

# The study on the effectiveness of soft skill subjects in Public TVET Institutes in Bhutan

Yonten Pelzang

Principal, Technical Training Institute, Khuruthang-Punakha, Bhutan

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**Abstract**— *The purpose of this study is to find out the effectiveness of soft skills subjects being taught in Public TVET Institute in Bhutan. The study was conducted using a mixed-mode research approach. A total of 30 TVET graduates were involved as respondents in collecting data for this research. The primary data for the study were collected through structured questions and informal interviews from the respondents. The data were analyzed through the process of thematic data analysis.*

*The findings of this study revealed that the effectiveness of soft skill subjects taught and learned in the public Institutes was mostly effective. The graduates who got enrolled in Institute after their 12th standard have different views on its effectiveness than the graduates who got enrolled in the same Institute after the 10th standard. The study concluded that a technical skill has the power to facilitate gainful employment, but soft skill can magically sustain them in the organization.*

**Keywords**— *Soft skills, National Certificates, Investments, IR 4.0, Gainful employment, Socio-economic.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background/Context

The year was 1960. It was the turning point in the history of developmental activities scheduled to take place in Bhutan. The First Five Year Plan (FYP) was scheduled to commence from 1961. Bhutan had no choice but to depend heavily on the expatriate workforce to execute planned activities. The need of the hour to establish a Centre that offers vocational training to solve the much needed trained manpower in the development process was felt like never before.

Ultimately, under the direct command of the then visionary King, popularly known in Bhutanese history as the “Father of Modern Bhutan” the first Technical School was established at Rinchening in 1965. It was later renamed as Royal Technical Institute (RTI).

The technical graduates of RTI to some extent addressed the much-needed skilled manpower to assist in the initial developmental activities. In 1974, the Royal Bhutan Polytechnic, later known as Jigme Namgyal Polytechnic in the eastern region was established to offer diploma-level

engineering courses. Accordingly, the two institutes have purportedly produced substantial numbers of technical personnel in various engineering fields making considerable contributions to nation-building.

Despite considerable investments made in the TVET sector over the past several decades, it still faces significant challenges in terms of access, relevance, and quality of skills in the wake of a rapid socio-economic transformation of the country. It is still a less preferred option for most youth in general while at the same time, TVET graduates continue to face difficulty in upgrading their educational qualification and career advancement. These factors have further aggravated the problem of the weak TVET system. TVET in Bhutan had always been looked down upon even to this day by society and parents alike, projecting a poor image towards the so-called “blue-collar job” and tarnishing the very essence of dignity of labour. There is a negative stigma attached to TVET. People hold the view that TVET is good for students who do not qualify for admission into the university and meant for lower-income groups. TVET is never the second-best choice. It is of course undeniably a

universal phenomenon that TVET programs are poorly perceived, especially so in the developing world.

Despite all odds, the TVET system in Bhutan has come a long way. Currently, there are six Technical Training Institutes (TTIs) and two Institutes of Zorig Chusum (IZCs). Around 797 trainees are undergoing training in various Public Institutes. The minimum entry qualification for the courses offered in the Institute is class X certificate holders. However, the majority of the trainees are class XII. Of the total 153 trainers, 111 have diploma qualifications, 32 have a Degree Qualification, and 10 trainers with a National Certificate. The head of all Public Institutes have a Master's Degree Qualification.

The persistent issue raised time and again by society with regard to the TVET system in Bhutan had provoked the researcher to undertake this study particularly on the effectiveness of soft skill being imparted to the TVET trainees.

### 1.2 Problem Statement

The TVET system in Bhutan faces significant quality issues and is often perceived negatively by employers and general public. A number of factors contribute to this situation, some of which include poor quality TVET graduates, trainers, and an unresponsive curriculum, to name a few. The introduction of subjects like English, Mathematics, Dzongkha (National Language), and Information Technology (IT) in public TVET Institutes are aimed to address the shortcoming, particularly in the soft skill aspect.

Soft skills can be diverse and contextualized to the unique nature of training and the overall labour market situation. UNESCO (IBE 2013) defines soft skills as "A set of intangible personal qualities, traits, attributes, habits, and attitudes that can be used in many different types of jobs." EU Commission (Skills Panorama, 2015) defines it as "Skills that are cross-cutting across jobs (Job-specific skills) and sectors (Sector-specific jobs) and relate to personal competences (confidence, discipline, self-management) and social competences (teamwork, communication, emotional intelligence)."

Career advisors and employers generally use the term 'soft skills' to describe not only the necessary and basic personal skills but also to describe social skills people must possess in order to execute most of the assigned jobs. Usually, soft skills are unique personal characteristics and skills each person possesses. Although these qualities have nothing to do with a person's knowledge of a particular trade or core skills, they have become a mandatory skill set for most

professional positions. Attitudes, personal habits, communication skills, and interpersonal behavior are important soft skills.

In Industrial Revolution (IR) 4.0, the global market is flooded with people who have acquired good educational knowledge and better work experience. As a result, employers are compelled to seek candidates who are not only well educated with good experience but also those with soft skills. Soft skills are what make all the difference.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

The broad objective of the study is to:

- 1.3.1 Assess the effectiveness of the soft skills programs in Public TVET Institute.
- 1.3.2 Assess the relevance of the existing soft skills programs in the Institute.
- 1.3.3 Suggest measures to make soft skills programs more effective.

### 1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

- 1.4.1 How effective is the introduction of soft skill subjects like English, Mathematics, Dzongkha, and IT in TVET Institutes?
- 1.4.2 How is soft skills taught and learned in the Institute relevant in your daily life?
- 1.4.3 How can you make soft skills subjects more effective and meaningful?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Various authors have defined soft skills as personal characteristics such as work ethics, positive attitude, social grace, facility with language, friendliness, integrity, and the willingness to learn (Bancino & Zevalkink, 2007; Coll & Zegwaard, 2006; Hmelo-Silver, 2007; Lewis, 2007; Lorenz, 2005; Lucci, 2005). Soft skills typically complement a student's hard or technical skills.

According to (Bancino & Zevalkink, 2007), Soft skills are an integral part of careers in technology and engineering. Therefore, there is a need to include these skills in career and technical education program. Bancino and Zevalkink (2009) noted that: The more soft skills training can be integrated directly into technical training programs, the more successful the graduates will be in the increasingly demanding global economy. While some people consider soft skills as the intangibles, these skills are quickly becoming a requirement

that drives tangible and measurable increases in personal productivity and directly translates to sustainable competitive advantage in a global marketplace (p. 22).

Kemper (1999), Mc Murchie (1998), and Spencer further supported the above idea. Spencer (1993) suggested that superior performers are not distinguished by the technical skills that they possess but by the demonstration of behavioral skills. Hackett et al. (1985) identified a number of skills that facilitate coping with the social realities of work. Skills that Hackett et al. (1985) claim are of importance include the ability to communicate well, to relate effectively to others, to plan and manage the demands of one's job, to exercise leadership, and to cope with stress effectively. These skills are behavioral skills, that is, interpersonal skills, personal planning and organizational skills, team leadership, directiveness, and self-control. The sector perceives that employers want graduates that are 'well rounded' and that all competencies are essential and sought after.

According to Hodges & Burchell, (2003); in order to be useful in any organization, one must be willing to learn new skills to keep pace with what is now seen as a rapidly changing workplace. What was important yesterday is no longer important today and what is relevant today may be obsolete tomorrow. Therefore, persons who are reluctant to change according to the need of the hour will find it difficult to adapt to the new, ever-changing workplace and adopt new skills as employers continuously search for employees who are able and willing to pick up new skills quickly. Such an idea was mooted by Sweeny and Toomey (1997, p. 299), who noted that "employers are looking beyond content and focusing more on attributes and skills that will enable graduates to be adaptive, adaptable and transformative".

Lifelong learning has emerged as one of the keys to improving the quality of life in the 21st century. Initial education is no longer sufficient to enable people to benefit from new opportunities that advances in science and technology bring and other changes in the world of work. There is no doubt that continuing to learn is the key to securing employment and income stability. Higher levels of formal education and training lead to higher incomes and greater employability. Rates of return (RoR) studies have included both educational attainment and skills measures while taking account of other variables such as gender, occupation, work experience, and geographic location (OECD 2005, 2007). These studies show that the main reason that well-educated and trained individuals earn higher incomes is that they have higher knowledge and

skills levels, or put simply, higher qualifications are a proxy for more skills.

Lifelong learning goes beyond formal education and training to include 'skills development'. This is an umbrella term to describe the ways in which individuals continue to learn and acquire skills and competencies, which influence employment and earnings potential (Adams 2011). Schools, higher education, and TVET institutions engage in skills development for work, but just as, or even more, important, are apprenticeships, enterprise-based training, professional development, informal learning in the workplace, and government and non-government training programs.

Vocationalization of secondary education provides a foundation for lifelong learning in skills development for employability. As argued by many, it is desirable and appropriate that secondary schools are more accountable for developing the economic and labour force needs of society through placing a greater emphasis on skills development for employability (Maclean and Wilson 2009).

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to Kothari (2007), research methodology is "a way to systematically solve the research problem, study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them" (p.8). Further Namgyel (2003) reiterates methodology as "the system of methods and principles used in a particular study. It means wide ranges of the technique are used to gather data for analysis and interpretation with respect to the research questions of the study" (p.67).

#### 3.1 Social constructivist paradigm

The research will rely on the interpretations and meanings of participants. The interpretations and meanings can be varied and multiple, which may lead to looking for the complexity of views rather than narrow down to a few categories or ideas (Creswell, 2007). Further Creswell (2007) puts it, "in this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (p.20). The social constructivists believe knowledge is constructed through human interactions and activity. The members of the society invent the properties of the world (Beaumie, 2001).

#### 3.2 Research approach

The study intends to find out the effectiveness of the soft skills being taught in the public TVET Institute. For this, the researcher adopted a qualitative research method, as it was the most suitable approach. This was based on the

philosophical assumption that individuals interacting with their social world construct reality out of it. A qualitative researcher tries to study the motives of human behavior and construct knowledge (Kothari, 1985). It endeavors to find out the views, experiences, feelings, and stories of people who are involved in the research question and not of the researcher.

Vishnevsky and Beanlands (2004) assert that qualitative research allows researchers to “explore social phenomena and how they are meaningful in everyday life” (p. 234). Further, Burns and Grove in Vishnevsky & Beanlands (2004) elaborate by stating that qualitative research is done in a natural setting. So, data collection and methodology are typically elastic, allowing for modifications throughout the research process (p. 234). Therefore, the researcher aims to create a rich description of phenomena of interest. The researcher approaches the subject as collaborator and equal in the research process (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004).

In view of the flexibility in usage, the qualitative method was used to study the research questions. Since this research is narrowed down to the TVET graduates of only public institutions, the researcher anticipated some misgivings during the process of research. Using this qualitative method would enable modification of the data collection tools, if and where required, as per on-field difficulties and challenges.

### 3.3 Research design

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is considered the first person to introduce phenomenology as a research methodology (Ostergaard, Dahlin, & Hugo, 2008). The philosophy emphasizes experiences and interpretations. Further, Creswell (2007) asserts, “a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p.57). As an approach within sociology, phenomenology seeks to reveal how human awareness is implicated in the production of social action, social situations, and social worlds (Orleans, 2011). Hitzler and Keller (1989, cited in Orleans, 2011) specify that the phenomenological approach employs the use of the introspective and empathetic method to describe how consciousness itself operates. In the introspective method, the phenomenologist uses his or her subjective processes as a resource for study while the empathetic method requires an empathic effort to move into the mind of others.

As soft skills subjects like English, Mathematics, Dzongkha, and IT are already introduced in TVET Institutes, it will be appropriate to use this method to explore their experiences and feelings about it. This approach will enable the

researcher to delve into the experiences and feelings of those graduates who have studied soft skills subjects in TVET Institutes. There is a need for interactions between the researchers and the participants and this philosophy provides a sound ground to work with. The study will find out the effectiveness of the soft skill subjects in our TVET Institutes through TVET graduates. It will draw common patterns and themes of the phenomenon: Effectiveness of the soft skill subjects in our TVET Institutes, particularly in Public Institutes.

### 3.4 Research sampling

Marshall (1996) suggests, “Choosing a study sample is an important step in any research project since it is rarely practical, efficient or ethical to study whole populations” (p. 522). Therefore, the researcher included TVET graduates who were taught soft skills subjects for this research, though there was a less diverse range of population that shared the same phenomena on the effectiveness of soft skill subjects in TVET Institute.

The positive aspect of sampling is, as Marshall (1996) suggests, “studying a random sampling provides the best opportunity to generalize the results to the population” (p.523). Further, Marshall (1996) enumerates three broad approaches of sampling: convenience sampling, judgment sample, and theoretical sample. In view of the intent and purpose of the study, I have considered the theoretical sample, which I found viable and suitable for the research. In this approach, the researcher has the liberty to select the most productive sample to answer the research question. Thus, I will be in a position to select a sample of soft skills TVET graduates. However, Marshall (1996) admits that each of the above sampling approaches appears distinct on its own right but “there is often considerable overlap between these approaches” (p. 525). Therefore, in this research, the researcher has adopted random sampling as it provides the best opportunity to generalize the result to the TVET graduate.

The sample of the research comprises particularly TVET graduates who were taught soft skills subjects. The inclusion of this sample is particularly to get an overview of the effectiveness of soft skill subjects from trainees’ perspectives.

### 3.5 Data collection tool

In this research, the researcher had used structured and semi-structured interviews and questions to collect data. The interview as defined by Kvale (1996) is an “attempt to understand the world from subjects’ point of view, to unfold

the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived experiences" (p. 112). Similarly, Clarks (2007 cited in Polit and Beck2006) elaborates interview as a method of data collection in which one person (an interviewer) asks questions to another person (a respondent)" (p. 2). It will reveal their experience and views of what happened about the phenomena. It will also provide an interactive process of communication between the researcher and the participants. As a researcher, it will also enable me to observe bodily gestures and expressions with regard to my research question. Further Namgyel (2011) supplements that interview "is a purposeful verbal interaction intended to dig information on research study (p.94).

Basically, there are three types of interviews – structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. Of the three types, in this research, the researcher is going to use the semi-structured interview for it provides the researcher with the option of having a "specific interview schedule or having none at all, or interview guide may be developed" (Burns, 2000, p. 424 cited in Namgyel, 2011, p.94).

### 3.6 Validity and reliability

Namgyel (2011) defines validity as "the degree to which a test measures what is supposed to measure" (p.102). The basic underlying principle of research is the dependability of its results and outcomes. Similarly, Angen (2000) in Creswell (2007) reaffirms validation as "a judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research" (p.205). Further Angen (2000) in Creswell goes on to support two types of validation – ethical validation and substantive validation. Under ethical validation, the research must pass the questions of political issues, ethical issues, and other diverse voices. It must also open dialogue and avenues for further research (Creswell, 2007). Similarly, substantive validation encompasses, as Creswell (2007) states, "understanding one's own understanding of the topic, understanding derived from other sources and the documentation of this process in the written study" (p.206).

Thus, Creswell (2009) sums up the validation as "strengths of qualitative research and it is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, or the readers of an account" (p.191).

### 3.7 Ethical consideration

Orb et al (2000) stressed the importance of ethical considerations in these lines: The research process creates tension between the aims of research to make generalizations

for the good of others, and the rights of participants to maintain privacy (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000).

The maintaining of ethics in any kind of research pertains to doing well and avoiding harm. Harm can be prevented or reduced through the application of appropriate ethical principles. Thus, the protection of human subjects or participants in any research study is imperative. The violations of human rights in the name of scientific research have been among the darkest events in history, (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000).

Research has to ensure that ethical issues are addressed at three stages: pre-data collection, during data collection, and post-data collection (Namgyel, 2011). In the first phase of pre-data collection, it is important to seek prior approval from concerned agencies and authorities. In this research, I have sought written approval from the Department of Technical Education, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources. The approval for collecting data was also sought from the concerned TVET graduates.

### 3.8 Research plan of action

The interview and its timing were set as per the convenience of the participants, so as to minimize to the extent possible the disturbances and impediments to the respondents. All the interviews were conducted outside of the normal schedule, which enhanced the consistency of the interviews. The places of the interview also provided physical as well as psychological ambiance as it was conducted away from any external distractions. This enabled the researcher to conduct the research in a free and conducive atmosphere. The data were collected from a minimum of 15 TVET National Certificate - II (NC2) graduates who had from public TVET Institutes.

### 3.9 Significance of the study

The research mainly focused on assessing the perception of TVET graduates on the introduction of soft skills subjects in TVET Institutes and its effectiveness. The study, although specifically focused on public TVET graduates, presents interesting insights on the efficacy of soft skills program and their relevance in technical and vocational training. Further, the study also serves as a starting point for bigger and National Level research on the importance of the soft skills components being delivered in the TVET programs.

### 3.10 Limitation of the study

The major limitation of this research is that the number of participants involved in this study is relatively less to

represent the views of the whole TVET Institutes that offer soft skills subjects. Although it is intended to assess the effectiveness of the soft skills subjects taught to TVET Institute under the Department of Technical Education, Ministry of Labour and Human Resources, the actual data collection was narrowed down to thirty TVET graduates. Based on past studies that have been conducted through tracer studies on this subject, 30 participants seemed to be an ideal sample size to carry out a comprehensive assessment. The research with as little as 10 participants has also yielded extremely fruitful and applicable results. In order to have a clear view on the effectiveness of soft skills subjects from graduates' perspectives, it would require a greater and more representative number of TVET graduates' participation. Therefore, the finding of this research is by no means representative of the views of all public TVET graduates. It may be a small-scale study, nonetheless, it provides insights into a critical component of TVET education reform, and thus presents a huge potential for more in-depth, national-scale research on this particular subject.

#### IV. DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

The researcher coded all completed survey questions and data were analyzed. Quantitative and qualitative data were combined through cross-referencing, and the views of respondents about the nature and validity of those relationships and the context in which they are found were reported. The findings were interpreted in the form of descriptive methods with basic arithmetic tools and tabulated and interpreted using tables and charts in form of facts and figures. Triangulation was used as an explanatory tool, especially when assessing conflicting topics. A complete literature review was done while collecting data to enhance the effectiveness of result analysis.

##### 4.1 Research discussions, findings and analysis

A total of 30 TVET graduates answered the structured questionnaire designed to indicate what they genuinely felt

about the effectiveness of the soft skills subjects taught in the Institute. The effectiveness of the soft skills subjects taught in the Institute was perceived differently by different TVET graduates with different academic standards.

The findings also suggest that the TVET graduates have a clear understanding of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the soft skills program irrespective of their academic qualification before joining the Institute in various courses.

Many TVET graduates were of the view that subjects like English, Mathematics, Dzongkha, and IT had definitely helped them not only to prepare for their future employment but also increased their level of confidence in handling situations in their day-to-day life. The graduates also understand the importance of soft skills in enhancing their core skills.

##### 4.2 Coverage of the study

A total of 30 TVET graduates from Public TVET Institute were interviewed for this study using structured as well as semi-structured questions. For qualitative research, a minimum sample size of at least 12 respondents is said to be required to reach data saturation (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Fugard & Potts, 2014; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Consequently, a sample of 30 TVET graduates was considered adequate for the qualitative analysis for this study.

#### V. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The data was processed and the following results have emerged in general:

##### Gender respondents

Of the total 30 respondents interviewed for this research, 18 were male and 12 were female. The respondent comes from different parts of the country with diverse cultures and traditions. They have different experiences before joining the TVET Institute and they are serving in various parts of Bhutan upon graduation from the Institute.

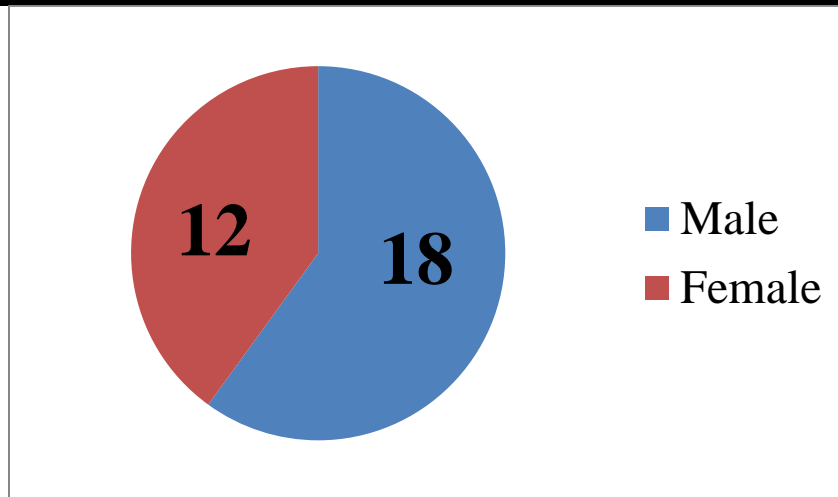


Fig.1: Respondents gender for the research

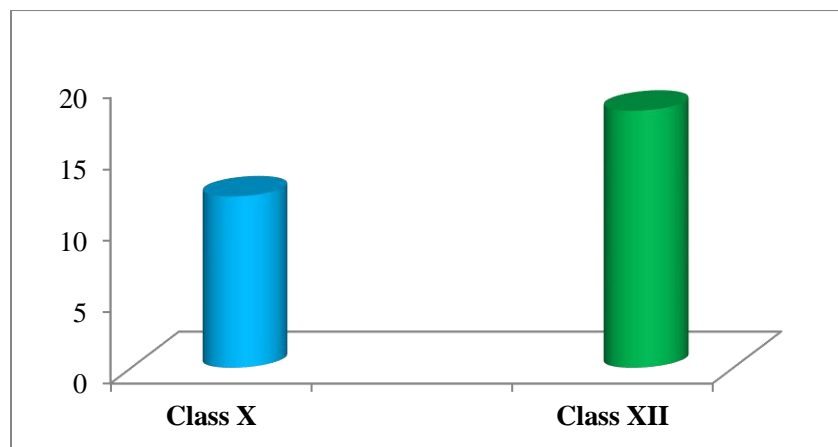


Fig.2: Respondents academic qualification prior to joining TVET Institute

Although the Royal Government of Bhutan had set the academic criteria for joining in TVET Institutes as Class X standard, the majority of candidates joining TVET courses in various Institutes are class XII standard. Of the total respondents interviewed for this study, 12 of them had class X qualification while the remaining 18 had class XII

qualification. The trend of class X joining the TVET Institute had drastically decreased in the year 2020 when the Government had encouraged class X students to pursue class XI through state funding for the students who could not meet the cutoff points in the Public Schools.

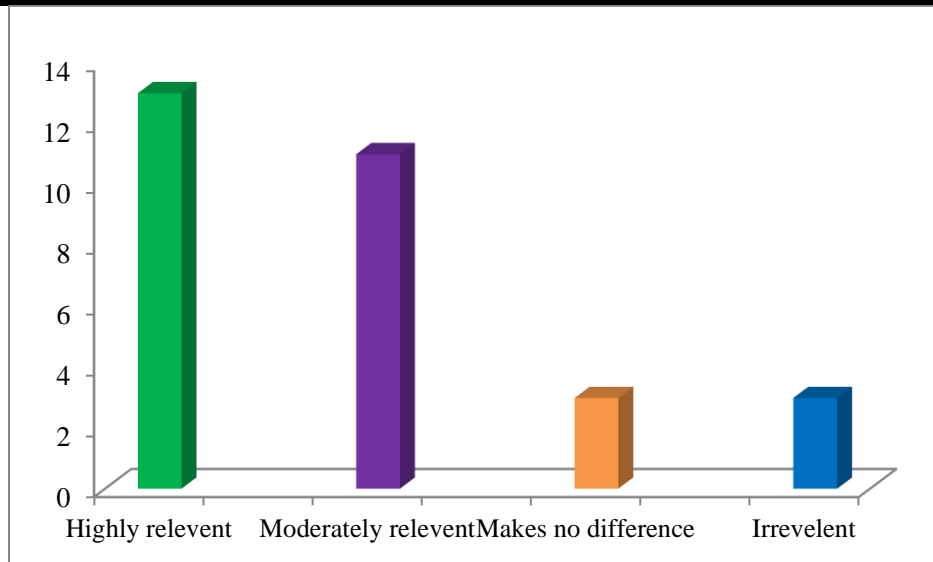


Fig.3: Respondents view on relevancy of the soft skills taught in the Institute

There is no doubt on the relevancy of the soft skill subjects being taught in the public institute as seen in the figure:3 Majority of the graduates (13) were proud of having learned the soft skills in the institute followed by eleven respondents who believed that soft skill was moderately relevant. However, it is interesting to come across three TVET graduates who doubt the relevancy of the soft skills being

taught in the institute. They were of the view that they would have been employed in any relevant industries even if they were not taught those soft skills. The soft skills subjects had not made any impact on the three respondents as they were frankly expressing that it didn't make any difference in their life.

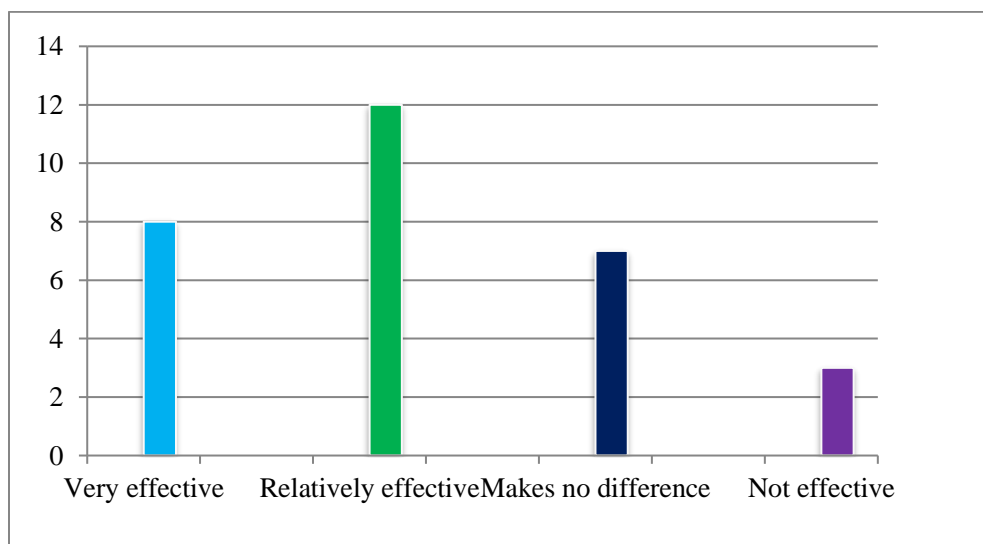


Fig.4: Respondents view on effectiveness of soft skill subjects



The respondents were asked to grade the effectiveness of the soft skills component. A majority of the respondents (12) said the program was relatively effective followed by eight respondents who said it was very effective. Seven respondents said it makes no difference while three said it

was not effective. This finding strongly indicates that the majority of the respondents (20) perceived that the soft skills component was relative to very effective. This is a positive sign that the soft skills program was helpful in some ways to the technical graduates.

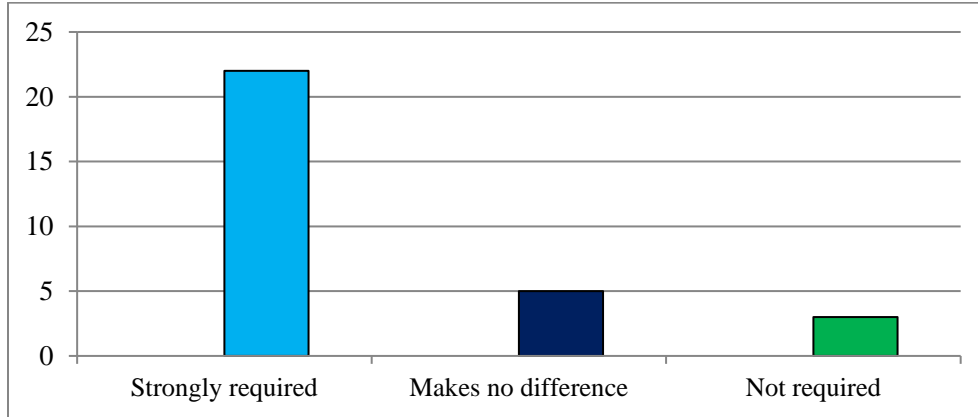


Fig.5: Respondents view on requirement of soft skill subjects in TVET Institute

Although there is a certain level of challenges and inconsistency in teaching and learning of soft skill subjects, the majority of the respondents (22) felt that soft skills program in TVET institutes is strongly required while 5 said

it makes no difference. The remaining 3 respondents said that the program is not required. Therefore, the finding indicates that the soft skills program in TVET institutes has high-value addition just as it is effective, it is also required.

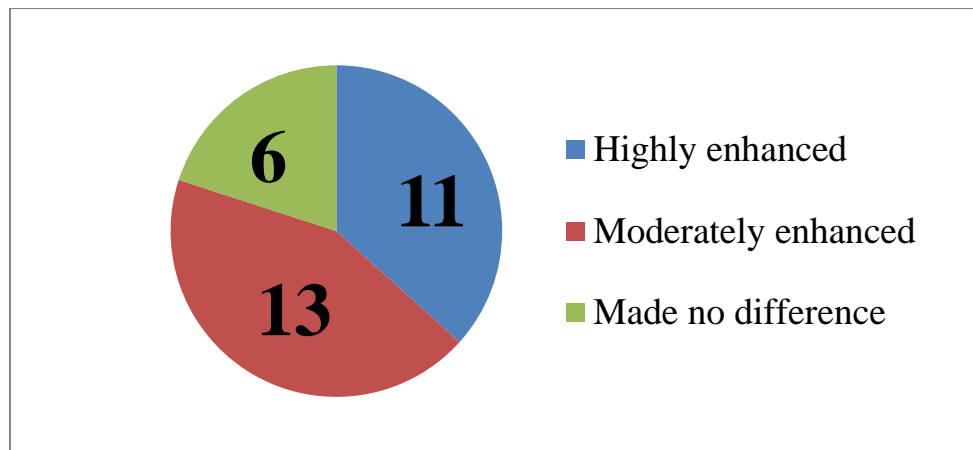


Fig.6: Respondents view on Soft Skill Subjects enhancing core skill

The respondents were asked how the soft skills program enhanced their core skills. A majority of them said that it moderately enhanced their core skills while 11 said it highly

enhanced their core skills. Only six respondents said that it made no difference. The findings strongly indicate that soft skills programs add value by enhancing their core skills.

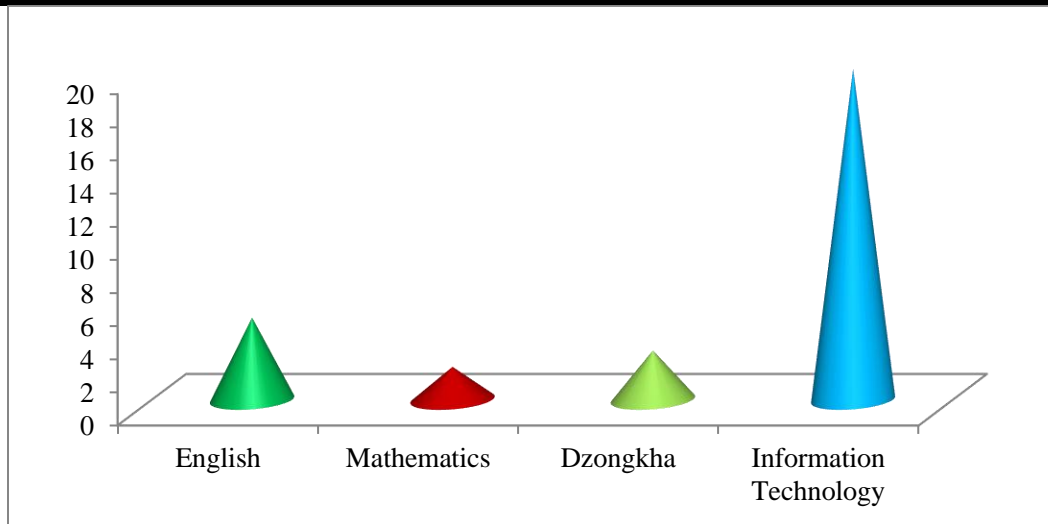


Fig.7: Most important soft skill subjects considered by Bhutanese TVET graduates

Respondents were asked to choose the most important soft skills subjects. A vast majority of respondents (20) felt Information Technology was the most important followed by five selecting English and the remaining 3 choosing Dzongkha. Only 2 respondents felt mathematics was important. This finding clearly suggests that Information

Technology is a highly valued subject among TVET graduates.

This is however an interesting and surprising component of the findings. Mathematics is an integral component of any technical education and generally perceived to be important. However, only two respondents perceived mathematics as an important soft skills subject.

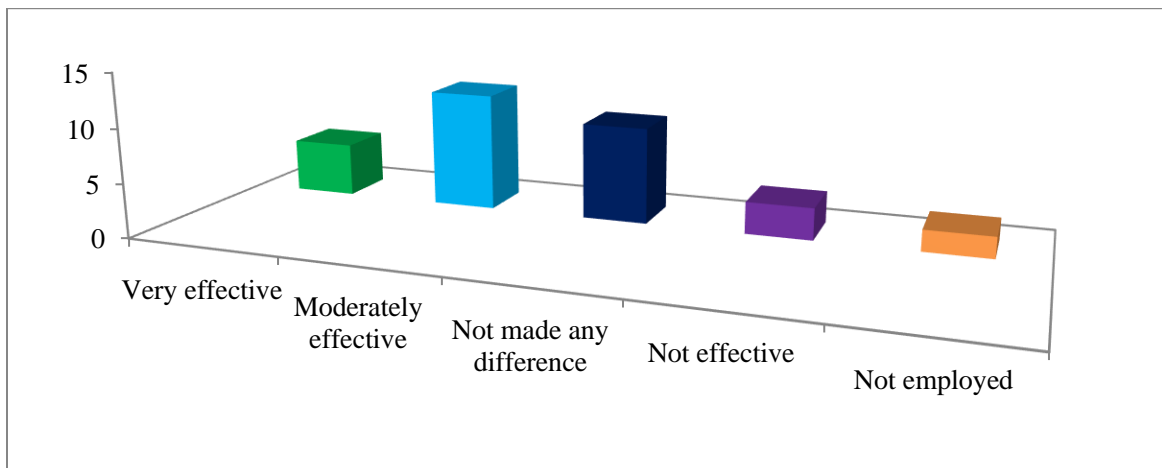


Fig.8: Effectiveness of soft skill subjects in preparing TVET graduates for employment

A majority of respondents (11) felt that the soft skills program was moderately effective followed by five who said it was highly effective. However, 9 respondents said that it didn't make any difference while 3 said it was not effective and 2 respondents were not employed. This finding indicates

that soft skills programs play a role in preparing TVET graduates for employment. Therefore, it would be critical for TVET educators to provide relevant soft skills courses that will equip graduates with a wide range of soft skills, enhancing their employability and job prospects.

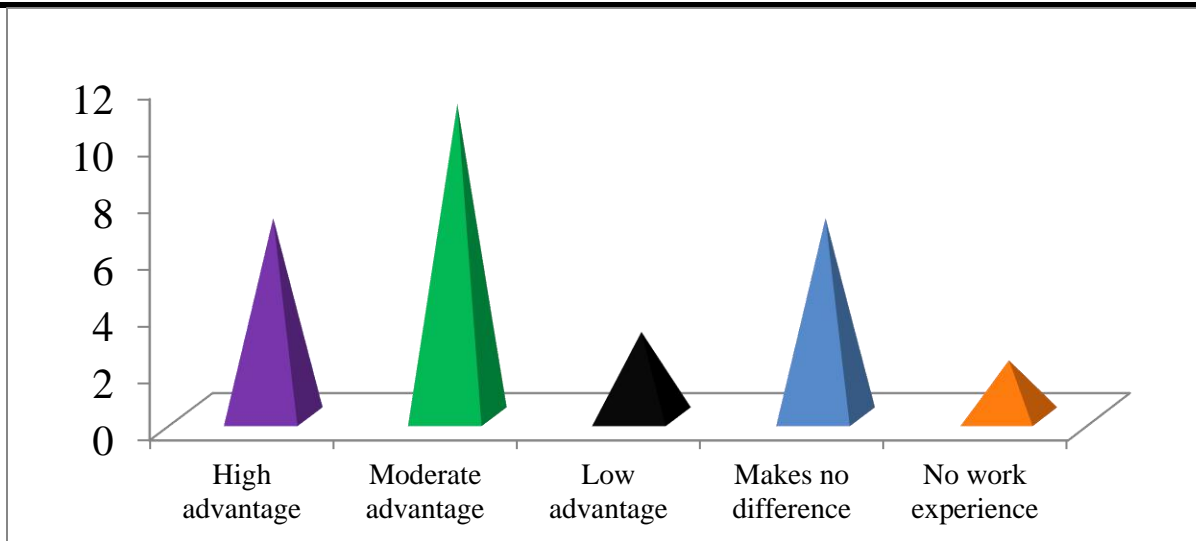


Fig.9: Perception on advantages of soft skills in their workplace

A majority of respondents (11) said that soft skills provided a moderate advantage in their workplace while seven respondents said it is highly advantageous. Two respondents said it is of low advantage and seven said it made no

difference. Two had no work experience. The finding clearly shows that the respondents feel soft skills programs provide an advantage in their workplace.

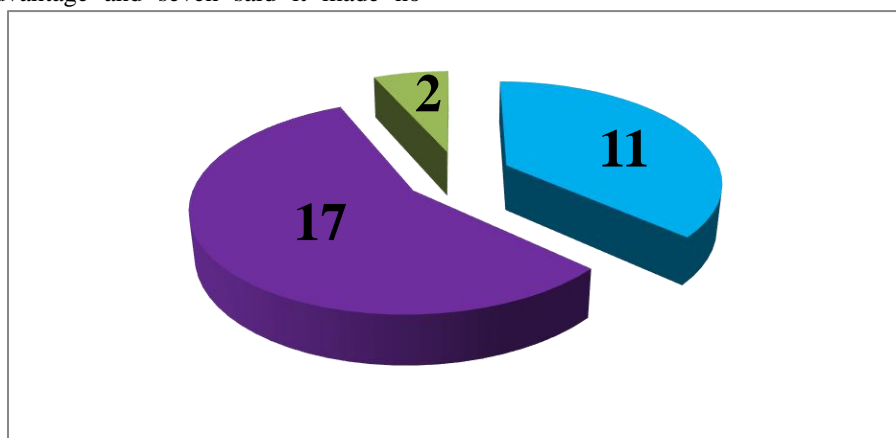


Fig.10: TVET graduate's perception on equal importance of soft skill to that of their core skill

The TVET graduates have different perceptions on the equal importance of soft skill subjects to that of their core skills. A majority of respondents (17) felt that soft skills will never be equally important to core skills while 11 of them said that it is as equally as important as core skills. Two respondents

said that they are not sure. This finding indicates that more or less, they are solely dependent on their core skills upon their employment. A few of the respondents also shared that they hardly get a chance to deal with customers in the firm as all issues were dealt with by their supervisors.

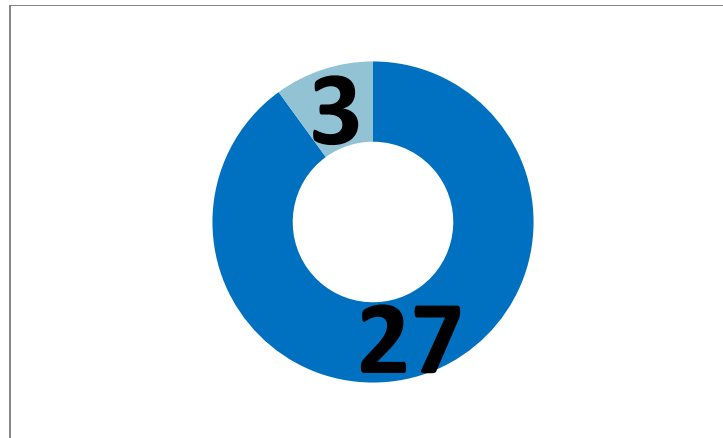


Fig.11: Sufficiency of Time/Period allocation for Soft Skills subjects]

Almost all the respondents (27) said that there was sufficient time or period allotted to the soft skills program against only three respondents who said that more time is required for the soft skills program. Upon further examining the three respondents who need more time and more periods, all three of them had joined TVET Institute after class X standard. Therefore, this finding indicated that more time and higher period allocation is needed if the majority of the class X standard joined the TVET Institute.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the research and interviews conducted with the respondents:

- Given the efficacy of the soft skills program in preparing graduates for the world of work and beyond, TVET institutes need to prioritize the soft skills curriculum and pedagogy to equip graduates with vital skill sets that will enhance their employability and work performance.
- There is a need to diversify the soft skills programs by including relevant and specialized skills mainly communication and interpersonal skills, analytical skills, creative skills, design skills, etc.
- Since Information and Technology is the most important component among the soft skills subjects, the IT subject can include coding and programming, which would provide additional skills to the graduates.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The introduction of subjects like English, Mathematics, Dzongkha, and Information Technology in the Bhutanese TVET system was timely. Its aim of improving the employability opportunity and career prospects of the graduates and to prepare them for the competitive job market has fairly served its purpose. The study also reveals that the majority of the graduates' overall performance in their work environment is not only cordial but also paves a way and pathway for higher education in the latter part of their lifelong learning.

Although the finding of the study is not highly comprehensive, however, the research indicates that the soft skill subjects are playing an important role. Irrespective of gender and qualification of the graduate, there is a growing awareness of the importance of soft skills program and their effectiveness in developing vital skill sets that help graduates improve in their higher chances of employability and work performance in the organization. The study also reveals that the soft skills program had not only added value in learning their core skills but also prepared and groomed them in boosting their confidence in finding the jobs and sustaining in it.

However, what was best in the past is not good enough now and perhaps will never be better in IR 4.0. There are lots of things queued up to be done. If not done now, when will it be? If we don't do it, who will do it for us? For all those questions, TVET sector is the answers. The bright future for TVET graduates lies in the hands of the Department of Technical Education, Ministry of Labour, and Human Resources. Let's join our hands to invest and contribute to make it happen – a dream come true.

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