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## TVET Trainers understanding of Engaging Instruction: the Learning Challenge

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### *Abstract*

*The purpose of this study is to explore TVET trainers' understanding of engaging instruction. Participants' engagement in the process of training is always a challenging task for trainers. The challenge increases when the practice is executed in the TVET sector, which questions the traditional instructional delivery practices commonly practiced in general education. One of the realities of teaching is that most teachers lack the knowledge of engaging instructional strategies and rely on traditional instructional devices or other factors. This research identifies the trainer's understanding of engaging instruction under three main themes: learning challenges, active learning, and the trainer's perceptions. Purposive sampling was used to collect data from 21 TVET trainers currently engaged in different TVET institutes in Lahore, Pakistan. The qualitative data analysis technique is applied as a data collection strategy to explore views, opinions, practices, challenges, preferences, and lived experiences of TVET trainers for engaging instruction during their training activities. The data analysis revealed that most trainers believe participant engagement and activity-based learning are the critical factors for effective instructional engagement. In addition, it has been concluded that training participants require a conducive training environment for enriching their learning experiences. The findings have been discussed from various perspectives, and some suggestions based on results have been put forward, including a further focus on delivery strategies and online training improvement.*

**Keywords**: Activity-based Learning, Competency, Engaging Instructions, Skills Development, TVET

## Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is a unique education system that mainly focuses on developing practical knowledge and understanding of employment in a specific sector, trade, or a group of professions (Mwashighadi, Kerre, & Kitainge, 2020). The most exciting element about technical and vocational studies is its knowledge towards the market needed learning and the curriculum that focuses on attaining employment competencies. This suggests the shift towards Competency-Based Training (CBT) for an effective and value-laden TVET centered on market-oriented skills. Graduates from TVET institutes would drive a CBT approach to learn from the competency-based curriculum taught in the TVET institutes. As a result of CBT, prospective competencies and skills set promise these graduates to start their businesses or work in public and private business organizations (Mwashighadi et al., 2020).

In the context of a developing country like Pakistan, the TVET sector has always been neglected since its formulation as the priority has always been given to general or mainstream education. Most TVET institutes represent the public sector, while private organizations and institutes operate a small presence. Several provincial and national bodies are also engaged in TVET initiatives, including the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTC), the apex organization for TVET in-country, provincial training assessment boards and administration, and provincial technical training and vocational training authorities (TEVTAs). According to Pakistan's government, New Growth strategy 2011, NAVTTC is responsible for: 1) Control policy directions for TVET institutes, 2) Balance the demand of skillful labor from public-private partnerships, 3) Revise

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strategies and designed policies maintaining efficient human capital, 4) Introduce updated curriculum, assessment, and competency-based training, and 5) Examine and monitor quality teaching with advances technological resources.

According to a report by IFC (the most significant global development institution), 200 million people from developing countries face unemployment, among which a majority consists of women and youth (Chamadia & Shahid, 2018). The improved and modern technology around the globe demands skillful human capital to operate the technologies and equipment. However, there still exists a mismatch in the demand and supply of necessary skills required. This dilemma prominently exists in a developing country like Pakistan, which requires human capital according to the changing world order. Pakistan's TVET system faces many challenges, particularly in access, quality, relevance, and equity. Around 2.4 million graduates per annum enter the job market, and in 2015 only 476,650 positions were available in 3,581 TVET institutes across the country (TVET, 2020).

This research will explore trainers' perceptions of engaging instruction and contextualizing learners' attitudes according to their socioeconomic status. The experiences of administrators, learners, and trainers develop a robust explanation of the phenomena to provide a mutual understanding of learner engagement. This research will help provide a rich knowledge of engaging learners through effective learner-centered strategies and attempts to be a valuable resource for trainers searching for guidelines for achieving engaging instructions, particularly in the context of the TVET sector.

## Literature Review
### Global TVET
Although several developing countries have used TVET as an instrument of sustainable development, TVET has been left to the periphery, and its significance has not been embraced. On the other hand, developing countries have a relatively large percent of skilled yet unemployed people. This is a result of declining employment in the public and private sectors. Moreover, despite that Developing Countries have a large cheap unskilled labor force, as a result of lack of education and training, the core role of TVET in enhancing the informal sector and in offering skills and knowledge to the unskilled has not been keenly appreciated in most of the Developing Countries (Raihan, 2014).

For a TVET system to be able to play its role effectively, it is essential to develop a TVET friendly environment nationwide. Such an enabling environment can be achieved by harmonizing national TVET policies, creating positive social attitudes towards training, providing adequate funds, and enhanced management. The governments and the private sector in different developing countries should above all recognize that TVET is an investment, not a cost, with significant returns, including the well-being of workers, enhanced productivity, international competitiveness, and economic growth in the long run. However, its challenges make it difficult to achieve (Raihan, 2014).

### Factors affecting learner engagement
Many factors affect learner engagement that makes engaging instruction a challenge. Generally, an improved social support system, creative tasks, and a friendly school environment encourage learners to study ((Raihan, 2014). Furthermore, the culture and institutional objectives highly impact learners' engagement in their studies. Learning and instructional practices are also encouraged to focus on learners' achievement. Finally, the shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered approach has increased learners' learning and involvement (Raihan, 2014).

Additionally, culture and environment also play a vital part in increasing learner's interaction. Trainers must be able to develop five main dimensions of competencies in the learners that include 1) Task skills, 2) Task Management Skills, 3) Contingency Skills, 4) Environment Skills 5) Transfer Skills. The lack of such competency skills also creates barriers to learner's effective engagement within their studies. This could be achieved through a friendly and innovative environment. A warm and creative environment is an essential part of to transfer of knowledge for the learning process. However, it must be noted that such an environment must be of small groups between learners and trainers.

On the contrary, the larger size of classes restricts certain activities that create engaging learners through such activities (Raihan, 2014). However, the environmental and cultural aspects are out of the trainer's control. Other than the environment, cultural differences and backgrounds of the learners also contribute towards learner engagement in their classrooms. In the same context, how learners deal with their peers also determines their involvement in their studies (Raihan, 2014). To

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gain a sustainable advantage in the education sector, developing countries like Pakistan must increase their investments in education and training for youth. In particular, to move further into a knowledge-based economy and move up the value chain, it is indispensable for such countries to improve the quality of education at every level (Raihan, 2014).

When trainers start caring about learners and try to create a bond with them, engaging learners accelerates. Mostly, effective instruction comes when a trainer can develop strong interpersonal skills with the ability to make an effective classroom environment. Better understanding between learners and trainers helps learners to perform better. Moreover, learners must also possess strong interpersonal skills to impact the trainer-learner relationship for creating a supportive classroom environment (Raihan, 2014). This strong learner-trainer relationship will also help learners excel in additional learning opportunities beyond the traditional classroom environment (Raihan, 2014). The trainer's normal response to solve learners' problems also helps to achieve effective engagement. In the context of TVET, trainers' interpersonal and communication skills and their instant responses also encourage learners to engage in their studies to achieve high academic grades. Trainers' positive emotions help to create a positive environment that allows learners to solve their problems (Raihan, 2014).

Additionally, the learning experiences do not happen from learners only. It requires the support of family members, trainers, peers, and the community that all affect the learner's emotions. The engaging learning experience is a set of learner-oriented, contextual, social, and a comfortable environment and for achieving learners' engagement, and all these factors are vital for achieving high academic performance (Raihan, 2014).

The instructional design quality checklist designed by the Australian Adult Learning Institute (TVET, 2020) gives important recommendations and guidelines for effective learning. These guidelines are essential for any learning program: blended, face-to-face, distance, and e-learning. The checklist recommends a clear picture of competency at the start and learns what type of skills, knowledge, and competency is needed to obtain. After having a clear vision, trainers must develop SMART outcomes that include program outcomes and session outcomes. The entire learning session must be designed so that the learners should progress through the whole learning cycle. The learning program should address all the three-domain of learning: skills, knowledge, and attitude. The checklist also provides guidelines about the delivery method, and resources must be of different learning styles, including PowerPoints, charts, relevant music, reading material, and e-learning activities. Mostly, adult learners learn best when the learning is applied through real-life issues and examples. The learners' group must be target according to their background and knowledge, and an appropriate learning strategy is used according to it. It must be noted that learner's brains are not computers, and for the learning to occur, content must be reviewed at continuous internals throughout the learning program (TVET, 2020).

There is an urgency required by the government and the public-private TVET institutes to take initiatives of such programs that would help grow and develop technical and vocational education in the country. There are several measures that the government and institutions can take in this regard. Introducing and implementing immediate steps for improving the service conditions of teachers, developing and establishing a national system of skills standardization, testing, certification, accreditation of institutions and equivalence, developing and implementing a monitoring and evaluation system to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of training programs are a few to name.

## Challenges for the trainers

Institutional collaboration is one of the essential elements to ensure the effective delivery of the TVET system. Linking the TVET delivery system will benefit both the private sector and the industry ((Raihan, 2014). Moreover, a significant economic contribution can be made by developing an effective TVET system. But in third-world countries like Pakistan, the TVET sector is still lagging ((Raihan, 2014). One of the main reasons is that enterprise still undermines the benefits of institutional and industrial collaboration (Raihan, 2014).

Moreover, the industry is not involved in designing or updating the curriculum as per current trends. Fewer numbers firms played their role in developing and testing students ((Raihan, 2014). There is a severe deficiency of work-integrated learning as well. Another primary reason that affects the efficiency of the TVET is the ignorance of enterprises towards the training process (Raihan, 2014). However, training is an essential part of the knowledge and skill upgrading process and could

be achieved through work-integrated learning. Therefore, institutional and industrial collaboration is highly required (Raihan, 2014).

**Research Objectives**

Following three research objectives were considered to complete this research study.
1.     To explore TVET trainers' understanding of the importance of TVET sector
2.     To explore TVET trainers' understanding of learning challenges for engaging instruction.
3.     To explore TVET trainers' understanding of active learning for engaging instruction.

**Research Questions**

Based on the research objectives, following research questions have been attempted to focus on in this study.
1.     What is TVET trainers' understanding of the importance of TVET sector?
2.     What is TVET trainers' understanding of learning challenges for engaging instruction?
3.     What is TVET trainers' understanding of active learning for engaging instruction?

**Methodology**

**Research Design**

The current study is a qualitative study using a hermeneutic phenomenology research design. Lydall, Pretorius, and Stuart (2005) state, "a fundamental tenet of hermeneutic phenomenology is that people seek to create meaning of their experience from the response sited within human consciousness" (p. 1). Using semi-structured interviews, the researcher accessed the participants' world of the lived experience and their interpretations of these experiences. Phenomenology is defined as studying a phenomenon through an inquiry about the way 'things' appear. Thus, phenomenology is suited to education as it endeavors to reveal the meaning of human lived experience, and it is through this experience that practice is questioned.

**Research Context**

Data was collected from 21 participants who have been working as trainers and other significant jobs in the TVET sector. Participants included 13 male and eight female trainers originating from the city of Lahore in the Punjab province of Pakistan. Ten participants represented the public sector, and 11 presented the private sector in TVET. A majority of participants had more than ten years of experience working as trainers in the TVET sector. The diversified experience ranged from 2 to 20 years of working in the industry. Almost all participants enjoy respectable job portfolios at senior management positions in the public and private sectors.

**Sampling and Participants Participant Inclusion Criteria**

The purposeful sample (Campbell et al., 2020; Denieffe, 2020), utilizing a criterion sampling technique (Patton, 2015), was selected to complete this study. Following criteria were used to decide the inclusion of participants in this study:
1.     Participants were working in the TVET sector
2.     Participants had the experience of conducting training
3.     Participants originated from the city of Lahore
4.     Participants had access to the internet and zoom
5.     Participants were willing to share their experiences voluntarily
6.     Participants approved of recording their online interviews for transcription

**Data Collection Method**

In the current study, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 respondents working in the TVET sector in different organizations in Lahore that helped in better understanding the organization's objectives. The interviews were conducted by experienced trainers working in various technical and vocational institutes working across the country.

**Interview Guide**

Several possible questions for the interview guide were developed based on the areas identified in the literature (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). More specifically, this study used open-ended questions to enquire about the participants' experiences, and the probing technique was frequently used to let them share their examples and experiences.

**Data Analysis Method**

The analysis of data proceeded in two steps, employing inductive and deductive 12 methodical procedures of qualitative data analysis:

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Step 1: meaning condensation and

Step 2: theoretical interpretation of the interview text

Firstly, the 'meaning condensation' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015) of meanings and narratives found in interview transcripts was done. The extended sequence of the interview text was then summarized and rephrased into shorter text, thus elucidating the central theme. Finally, each theme was named: Learning Challenge, Active Learning, Supportive Learning Environment, etc.

Secondly, a 'theoretically informed reading' (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015) of the interview transcripts was done. The five facets form the basis of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which defines student engagement as "students' involvement with activities and conditions likely to generate high-quality learning" (Coates, 2009), measured along with six engagement scales helped to develop a theoretical interpretation of the data. For the theoretical data analysis, interview transcripts were coded into categories.

**Analysis**

**Theme one:  Learning Challenge**

The master theme of Learning Challenge is discussed under the seven superordinate themes. Each of these superordinate themes is discussed to share participants' experiences and understanding.



*Views on participants' engagement:*

The majority of the respondents believed Participants' Engagement to be the core factor in engaging instruction during the training. They believed the desired training outcomes never be achieved unless the trainer had not successfully engaged participants. Participant 12 said, "Unless and until there is no participation engagement, the expected training results could be nothing but 0%". He further emphasized the proactive planning and responsive behavior expected from trainers to engage their participants effectively. He added, "Failing to keep the participants interested in the training is the failure of the trainer. It requires innovative training methods to keep the learners engaged throughout the course of the training session." The majority of the participants signified the two-way communication to be the most critical factor for engaging participants. Quoting one of the participants:

> Participant engagement is the most crucial factor for successful and meaningful training, and effective two-way communications lay the basis for it. If your participants are not engaged and reciprocate well, it will be like they are watching television. The level of participant engagement measures the level of effectiveness attained by participants in any learning activity. (Participant 16)

*The preferred medium of instruction*

The vast majority of participants said they use multiple languages, with most of them saying they use English and Urdu to enhance their learning. However, quite a lot of them also highlighted the benefits of using more than one language. For example, one of the participants said:

> Before making my choices about the medium of instruction, I assess the competency level of learners. Sometimes, I even use Punjabi language and poetry and quotations in Siraiki. It helps me to create that powerfully connect with my audience. It becomes even challenging when I am training public sector teachers. I, therefore, prefer bilingual mediums of instruction. (Participant 7)

Participant 4 stated the utility of using the mother language just to add spice in his training sessions. He said, "I always found the storytelling technique highly motivating for my trainees, and these work best when I am using the native language." Most participants also mentioned specific jargon and vocabulary that has to be taught and discussed only in the English language. The names and features of some technical processes or machines, for instance, are usually communicated in the English language. Quoting participant 20, for instance:

I train the teachers in the Beautician sector, where most of my trainees are not highly qualified or comfortable with the English language. Yet, I am supposed to learn the specific vocabulary of products and services in English, and I do it. They do make an effort to understand those. (Participant 20)

*Application of theory and practice*

Participants were divided about the use of theories and practice in training sessions to enhance trainees' learning. Almost everyone believed there needs a flavor of both aspects, theoretical and practical; however, most participants firmly believed more emphasis should be given to the practical part. They viewed the phenomena as specific to the needs of TVET as it requires participants to get practical and hands-on expertise more than learning the theories. One participant, for instance, stated:

I have usually found theories to be less effective. The audience is not much supportive of grasping theoretical components for a long time. It gets me challenging to keep them engaging in the session. I believe theories are helpful but only for a limited time. Excessive use of theories can create boredom among learners. (Participant 6)

The trend seemed varied, and it was found out that the ratio between teaching theories and applying practical aspects varies from one trade area to the other. However, the majority agreed that the trainers should consume more focus and time in a training session in enabling participants to practice the taught skills. They believed the mandatory parts of theories help support the trainer's lecture, but this needs to be backed up with more time, energy, and concentration towards practical aspects and exercises. Whether subject-specific or general management training, the physical activities and practical side of training keep the training participants focused and pertinent towards maximizing their learning. One of the participants, for instance, shared:

Being the IT trainer, when I am teaching databases to my students, the first thing I do is to explain critical aspects and to work on the databases verbally. Following it, I then explain it theoretically as well as logically. And then, I take my learners to the practical side, where they get the heck of the concept through the hands-on learning approach. This step-by-step strategy always results in positive outcomes. (Participant 4)

*Trainees' participation practices*

Participants shared their experiences of practices that they adopt for maximizing trainees' participation in their sessions. They expressed the experiences that they have encountered with different ways and manners to serve the purpose. The majority of the participants highlighted the importance and benefits of 'questioning. They believed, "the more you encourage trainees to ask you questions, the more they are involved in the learning experience." One of the participants said:

The simplest way to engage trainees in the discussion is to question them to know them more and build a cordial environment. I crack jokes at times to get people in a lighter mode, and this always helps. I also believe that people have a limit of the engagement period, and after it, their minds divert. (Participant 10)

Another participant explained how questioning helps him planning his training sessions. He shared:

Over the years, I have learned to encourage trainees to interact, and if they don't speak much, I start questioning them. I give them an easy go, and they start opening up. It also helps me in re-planning and review activities that are part of my initial plan. Sometimes I plan them to an advanced level based on the input I get from questioning. (Participant 13)

Participant 9 shared that sometimes questioning does not give the required results. She said, "Sometimes the whole cohort agrees not to come out of comfort zone. Practical and physical activities then help me to break the ice."

*Participants' reactions towards assignments and assessments:*

Most of the respondents believed training participants show reluctance when it comes to assessments and examinations. They related their experiences of a mixed response about minor tasks that are organized during the sessions. One of the participants mentioned that training is more of entertainment, fun, food, and networking. He also thought some participants are more interested in the TAs / DAs (monetary benefits). Quoting his words:

They (participants) like easy tasks, and usually, they would prefer doing these in groups. The problem starts when you give them home tasks and readings. They typically prefer verbal discussions, which is undoubtedly not the TVET spirit! (Participant 18)

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Another participant shared that there must be a friendly environment and a healthy relationship between the trainer and trainees. He explained how he overcame this issue:

> To some extent, reluctance is there in every group. However, I always feel the trainer has the controlling authority, but this must be exercised gently and friendly. I guide my trainees and tell them why the task or an assessment relates to them and the prime objectives. They get it if it has something in it for them, resulting in a win-win scenario. (Participant 13)

According to the majority of participants, it also depends on the nature of the task and assessment. If these were summative assessments, trainees would take them more seriously. Participant 3 shared his experiences about the connection of length of tasks or assessments with the positive reactions of participants. He mentioned, "A task of say 10 minutes length is easy to sell but something that takes more than 30 minutes would unpleased them." He also shared his views about the use of technology as another unfavourite tool for public sector trainees. Pen & paper is their preference, he mentioned.

### Participants' perceptions about new ideas and concepts

Interestingly, most participants shared that the young trainees are more receptive, flexible, and adaptive to new concepts and practices. They shared their experiences of how the senior training participants become rigid and hesitant to immediately accept and approve contemporary and latest up-gradation in the field. According to them, this is one primary reason why the TVET sector in Pakistan is lagging behind the world. It also becomes a critical challenge for trainers while engaging in instruction. Quoting one of the participants;

> Resistance usually comes from participants who are above 50 or in their late 40s. It could be hard to convince them at times. I call them the 'challengers,' and one has to be very swift in handling them. The younger lot is usually excited to know more and grow more. (Participant 14)

Furthering the same issue, another participant shared why he believed the senior trainees are not comparatively receptive to learning new concepts and accepting new ideas. He said:

> They sometimes believe they know everything, and the level of acceptance for a younger trainer and that too from the private sector becomes a 'factor' for them. I have usually had this problem with participants representing the public sector. Some are just too lazy to get out of their comfort zones. (Participant 11)

He also mentioned that usually, these senior trainees possess decent experience and competencies, yet adopting a new perspective and buying the western practices is challenging for them. Many trainers also suggested that linking the concept with an Islamic perspective or endorsement makes the job easier.

### Trainer's preparation to enhance participants' engagement

Each of the participants shared their opinion and practices of preparing well in advance. In addition, they shared activities that were on their minds to run the show. For example, participant 17 said, "Being a trainer is like playing the central part in the act that is going live on air, so there is less concession for any mistake." She even said she used to learn it like a script during her initial years in this career.

The majority of the participants also shared that they are very keen on knowing about the training venue and available resources, emphasizing space availability for conducting practical activities. They also referred to their experiences of demonstrating the task in front of trainees before expecting them to learn and perform. This was explicitly considered the most crucial factor for the skills-oriented training sessions. Sharing the words of one of the participants, for example;

> I believe demonstrations and practical applications earn the trainer a good reputation, and this will be smoother only if we are efficiently and effectively prepared. I follow a step-by-step approach: an excellent introduction to a topic, an exciting relevance it has with their jobs, a compelling demonstration of the task in front of them, and then letting them do it independently. (Participant 11)

Trainers also mentioned the importance of ice breakers and group-based physical tasks, especially in the afternoon and post-lunch sessions. They called it the 'graveyard session.' They believed a well-prepared trainer will always have the required resources and accessories to conduct these activities, and they will have logical reasons and connections to link these activities with the underlined potential learning.

**Theme two: Active Learning**
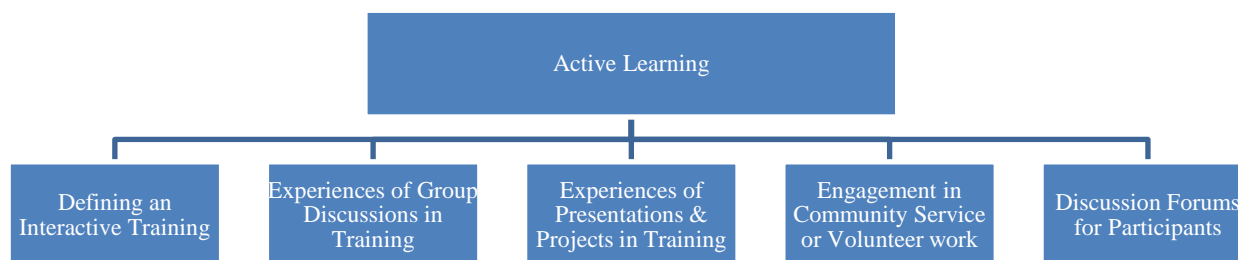


*Defining an interactive training*

All participants shed their experiences about how they see the vitality of conducting interactive training. They also explained their views about factors responsible for making possible what is called interactive training. For example, one of the participants said:

> Interactive training is not just an added value or benefit associated with training. For me, it is the actual spirit or essence of the learning experience. Trainers must evaluate and re-evaluate to making their training interactive. It certainly requires two-way communication for turning the training interactive and practical. (Participant 2)

> Participant 1 seconded the thoughts and said, "Without being interactive, we should not even call it a training; it will be merely a one-way talk or a presentation." Some participants explained how they learned and realized this factor to be considered the most critical success indicator for any training intervention over the years in their careers as a trainer.

> My sessions, in the beginning, were not very interactive, and as a result, the feedback was average. I was new in this field, and through observing senior trainers in action and reflecting on my ways and style, I realized how important it was for me to make the training more and more interactive. It took me about two years to work on it, and since then, I have been pretty confident about achieving the desired training outcomes. (Participant 19)

*Experiences of group discussions in training*

A vast majority of the participants expressed their consent about the positive outputs and experiences from the group discussions during their training activities. They believed it greatly helps trainers to get participants involved in the training if they are provided with an opportunity to conversate and work within groups. Quoting one of the participants:

> Group discussions help in making an active learning experience. People love to learn in group discussions. Participants want to interact with each other instead of communicating with the trainer all the time. I believe in multiple sources of learning, and the trainer is only one of the sources. Aggregate knowledge enhances when everyone shares their experience, and it is practically possible through group discussions. (Participant 3)

> Some participants also shared their experiences of engaging different trainees in group discussions. They also shared the active involvement of some participants compared to others. Participant 8, for example, said, "I have experienced younger participants are more cooperative and impactful when it comes to group work or discussions." However, most participants believed it is regardless of age and is dependent on the willingness to learn. One of the participants also shared his experience of making 'group discussions' more effective. He shared:

> I ensure participants interact with different people and work in other groups. The task is to break the ice among them. Sometimes, they wish to remain part of the same group throughout the course of training, which is not a promising approach, in my view. I give everyone in the training room a number, keeping in mind the total number of tables in the room and then number the tables, so people work in groups, not on their choice. It makes the task easy and acceptable to them. (Participant 18)

*Experiences of presentations and projects in training*

All participants favored the inclusion of projects and presentations to enhance productivity in the training activities. However, they pointed out the difficulties and challenges they faced while organizing projects and presentations from the trainees. They mainly named the lack of confidence, absence of public speaking skills, and the usual laziness as significant reasons for some participants to avoid these. One of the participants shared:

Some participants get anxious, and they are reluctant to face the audience. It is usually their lack of confidence. However, once they have presented, I have always seen tremendous trust in them and their performance levels get drastically higher. We must provide them with this opportunity more often. (Participant 7)

One trainer shared her experiences of working with female participants. She believed; female participants tend to show different behavior when attending training with their male counterparts. She said:

Female participants, at times, feel dominated and uncomfortable in the presence of males. I have many female participants coming to me and requesting me not to ask them to present in front of the audience. It is not their fault. Some of them have developed this behavioral issue over the years, and this could go back to their school times where they have never appreciated and been motivated. (Participant 19)

She emphasized that there should be more opportunities for female teachers in the TVET sector to study, work and present their ideas more confidently.

### Engagement in community services or volunteer work

Most of the respondents shared that the practice of engaging trainees in any community or volunteer work is not usually prioritized or directed by the higher authorities who are responsible for approving the training content. According to most participants, there is little say of trainers in the public sector when adding societal value or proposing any out-of-box idea. As a result, there are already fewer training opportunities, which may not fit the top priorities in setting the training agenda. One of the participants shared:

This has never been a priority for the public sector and not even an attraction for many private TVET agencies. Usually, it is opposed by the ceremonial laws, but I think it is imperative and effective for achieving issues like social inclusion or so many other social problems that TVET practitioners should address. (Participant 2)

Participants also mentioned that where any such opportunity is provided, the trainees mostly react positively towards doing any volunteer work or community service; however, they usually want such activities to be done within the training hours.

I work in the beauty sector, and my organization runs a philanthropic program for burn victims. Being a trainer, I have engaged my trainees to work with them voluntarily. Not only are they very interested in engaging with them, but trainees request such opportunities. I completed such initiatives because I always had strong support from the owner of my organization. This cause is very closed to her. (Participant 20)

### Discussion forums for participants

Maximum participants positively answered about providing their trainees with a discussion forum to share their opinions and use these forums to submit training tasks and assignments. Almost all participants shared that they usually create WhatsApp groups for the training cohort. Referring to the answer given by one of the participants:

Technology has made our lives easier. I remember we never had such forums before we started using WhatsApp. I never had any issue with this part. Usually, the group is made at the beginning of the training, and it is beneficial to me. I share content related to the training topic, and participants also respond favorably. (Participant 1)

All participants shared their appreciation for using technology and social media platforms for this purpose. A significant chunk of them also highlighted the downside of such groups. They shared that the initial usage is productive, but participants tend to divert from the core purpose, and much irrelevant sharing in these groups is annoying to these trainers. Quoting one of the participants:

No one could deny the importance of having such a forum for discussion and participation. However, participants mostly share photos taken during the training, which is fine, but they often start sharing religious posts or irrelevant content to do with their political opinions and beliefs. Secondly, if you try to control these groups by approving the posts before they are shared, it is extra work and a lot of time-consuming. (Participant 5)

### Discussion

Engaging trainees during learning space has always been challenging for an instructor, a teacher, or a trainer. The most important aspect of the learning space is its discussion and the student's interest in the learning process. Therefore, it is highly significant for an instructor and a trainer to understand

learners' nature, necessities, and expectations to maintain their interest in the learning process. Literature has shown that much burden is laid on the shoulders of teachers to amplify their learners' interest level by playing different roles like teaching, guiding, mentoring, etc. Therefore, the teacher's competencies significantly impact the attitude and behavior of the participants, which is evident from the data and suggested by most participants.

The teachers' competencies affect not only students' attitude but also their performance. A recent study suggested the teaching competencies affect students' performance and evaluations (Raihan, 2014). The same crux is found in the findings of this research study, specifically in the participants' answers to check perceptions, believes, and behavior. It is evident from the data that trainers expect their participating TVET teachers to have exposure to these multiple competencies. With the below-average competency level of teachers, TVET trainers would not be able to give an extraordinary performance.

Trainer's competencies and using a learner-centric approach can significantly alleviate the level of student interest. The learner-centric approach facilitates the trainers to interact and develop effective communication channels with trainees. Learner centric approach has a positive policy impact on the students' engagement (Raihan, 2014). The underlined findings from various questions asked to participants about learning challenges also reflect the same perspectives. Therefore, TVET trainers should emphasize planning and executing learners-centric training methodologies. While doing so, trainers have to consider the limitations and current level of understanding among their audience.

There exists a relatively lesser learning motivation among trainees, and it becomes a more convincing argument for trainers to avoid challenging assessments or training tasks. An interactive approach that fully facilitates training participants' essential needs and requirements must be kept in trainers' minds. A learner-centric approach can help the instructor enhance quality management practices and improve student interaction and engagement (Raihan, 2014). Although in the TVET sector, the generic needs of teachers are quite similar, there is heterogeneity among the trainees, which is based on their experiences, existing skills, and current exposure to the best local and international practices. The expectations and engagement of trainees also vary from one sector to another. For example, trades that fall in the category of services require more emphasis on soft skills, whereas the more hardcore technical trade teachers need more hands-on and production-oriented training skills (Raihan, 2014). The trainers, therefore, have to consider aggregate common grounds to engage participants in the training activities (Raihan, 2014). The data also suggested that participants' understanding and knowledge consumption may vary from one cohort to another. Therefore, it is emphasized that trainers must rethink and re-plan their activities after personally gauging trainees' existing skills after their meetings and interactions (Raihan, 2014).

**Implication of research**

**Recommendations for policy**

Based on the findings of the current research study, the following recommendations for policy and practice are made:

1. This study has revealed an area of TVET trainers' understanding of engaging instruction, and the topic itself is contemporary and unconventional, which calls for further investigation of the phenomenon by policymakers.
2. It was not intended to correct the irregularities; it uncovered the strengths and weaknesses of current TVET training practices and exposed the multiple challenges faced by TVET trainers in conducting effective training sessions. Therefore, it is recommended that an official forum is created at the national and provincial levels that regularly enable trainers to meet and discuss the related issues.
3. This study raises questions about the active involvement of industry in drafting and imparting the most relevant training content. Nevertheless, the true spirit of demand-led TVET strives for this argument. Therefore, it is recommended that the active involvement of industry is focused, and the policymakers should involve respective industry forums to serve the purpose. Local chambers of commerce, for instance, could be involved.

**Recommendations for practice**

Based on the findings of the current research study, the following recommendations for practice are made:

1.      This study has revealed an area of KSA (Knowledge, Skills, Attitude) to be a prominent opportunity and challenge simultaneously. Trainers, specifically in the TVET sector, need to apply all three learning domains in a balanced proportion, emphasizing each of these.

2.      It was not intended to correct the irregularities; it uncovered the strengths and weaknesses of TVET trainers' practices regarding participants' portfolio development, an essential element of TVET training at every level. Therefore, it is recommended that trainers educate and invite all training participants to develop their evidence folders and personal portfolios for every training they attend.

**Conclusion**

This qualitative study reinforces existing research linked with teachers' instructional strategies and engagement at various education levels. The current research study has focused on the TVET sector particularly, and trainers' understanding of engaging instruction has been the central research area. Twenty-one TVET trainers were interviewed from Lahore, with participants representing the public and private sectors.

The research study highlighted trainers' perceptions, believes, and behaviors generally about the TVET sector. It also portrays trainers' clarity and understanding about teachers' expected roles and competencies who are working in the TVET sector and happen to be training participants.

Most trainers believed trainee-centered teaching methodologies work effectively in this sector, and participant engagement remains the foremost target of trainers. They also believe training tasks, assignments and assessments also need to be trainee-focused with more engaging teaching methodologies in forms of group work and discussions were highly favored. Most participants have predominantly advocated Activity-based learning for obvious reasons for liking practical and hands-on learning, usually preferred in technical and vocational education and training.

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