the same school doing further higher-secondary level education.

The stories mentioned above were from those working in the informal sector as informal skills learners. Some other people do not have to search the work anywhere as their families had been running traditional occupations for long history. Trade of *Kumale* [pottery] from Thimi Area of Bhaktapur district is one of such conventional trades from which two of the research participants are in this research.

Gopal Prajapati, approaching his fifties, is a mature youth running his family pottery occupation in one of the settlements of Thimi. Although every component of the pottery (for instance, a place for dusting clay, shorting, mudding, wheeling, drying, burning, etc.) is in Gopal's occupational premiss, it was strange a single couple of Gopal was working in the workshop. It came to know that the family now does not want to make their children a potter and wants to change the occupation. But what was the educational journey of Gopal, I wanted to know. Gopal informed that he

does not have any school-level education. From his adolescence, Gopal started to work in the pottery workshop together with his grandfather and father. What everything Gopal learned is the learning acquired during the work. He mentioned that "only one elder brother studied till ten class and (we) other four don't have school education."

Education and work are inseparable parts of skill development (Eraut, 2004). However, in a traditional occupation like pottery, it seems that previously there was less awareness of education's importance. But now, together with increased attention to education and other different reasons, attraction to the trade is decreasing. Nevertheless, such a trend of youths' changing occupation also exists in other traditional works (Chetry, 2011).

Another potter *Binayak Prajapati*, 42, running the traditional occupation of pottery in the settlement of *Nikosea* in Madhyapur Thimi Municipality, also provided similar information. However, in contrast to Gopal, Binayak studied till the tenth grade of school but did not appear in the national examination—School Leaving Certificate (SLC). After having that educational qualification, he did not want to pursue the pottery occupation and change it. He could not stay longer in the altered occupational field and returned to the traditional family trade after a few months.

Of course, there are different reasons for abandoning school earlier. No one wants not to attend or to leave school class in early grades. There must be specific reasons for

this. One of the dominant reasons can be a person's family circumstance (Acharya, 2016; Rumberger, 1983), which is clearer from almost all research participants' life stories.

Zigzag Journeys of Getting a Job

Usually, each person has their career journey starting from an educational institution to different types of work. With some people, this path is less deviated, but with others, it might not be. In adolescents, youth, and adults dropping their school-level education, the career paths are comparatively uncertain and turbulent. Except in the traditional occupation, in the particular case- the pottery, informal skills learners have expressed their career journey's zigzag course.

Moti Kutu just crossed forty-five, is an automobile mechanic who has been running a workshop for more than two decades, had faced a challenging work-path. When he dropped his school, initially, he helped his peasant father. However, he could not stay longer, as his will was to work in the automobile sector. With the help of one relative, he initiated a job in a workshop in *Balaju*, located at a distance of more than fifteen kilometers from his home. He was commuting each day that a long-distance, sometimes on feet at that time (due to local transportation unavailability), made him searching for a job in another more comfortable location. Fortunately, one of the friends helped him find a similar position in a convenient location, at *Teku*, where he worked for more than seven

years. Both the work-experience obtained at *Balaju* and in *Teku* made Moti confident in his occupational skills, which created the germs of becoming a self-entrepreneur. He initiated two workshops at once in the partnership with a mechanic-friend: one at *Manohara*, Bhaktapur, and another in *Anamnagar*, Kathmandu. The partner looked after both workshops, and Moti was doing another work—importing automobile parts from Delhi. However, Moti experienced challenges in running a partnership business. His partner started to suspect the time devotion of Moti and mishandling of the account. About situation how there was a misunderstanding with the partner and how he created the present workshop, Moti mentioned:

I felt that it is not easy to work with a partner. If a partner treats as a partner, only then can an enterprise run. Otherwise, it can not run well when the partner starts to show his dissatisfaction with suspicion and grievances. So, I decided to be separated and create a separate business taking risks. Some of my relatives and friends also suggested running my own independent business. Thus, I started the workshop here [Interview, October 2018].

At present, Moti is operating his workshop in Gathaghar of Madhyapur Thimi Municipality for 12 years, where despite the multiple struggles faced for the establishment and operation, he seems satisfied.

Though Moti was from a peasant family, he was from the capital city. But the story of a boy working in the same occupational sector is different. *Yuvaraj Shah*, who is, as

mentioned earlier, 19 years old at present, is from the border area of the rural southern plain of Nepal. After leaving school to support his family economically, he moved to the adjoining city in India, *Motihari*, in search of a job. Nobody was there at *Motihari* who facilitates identifying the work for Yuvaraj. He spent almost a week wandering here and there searching for the job. One workshop owner found him and offered him a cleaner position, and provided a food and lodging facility as an incentive. The work started in the morning around eight and continued till eight or nine in the evening. Initially, Yuvaraj was working only on cleaning and collecting tools, but afterward, the senior *Mistri* [craftsperson] started to trust him and assign some minor tasks of repairing motorcycles. During seven months, Yuvaraj learned the preliminary skills of motorcycle mechanics.

As mentioned in the above section, the primary purpose of Yuvaraj for abandoning school was to support the family financially. But it was not possible as there was no provision of salary or wage. So, he was thinking of searching for a job where he could earn and support the family. Amid, one of his far-relatives approached him and proposed whether he wants to go to Kathmandu for a similar job. The proposal encouraged Yuvaraj to leave the present place as he has heard good stories from colleagues about the possibilities of good earning in Kathmandu. Thus, in the facilitation of his *Mama* [maternal uncle], Yuvaraj arrived at Kathmandu and initiated

the work in one of the workshops. When I asked Yuvaraj regarding his journey from *Motihari* to Kathmandu for the new job and also wanted to know whether he informed the owner at *Motihari* regarding his move, he expressed how he left the first job and arrived at Kathmandu:

Ohh. No. I didn't inform the owner and left the workshop covertly, and went home. The other day early morning, when I came to the place where my Mama told me, there were other boys too on the bus together with my Mama. We arrived here in Kathmandu in the evening by bus. Few days I spent in the room of one villager together with Mama. Then, he [Mama] took me here, and I started to work [Interview, February 2019].

Though Yuvaraj mentioned Kathmandu, he was initiated a job in Madhyapur Thimi, Bhaktapur. Yuvaraj also informed that he left this place too after some months and moved to another workshop to obtain a better wage. Later on, when the present workplace owner knew that Yuvaraj left his enterprise due to being less paid, the owner convinced Yuvaraj to offer a similar amount. Then, Yuvaraj decided to return to the initial workshop, where he is still working. He frequently repeated that he has been learning multiple skills and knowledge and no regression of not completing school education. Box 1 below displays the summarized version of Yuvaraj's expression regarding abandoning school and struggles. Despite being compelled to drop school education untimely, Yuvaraj is comparing his informal learning with his school and portrays his life-picture of compromised dreams.

Box 1:

I am still in the school

*I did not want to be a fool
For becoming a "wise" son
I have left the school !*

*I was unknown about my abilities
But, shoulders were laden with
enormous responsibilities
Seeing early-wrinkling parents
Pale brothers and sisters
Knowing family problems in bundle
How could I lived the life cool ?*

*Most of my school friends
Continued the journey of learning
I abandoned that school at grade eight
At the adolescence of seventeen
I shifted the school
This school is a bit different
The name of which is a "struggle."*

*I have learnt a lot in this school
Now, I can understand-
- the Mathematics of hunger
- the Geography of shelter
- the Economics of passion
- the Health of relation*

Moreover,

*I have encountered cruelty of divine
And ultimately,
Hand-shook with the claws of time*

*I am shaping my future
Putting in the mould of present
and clamping with the nails of past
Though it is not like usual
I am still in the school*

*** **

In the case of two females, *Anita KC* and *Devika Sharma*, the story of the struggle for having a job are different. Anita is a

mature woman in her forties with a brought-up son. Indeed, Anita initially wanted to have a wage job, but it was not possible for her. Her in-law's family wanted her not to go for any works but stayed at home doing domestic chores. The father-in-law of Anita was expressing that there was no need for her to go to work and suggested "*staying relaxed at home*" as the family was comparatively well off. However, Anita had a strong commitment to running a business. So, it was difficult for her to pursue the family members on the matter. When they permitted doing a business, there was a strong reservation on the type of business she selects. Anita wanted to run a restaurant business, but her in-law parents did not want this because a restaurant business needed to provide service to diverse people. Ultimately, Anita got permission to run a bakery shop where she had to deal with fewer people. Her parents-in-law did not want that their daughter-in-law washed dishes used by other *strangers*. They were advising for running a bakery shop because of the possibility of using paper dishes and plates. Thus, Anita established a bakery shop near the International Airport in Kathmandu, where there are some prominent organizations such as hospitals, airline offices, and construction companies.

When Anita managed to run the bakery shop well and started making a good income, the family's trust in Anita as an entrepreneur increased. This trust opened the door to changing the enterprise from the bakery shop to a café cum restaurant. Then she rented a

spacious shop stall along the busy road and furnished it with necessary facilities and utilities. The business had been running well for seven years.

There seems a common reason why Anita stopped searching for a salaried job and decided to become a self-entrepreneur establishing her own business as females have to face comparatively more difficult for getting a job in Nepal (Serrière, 2014). Even it is not easy for them to start an enterprise.

As mentioned earlier, Devika is a 22-year old girl who was brought from her hometown together with her mother in her childhood, completed school in Kathmandu. Devika's mother was living as an au pair in the home of Anita performing domestic chores and working in the café of Anita. It made it easier for Devika to initiate the job at the café. She was managing both activities together—studying at a higher secondary level and working in the café.

Regarding getting a job, the struggle for youth and adults adopting traditional occupation seems less. For instance, Gopal Prajapati, a potter at Thimi, never worried about getting a job. As he never visited a school class, he was involved in pottery work together with his grandfather and father from early adolescence. Initially, he could not perform essential tasks such as operating flywheel, malleting green pots, and carving; he used to help other auxiliary works such as crushing clay-lumps, transporting and drying pots, and so on. Intentional instruction from the seniors was lacking. He learned some vital

Box 2.
Jagir is my dream

When I was in the early grades

Teachers sometimes do ask

what you want to be in the future?

Some friends told Doctor

Some other mentioned Engineer

Leader, Teacher, Lawyer were some professions expressed by some friends

When I was asked at the school what you want to be ?

I always expressed-

There is no any other destination

The government Jagir is my dream

I had a lots of friends

Of the family from merchants to peasants

But,

Seeing the well-off condition

of fathers of my friends

I have made my life-scheme

Jagir as my dream.

Do job as factory worker is not easy

Running own business means to be busy

I cannot imagine working at a farm

I don't want to enter

where there is less charm

Working in other's field is secondary theme

The only government employment is my dream.

I know not all dreams are fulfilable

Neither all goals are approachable

So,

I believe in the notion-

that "effort is the foundation"

Every success can stand on

So, I am moving with my ambition

Let me see how this can I rim

to achieve a jagir as dream !

*** **

skills with his efforts. Gopal was trusted for the operating wheel and did other significant tasks when his grandfather and father knew Gopal had already learned those skills.

Regarding this "peculiar" story (not teaching skills from the seniors), he mentioned:

When I started to work in my childhood, senior people did not allow me to work on the main tasks. So, I began to assist them in pretty works, such as cleaning and transporting. When I became more confident, I started to use flywheel secretly when my father and grandfather went for a break, for taking a meal, or for other purposes. I also learned additional skills such as mixing clay, malleting green pots, etc. If they knew that I am learning, they could scold me. The main reason for this was that pot items could be broken or damaged [Interview, September 2018].

Probably, the discouraging behavior of Gopal's seniors can be taken as an exceptional case. Knowingly or unknowingly, senior family members want to help their children learn different social behaviors and occupational skills, making them self-reliant.

From the story of another potter, *Binayak Prajapati*, it can be understood that adopting a traditional occupational path can also compromise the situation. When Binayak completed his tenth grade, he did not want to follow the trace of his ancestors. So, he opted for the occupation of a construction worker. When he worked there for some six months, he started to compare a construction worker's field with his family's traditional trade, the pottery. Finally, he decided to abandon the construction sector and returned to work being performed by the family. At present, Binayak is 39 years old and following the pottery occupation since his early youth stage. When he was asked how did he select this occupation, he mentioned:

Initially, I thought that pottery is a worse occupation. So, I entered the construction work. But when I worked there, I wouldn't say I liked the (construction) occupation because it was both unsafe and challenging. It also needed regularity in work. I felt that this (pottery) occupation is more flexible. If you want, you work and if you don't want you to take a rest. So, I decided to return to my parents' and ancestors' occupation [Interview, February 2019].

As Gottfredson (1981) asserts, selecting a person's occupational choice starts from childhood and depends on gender and age. Unfit occupations are eliminated gradually. In the youth stage, the person has to compromise and follow the best available occupational option. Such a compromise in the available occupational option can be understood in the case of Binayak. Such a career compromise can also be noticed in other research participants, too, in different ways.

Aspirations of Informal Skills Learners

Aspirations generally mean what an individual thinks and strive to make the future better (Cobb et al., 1989). Of course, aspiration is the individual's life goal and ambition. As aspirations of informal skills learners are one of the focus of this research, the following paragraphs provide expressions of the research participants regarding their future aspirations.

Moti Kutu is running his sole business of operating a motorcycle workshop for 13 years. When he was asked what his future goals are, he informed that "*motorcycle is a*

craze of present youth." So he wants to extend his workshop concerning both—capacity and the use of contemporary technology. Based on his experience from the partnership business in the past, Moti mentioned, "*in our (Nepali) context partnership in the business doesn't work.*" So, every effort for extending the business will solely be made by him, as he expressed.

It seems that aspiration also depends on the individual at what life-stage they are at present. For instance, Yuvaraj, another younger research participant from the same occupational field, has mainly two aspirations. First, he wants to earn money and support the family. As he mentioned regarding this:

I have to see my family. My family is in a difficult situation. I want to earn good money and send it to my parents to run the family better and have a small Ghaderi (a piece of land for a house) in the Chowk (center) of my village where my parents run a small business of grocery shop. When they have a small shop near the home, it will support running the day-to-day house expenses [Interview, October 2018].

The second ambition of Yuvaraj was to become an entrepreneur like his senior *mistries* [craftspeople]. He seems confident after acquiring skills during the jobs. However, he was suspicious whether he would open the workshop in Kathmandu due to its associated costs. He shared his plan:

At first, I want to become good mechanics knowing everything. Afterward, if I can collect some money, I will open my small workshop myself. But it is challenging here in

Kathmandu. So, I will open a workshop in a new place along the roadside in any village or Bazar [market place]. I want to become an owner of the workshop and not always work in the business of others [Interview, October 2018].

Box 3.

Please don't ask

*On each early wake with fresh mood
I see the fly-wheel inside the house
where I am revolving since my sperm-hood*

*When I see out from my window
I see the dusty-smoky-noisy road
Where some display their luxury
But at the same time I do become nostalgic with
my history.*

*Yes, really !
I have beaten with the mallet of regime
I am wheeling with fly-wheel of the time
I tell you, my dream is neither deep nor wide
What a potter can realize who resides and works
along the roadside.*

*I remember the days
when I dug the clay with my Grandpa
I did feel clay is our soul
And, pottery is our goal !*

*When I prepared the clay-sheet
with my spade and feet
I do feel the rhythm like from a drum-set
You see !
In the moments
when I bowed down to the fly-wheel
when I dried the green pots under the shed, or
Dried it under the sun
And also when I burnt the pots at the kiln
I always thought that
Soil is ours, the gift of nature
The land is ours, the Naso [a gift] of ancestors
And ultimately,
the time is ours
as I was an indigenous inhabitant*

Ahh...!

*It was an illusion absolutely
Which was apparent to us slowly
The lands were captured
The soils converted to be marketed
Fuels became jewelries
Plastic and metals converted as enemies*

*Dignity was dying day by day
I was paling on this way*

*Please don't ask—
What is your aspiration and goal
We are like an owl
Doing what ancestors told
Making what parents made*

*Please don't ask—
What is your vision
How can I say when I am in illusion-
Which world is better ?
The time of my ancestors
Or of today's youngsters'?*

*** **

Future aspirations of people probably also depend on the occupation selected by an individual. Both of the research participants from the pottery occupation didn't have greater aspirations. When the question regarding future aspiration was asked to *Gopal Prajapati*, he expressed multiple frustrations over the work despite feeling love for this traditional job. He mentioned some of the points that clay-pots are being substituted with plastic and metallic items these days, so the income decreases. Further, the production process requires a significant land area, which is not easy to manage in such and urban locations. His expression of "*Lakh ko bhada banauna karoda ko jamin chahinchha*" [it requires land costing Crores for doing the Lakh Rupees pottery

business] was one of the pain that facing by the potters these days. Due to such multiple challenges, Gopal does not see the future of the occupation. He shares that they (the family) are not teaching pottery skills to their children and prohibit them from being engaged in such skills learning because such skills learning "*can hinder the children's academic performance.*" At last, Gopal mentioned that they do not have any future ambition and just run this traditional enterprise until they (the couple) can work physically.

Another potter, *Binayak Prajapati*, also was not happy with his occupation. According to him, previously, there was no clay problem, no scarcity of land, and was relatively good income. But nowadays, the trade is facing multiple issues and become just a subsistence one. Binayak mentioned one phrase, "Please don't ask," regarding the future aspiration with this tone. Because he had so many compromising instances so that he was limited to the traditional occupational job as his ancestors performed. His feeling is depicted in box 3. above as a poetic expression.

Confined Dreams of Informal Skills Learners: What Can TVET Do for Widening Aspirations?

In the above sections, I presented how informal skills learners acquire crucial skills for shaping their future careers. It was also revealed that they gradually gained their confidence to become an entrepreneur in the future despite multiple barriers and

difficulties. However, a great question can be raised whether becoming a skilled person through informal skills learning is based on willingness or obligation. From the expression of informal skills learners, they can be said to have both opportunities and compulsion to become informal skills learners. On one side, those learners are the social structure victims who don't get sufficient opportunities to gain their educational qualification. At the same time, it can also be seen as an opportunity to get occupational insights and skills and running livelihood through being employed or becoming a self-entrepreneur. Remarkably, this is very important in the context where thousands of so-called educated youths do wander to search for employment but can not get it due to lack of occupational skills (Sharma, 2014). The major role in addressing this alarming issue certainly lies in the national TVET system.

In an underdeveloped context such as in Nepal, most adolescents and youth dream of getting higher educational qualifications, mainly in different technical fields such as medical doctors and engineers (Rimal, 2017). None of the informal skills learners I met expressed such aspirations. Instead, they wanted to become a successful entrepreneur. In this sense, we can understand that their career aspirations are "confined" and shaped by diverse socio-cultural environments and their family circumstances (Careersnz, 2012).

But, such confinement of aspirations can not

be taken as negatively because they have proven that despite the less opportunity of extending educational qualification, some of the informal skills learners are very competent artisans and entrepreneurs who can not only running the livelihood of their family but also contribute for preserving traditional skills and crafts. They are significant members of society.

Informal skills learning practice can also be taken as an informal apprenticeship. In different parts of the globe, there is a practice of imparting skills from a senior skilled person to a novice learner based on certain verbal agreements. In the case of informal skills learning, the primary intention is not the skills instruction. Instead, it is part of the performance of work. However, knowingly or unknowingly, skills learning activity occurs, and later on, a novice learner can convert to a semi-skilled, skilled, and highly competent occupational artisan. Such an invisible apprenticeship system is rampant in the countries where the informal economy and informal employment prevails. Some of such countries are focused on their TVET interventions for strengthening and recognizing informally learned skills. The experience of some Sub-Saharan African countries is very mentionable (Bankolé & Nouatin, 2020).

If we see this phenomenon through the lenses of career theories, it seems natural that the career selection process itself is a more or less compromising act. This fact is accepted by the theorists such as Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, & Hernia (1951); Super

(1953), as well as (as cited in Gottfredson, 1981, p. 546). Aspiration of young and adults also seemed varied individual to individual. However, from the study, it could be understood that, probably, aspirations are also shaped by circumstance. In general, as mentioned above, Nepali children want to be professionals such as doctors, engineers, or other professions (Rimal, 2017), as one research participant, Devika, expressed how she had to compromise her aspiration of becoming a civil servant (Box 2). But in the case of those informal skills learners who were opting for their career path as their circumstance guided seemed different. They had not such big aspirations and just limited to establishing or extending their enterprise and continuing how ancestors were doing in traditional occupation.

It is a pity that most youth informal skills learners are not included in the national TVET system. It means their skills and competencies obtained by themselves without state investment are not being recognized. On one side increasing access of people—particularly the youths—is considered as one of the prominent issues in front of TVET sector whereas on the other side a massive number of such skilled human resources are not getting an opportunity for enhancing their skills and competencies

Obtaining education and skills is both— necessity and the right of people (Government of Nepal [GoN], 2015). Every piece of knowledge and skills acquired by a person should be recognized and certified. The critical spirit of the national vocational

qualification framework (NVQF) also exists on this principle. Nepal is also in the process of implementing newly developed NVQF. So, it is the right time to streamline the considerable mass of informal skills learners as workers—which volume is more than 80 percent in the country (ILO, 2018)—to TVET interventions.

Such massive recognition of informal skills learners can have multiple advantages. The first and foremost benefit is that it will help increase access, equity, and inclusion in TVET, one of the major emphases of the recent TVET Policy (GoN, 2012). The employment sector's next grievance about lacking TVET graduates' competencies and mismatch with the labor market need can significantly decrease by recognizing informal skills learners. Similarly, the vast mass of unskilled youth going for foreign employment can benefit directly. Besides, this intervention also can contribute to producing skilled human resources capable of global competitiveness.

Conclusions

This paper tried to express the findings under three headings. The first heading was focused on research participants' condition for discontinuation (or pursuing) school-level education. It has been found that there are mainly two pushing factors contributing to the discontinuation of the school study. In the traditional occupation, one of the reasons for either not visiting or discontinuing school was the need for support by children to the enterprise and lacking awareness towards the importance of education. Although the

journey of struggle after leaving school for getting and being established in the job can differ person to person, generally, it was found that getting work adolescent and youth jump directly to the job what is available at present. During working and learning the competence develops. It is also found that getting a job or creating self-employment is more difficult for females.

Finally, it is the essence of the paper—as well as the recommendation— that the TVET system of a developing context like Nepal should focus its intervention on widening the "dream" of those youth who are compelled to "confine" their future becoming an unrecognized informal skills learners but contributing the nation a lot. Until or unless it (TVET system) is not focused on "3A"—awareness, attraction, and acknowledgment of the young informal skills learners—the country's development effort can not be materialized as expected.

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