

EXPLORING FACTORS AFFECT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING MODEL OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN SRI LANKA

Niwunhella N. A. R. P.^{1*}, Abeysekara R. ², Weligamage S.²

¹, Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

². Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

¹nriwun@gmail.com, ²ruwanab@kln.ac.lk, susima@kln.ac.lk

Corresponding author*

Abstract

This exploratory research focus on identifying and analyzing the factors that affect, the effectiveness of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) model of Vocational Training (VT) in Sri Lanka. Literature review shows that there are two vocational training models: Model 1. Focus to up skill youth with relevant skills & knowledge demand by the industries through direct recruitment as students & model 2. is to regulate & up skill those who are already working in various industries without a professionally recognized qualification; this is also categorized as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) model; which is the focus of this study. Single case study method was selected to carry out this research and the Vocational Training Authority (VTA) was selected as the case. This research used Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) framework model as the theoretical underpinning; Purposive sampling was used to carry out the study: there are thirty-two (31) in-depth interviews were conducted. Key stakeholder groups represented the RPL applicants, VTA officials, Business Managers in the private organizations that provide the RPL opportunities & the VTA registered craft trainers. Transcribed data was analyzed using Thematic Analysis. Based on the research findings, there are five recommendations discussed. This research uniquely looks at all three levels of effectiveness at individual, organizational & larger societal levels. They contribute to the theory and practice of the topic. Findings show that there is strong evidence for the collective nature of RPL Model of Vocational Training.

Keywords: Effectiveness, IMP Framework, Sri Lanka, RPL Model, Vocational Training

Introduction

The objective of this research is to examine the factors that affect the effectiveness of the RPL Model of Vocational Training Authority & examine how they affect the effectiveness. Thus, this study attempts to answer the question of “what are the factors that affect the effectiveness of the RPL Model in Sri Lanka?” An exploratory case study method (i.e., qualitative approach) is used in this study, which facilitates the identification of factors that influence the training-performance dyad. Research GAPS are identified

under three main categories of Practice GAPS, Empirical GAPS, and theoretical GAPS. Sri Lanka's VT system has evolved over the years mainly to fulfill the economic and political agenda of the country; for example, Deloitte (2019) stated that Vocational Education (VE) in Sri Lanka (SL) commenced with the establishment of the Government Technical College by the British rulers of SL in 1893 in Maradana. At that time the primary objective of VT was to train the blue color personnel to run the railway and tea industry. Mauricio et al. (2017) stated that field-specific knowledge and vocational maturity could improve the performance of students from secondary VE backgrounds. Liyanage (2014) stated that traditionally Sri Lanka's primary and secondary education is often too academic and does not prepare youth adequately for the world of work. Merikallio (2019); Safaei et al. (2020) stated that the RPL model is the formal process for recognizing skills and knowledge through previous studies, work experience, skills, abilities, and talents a person has already achieved. Thus, under this model, if a candidate can prove his or her ability with adequate evidence of competencies related to qualifications stipulated in the Skills Standards of the VTA, he or she is eligible to receive National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). Except for random and periodical course evaluations, in Sri Lanka, no one has looked at the effectiveness of RPL model. In order to describe the phenomenon being discussed well, theory should support explaining different forms of relationships and how they affect each other. Thus, researcher used the IMP Framework Model to carry out this research. Dean et al. (2000) explain that intuitively, it is presumed that investment in training will enhance the performance potential of a firm. It is argued that recognition of the considerable range of variables that impact the relationship between training and performance is essential. They further argue that an adaptation of the Hakansson (2006) model supports addressing and explaining the problem identified. Thus, this study uses the Industrial Marketing Purchasing (IMP) group framework as the theoretical underpinning to identify factors that influence the business training intervention leading to performance. Thanks to this framework, this paper argues that the operating environment, atmosphere, interacting parties, and the interaction process influence the training-performance dyad. The remainder of the article is organized as follows: Firstly, the literature review is presented. The next section explains the research methodology and then thirdly, the findings are presented. Finally, the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations are offered.

Literature Review

This section summarizes the key findings and theories used in the previous research studies. Mujumdar (2012); Golstain et al. (2002); Bostrom, L. (2013); Gamble (2013); Chan et Al. (1999); Dean (2014) & Lucas (2018) have discussed the topic of VT and its effectiveness in different yet relevant circumstances compared to this research.

Vocational Training in Sri Lanka

Literature shows that a person entering a VT program is seeking to learn a specific trade or craft ranging from welding, cooking, medical transcription, auto repair, construction, manufacturing processes, etc. while there are various VT implementation methods available in different countries, some VT programs

provide students with certifications or licenses demonstrating their competence following completion of the training program.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Model

Recognition of prior learning commonly known as the “RPL” model, describes a process used by regulatory bodies, adult learning centers, career development practitioners, military organizations, human resources professionals, employers, training institutions, colleges, and universities around the world to evaluate skills and knowledge acquired outside the classroom for the purpose of recognizing competence against a given set of standards, competencies, or learning outcomes.

Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of the RPL Model & Measuring the Effectiveness of Vocational Training:

There are varying opinions shown on the topic of measuring the effectiveness of VT. However, Lucas (2015) stated that the purpose of vocational training is to adequately prepare students for the needs of the industry. This gives an indication that the effectiveness should be looked at from the lens of service receivers. Lucas (2015) points out that in the VT sector measuring action comprises individual characteristics that are potent determinants of human behavior and, ultimately, success. Identifying these views at the point of delivery provides researchers with “during-the-event” indicators. Patton (2004) stated that it is clear that if the impact of training interventions is to be fully understood, the way in which the recipient learns must be considered. Thus, researchers believe that focusing more on the lifecycle of the trainees in the VT is more important to understand the effectiveness. This research has identified that there are four main factors directly affecting the effectiveness of vocational training in Sri Lanka. They are: 1. Interacting parties, 2. Interacting process between the parties, 3. Atmosphere & 4. Operating environment. The following illustration shows the interconnected relationship between these factors. The researcher also has identified the sub-topics under each factor. Following illustrations shows how different characteristics of trainers and trainees interact in workplace training process.

Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP) interaction model

Paton (2000) has used the IMP Framework model to study the relationship between training and performance; where he asserts that the various parties involved in the training process are probably linked. He further argued that an adaptation of the Karlsson (2018): IMP Framework Model goes some way towards addressing the problem identified. Thus, IMP framework is used as the key theory to carry out this research. Work of the IMP Group can be accessed through Hakansson (1982) and Chen et al. (2020). Ford (2004) confirmed that "the work of the IMP Group is reported in some dozen books, about two thousand papers and more than 130 Ph.D. studies,"

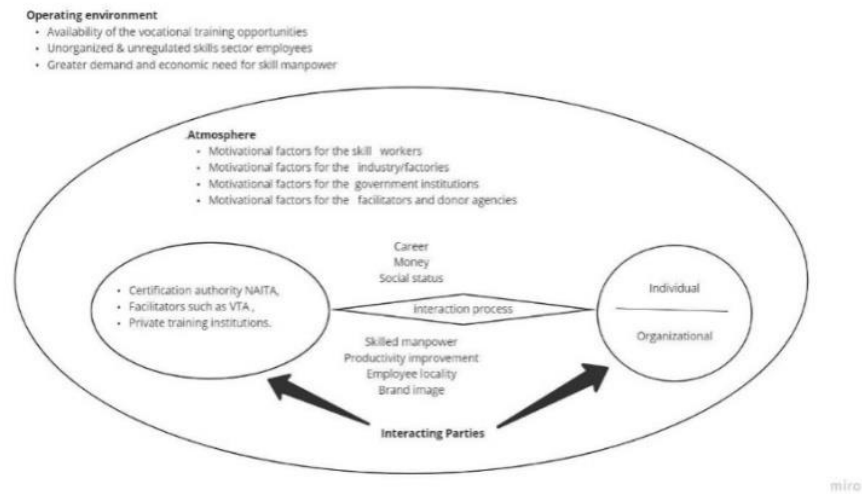


Figure: Illustration of the Interacting model with key factors affecting the effectiveness of RPL Model

Source: Author’s creation

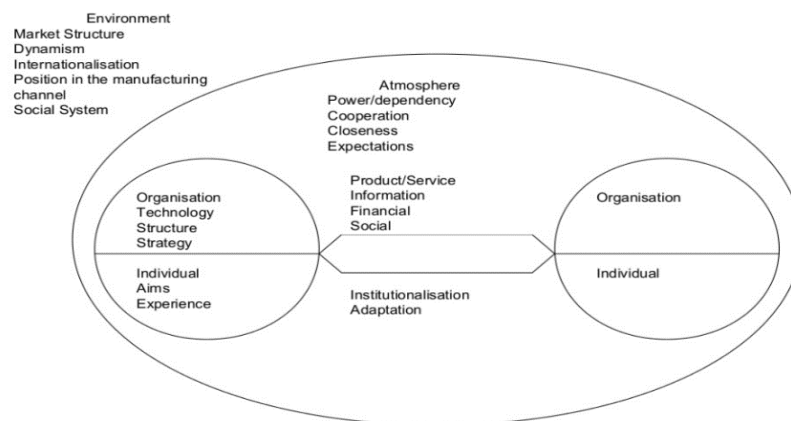


Figure: The IMP Model

Source: Gan Chun Chet, 2014

The interacting environment: The environment in which work place training takes place would influence training and performance.

The atmosphere: The atmosphere in which associated with the relationship between the provider and the recipient. The atmosphere looks at the motivators of each party in relationship.

The interaction parties: Interaction parties consist of the structures, systems, and personalities of the parties involved in the interacting process. Differences between the parties determine the interaction between the parties.

The interaction processes: The interaction happens between the parties which could be organizations or individuals. There are four types of exchanges between parties: product or service exchange, finance exchange, information exchange, and social exchange. In this study, the interaction between trainers and trainees is observed to identify how trainers use communication to deliver effective business training programs and how training location and time affect the outcome of the RPL Model of VT.

Research Methodology

Case study method was selected for this study. Researcher believes it allows for the identification of rich insights into the phenomena; Yin (2003), stated that if the researcher only wants to study one single thing (for example, a person from a specific group) or a single group (for example, a group of people), a single case study is the best choice. The focus on human beings and vocational educational establishments and the process of VT itself demands a more comprehensive approach. Thus, the case study methodology was considered to be the most suitable tool for carrying out this research. Yin (1994) stated that there are three main research methods namely, Quantitative, Qualitative & Mix Methods. The qualitative method is appropriate to explore the phenomenon in social science research, particularly in studying individual and group behavior in the organization. Therefore, the qualitative research method is used to carry out this research. Thirty-one 31 interviews were carried out in the sample. Marshall et al., (2013) stated that in a qualitative study, an average interview size of 11-16 participants is often adequate to reach the data saturation level. However, considering the nature of the study, and the multiple parties involved, a number of research interviews were considered. The qualitative approach is suitable when research provides answers to “how” and “why” research questions (Yin, 2003). Researchers such as Abeysekara (2019); Wedawatta (2011) identified two research paradigms: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative, also known as the positivist approach, believes that the researcher is independent of what is being researched, whereas in the qualitative, also known as the interpretive approach, the researcher interacts with what is being researched.

Findings

The findings of this study show that the operating environment affects workplace training, which could influence training performance. Further, it was identified that there are four main factors that affect the effectiveness of VT in Sri Lanka. They are the operating environment, Atmosphere, Parties Involved and interacting process between the parties.

Operating environment

The operating environment comprises factors such as structure, dynamism, internationalization, position in the vocational training process & social system. Sri Lanka’s VT system is characterized by a multitude of agencies including training providers of public and private sectors, standards and curriculum development agencies, and a regulatory body, which is the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission operating under the purview of the ‘Ministry of Youth Affairs. National Apprentice and

Industrial Training Authority (NAITA) and the University for Vocational Technology (UNIVOTEC) previously known as the National Institute of Technical Education of Sri Lanka (NITESL), function as competency standards and curriculum development agencies respectively.

Table: Illustration of the Interacting model – factors that affect effectiveness of RPL - RPL Model in Sri Lanka

4.1 Operating environment	4.2. Atmosphere	4.3. Operating parties involved	4.4. Interaction process
4.1.1 Availability of the Vocational Training Opportunities	4.2.1 Motivational Factors for the skilled workers	4.3.1 Trainee - direct recipients of the vocational training	4.4.1 Individual level
4.1.2. Unorganized & unregulated skills sector employees	4.2.2 Motivational factors for the industry/factories	4.3.2. Trainers - workplace trainers/direct supervisors, trainers from the VT institutions	4.4.2 Organizational level
4.1.3. Greater demand and economic need for skilled manpower	4.2.3 Motivational factors for the government institutions	4.3.3 Certification Authority	4.4.3 Larger Society level
	4.2.4 Motivational factors for the facilitators and donor agencies	4.3.4 Facilitators such as VTA, Private training institutions	4.4.3 Larger Society level

Source: Author's creation

Availability of the Vocational Training Opportunities: Department of Technical Education and Training (DTET) operates 38 Technical Colleges throughout the country, of which nine (09) Colleges have been upgraded as Colleges of Technology (COTs) to offer diploma-level courses leading to National Vocational Qualifications. The Vocational Training Authority (VTA) operates a network of Rural Vocational Training Centers (RVTCs), Special Vocational Training Centers (SVTCs), District Vocational Training Centers (DVTCs), and National Vocational Training Centers (NVTCs), throughout the country. At the end of 2009, there were 270 training centers managed by VTA. The National Youth Services Council (NYSC), under the purview of the Ministry of Youth Affairs, organizes vocational training courses in urban as well as rural areas. Private sector establishments in the industry provide industry specific TVET courses for their own workers as well as outsiders in different occupations. Researchers logically believe that it is clear that there are multiple opportunities available within the vocational training system in Sri Lanka.

Unorganized & unregulated skills sector employees: This category of employees comprises those who are working in unregulated economic activities; the majority of them are self-employed craft personnel.

According to employment data published by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, there are around 1.4 million personnel engaged in craft-related work in the country in the year 2020. Therefore, when we consider the operating environment of this category of employees, it is evident that their contribution to the economic activities deserves better recognition. An official in a donor funding program attached to US AID Sri Lanka stated,

“RPL Model is probably the only program in Sri Lanka which can support the majority of those working in the unorganized sector such as construction. They are doing very important work and contribute to nation building such as carpentry, masonry, etc.”

Greater demand and economic need for skilled manpower: Opening of Sri Lanka’s economy for foreign direct investments & allowing overseas companies to establish their business created a new era of industrialization and commercialization in Sri Lanka. However, as a country, Sri Lanka was not ready to supply the various skills sector labor demand. Following response is from a senior manager of a BOI-registered company engaged in exporting market-oriented goods reflecting the above phenomenon.

“One of the biggest challenges we have is to get the skilled manpower to run the factories. Our industry is so small compared to the global tire manufacturing industry, therefore not many skilled workers are available in the country. Our approach is to recruit fresh school leavers and train in-house. But this has many challenges such as there is no guarantee they stay after the training period; existing Labour laws of Sri Lanka are almost employee friendly, so we cannot hold trained workers. The most practical way of retaining them is to pay a higher salary. But our budgets are too tight. On the other hand, with the current economic situation in the country, most skilled workers tend to go for jobs abroad. We actually don’t mind them making a life with a few years working abroad. If they come back to us in the future.”

Atmosphere

The researcher identified four main atmospheric conditions as described below:

Motivational Factors for the skilled workers: This category comprise those who do not have a recognized vocational qualification yet perform a task competently using their previous experience. They can be seen as one of the prime beneficiaries of the RPL Model.

Key motivational factors for skilled workers:

- To get better employment – Having an NVQ certificate would fill this gap in their life. This also helps to get foreign employment opportunities in the skill sector. During the research interaction, an official attached to VTA stated that;

“It is easy for the younger generation to find a job and also help them to get basic training related to the job.”

- Social recognition – almost every RPL applicant has lived with a social stigma that they do not have the kind of recognition of any other person who has had a formal education in a certain vocational trade. This is mainly due to the fact that they were not able to apply for any job either in the private or public sector. They did not have a certification; a formally recognized way of showing the qualification. However, the evidence shows that with the RPL certificate, many have changed the course of their lives. A RPL recipient who has been working in the capacity of Bar Bender for over 20 years in his life stated that:

“I did not have a proper OL or AL in my school education, so I never thought I would be able to get a certificate for what I am doing. It just feels good for the fact that I am a certificate holder. Moreover, my family started appreciating my skills.”

RPL certificate holder commenting on his colleagues stated that:

“There are people who do jobs in the field with a lot of skills. Through the RPL method, VTA gives an opportunity to recognize their skills.”

- Being able to pursue further education –In the recent past, relevant laws and regulations have been updated and opens the path to higher education. RPL certificate holder can continue even to the highest level; level 12 of the educational system through the establishment of UNIVOTEC.

NVQ certificate holder RPL stated that:

“I had almost five years of prior work experience. The good thing about RPL is that you do not need to go for studies separately. We just need to prove that I am capable of performing a task fully.”

Motivational factors for the industry/factories: As much as individual certificate holders benefit from this; employers and workplaces also benefit immensely. Data shows the shortage of skilled manpower has caused economic losses in the business. On the other hand, during interviews, it was revealed that most of the organizations come forward to support getting the RPL certificate for their employees.

Motivational factors for the government institutions: The government's development agenda contains a number of projects that are aimed at vocational training and skills sector development. Thus, the following factors can be identified as key motivators for government institutions: a. Act as a key driver of the development agenda, b. To uplift the skills level of youth to prepare them for future skills needs, c. Utilization of foreign donor funds for a job-oriented training program & d. Support the ultimate goal of creating a prosperous society by upgrading the skills levels of the working population.

Motivational factors for the facilitators and donor agencies: Every year, Sri Lanka receive grants, donations, and loans for the skills sector development. The main motivational factor for these parties is the developmental agenda of the country. It was revealed that UNDP, ILO & ADB-funded skills sector development programs have specifically focused on the RPL sector.

Operating parties involved: Operating parties involved in the vocational training are key to the effectiveness of the vocational training partners for mutual benefits. Involving parties can be identified as: a. Trainees, b. Trainers – senior employees who do the coating, mentoring, and knowledge transfer process, c. Employers – those who are receiving the service of the RPL recipients; those who are seeking skilled manpower, d. Government certifying agencies – an authority that carries out the evaluation process and issues the NVQ certificate. They also issue regulations with regard to vocational training in the country & e. Donor agencies for the vocational training sector in Sri Lanka

Trainee - direct recipients of the vocational training: As per the current vocational training data, there are over 1.4 million skilled workers without proper certification, this population is spread across many industries and working in different capacities.

Trainers - workplace trainers/direct supervisors, trainers from the VT institutions: In the workplace learning model, the trainers are the ones who provide guidance, mentoring, and coaching for the new joiners. There are two categories of trainers that can be identified; **a.** those workplace supervisors and managers - they become the trainers in terms of transferring knowledge to the newly joined **b.** the formal trainers and instructors attached to NAITA, VTA, and other vocational training institutions. Support and guidance of both these groups of people are necessary for the success of the recipients.

A trainer attached to the NAITA stated that:

“When I think about who really helped me in this process, there are a few things that come to my mind, such as being able to work for a well-experienced senior in the beginning, VTA has a group of experienced teachers. It is an opportunity for us to learn all the simple and complex things. A job requires the same level of theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. We should use practical knowledge in the training. It's better to follow the course while doing a job
“

The above finding shows that, trainers & trainees are the two most significant parties involved in this process. Their interaction process seems to have a direct impact on the outcome.

Certification Authority: National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA) act as the certifying body of Sri Lanka's VT. As stated by the government information department, in the year 1971, the National Apprentice Board (NAB) was established to coordinate and regulate enterprise-based apprenticeships. With the assistance of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the International Labor Organization (IOL), NAB acquired and developed the competencies related to apprenticeship training for: Training Monitoring & Progress Instruction, Distance Education, Preparation and delivery of related instruction, Trade Testing and Certification & Curriculum Development.

Facilitators such as VTA, Private training institutions: Main Government & Government affiliated institutions are; National Institute of Business Management: Skill Sector Development Program (SSDP): Vocational Training Authority: Sri Lanka Institute of Printing: National Apprentice & Industrial Training

Authority: Ceylon – German Technical Training Institute & Department of Technical Education and Training.

Interaction process

In workplace learning, interaction process takes place in order to carry out the assigned tasks for the employee/newly joined. All the employees learn and gather experience in a certain skill set. Findings reveal that the outcome of the vocational training is largely dependent on the interacting process itself. The researcher has identified three levels of the interaction process as mentioned below:

Individual level: Individuals interact with each other in organizations mainly to carry out the duties and responsibilities assigned to them. These interactions take place in many forms such as peer-to-peer, supervisor-subordinate, management, and working population within the organization. RPL certification is a reassurance for the skills they possess by gaining years of hands-on work experience. Findings show that this certification increases their employability, mobility, lifelong learning, social inclusion, and self-esteem. Commenting on the above, an official attached to VTA stated that:

“If a person can get the RPL certificate at an early age, I mean soon after they pass the school and learn a vocational experience, it is easy for the younger generation to find a job and also help them to get basic training related to the job. This can only happen if the youth work with his superiors in the organization with a growth mindset. He will have to work with many parties inside and outside the organization.”

The central aspect of most of this new knowledge is its relationship to prior experiences and prior learning. However, new knowledge can also be developed when a person is made aware of incorrect behaviors in certain situations.

Organizational level: In a workplace learning model, learning takes place informally as part of the work process and it is not usually assessed or certificated. In most cases, this kind of learning meets the immediate needs of the employee to help them in their job but in many cases, the lack of formal certification or recognition can lead to issues for individuals in the workplace such as slow or no career progression, lack of progression in their learning and duplication of learning. An official attached to US AID-funded program dealing with the RPL Model stated that:

“The biggest benefit is that they are located in villages - different parts of the country which helps us to reach out to the masses who do not have a proper paper qualification; yet engaged in important work such as masonry, carpentry, & some other odd jobs. We want to support them coming into the formal workforce. eventually helping them to improve their living standards.”

An employee attached to a private organization who has got the RPL stated that:

“When I think about the factors that really helped me in this process, there are few things comes to my mind, such as to be able to work for a well experienced senior in the beginning.”

Larger Society level: When we study the life cycle of the RPL beneficiaries, it is evident that from the point the individual starts his work (mostly after-school study) & gets the certificate, and carries on to career, there are multiple parties involved, key parties can include: immediate and extended family members, friends and influencers, government authorities & customers and suppliers related to vocational qualification & experience.

Discussion of Findings

Effectiveness of RPL Model in Sri Lanka, can be affected by various factors. These factors include: Awareness and understanding of RPL among stakeholders: The extent to which stakeholders, including training providers, employers, and individuals, understand the benefits of RPL, and the processes involved in the RPL assessment may impact the effectiveness of the RPL model. Another key factor is the Availability of adequate resources and infrastructure: Acceptance of RPL qualifications by employers identified as a key factor. Similarly, the existence of clear legal and regulatory frameworks to guide the RPL process can provide a level of certainty and consistency and help to ensure that the RPL assessments are fair, consistent, and valid. Finally, Socio-cultural factors: Socio-cultural factors such as attitudes towards learning and work, the role of education and training, and cultural norms and values may influence the uptake and effectiveness of the RPL model. When analyzing the data related to the research objective, there are four main themes and fourteen sub-themes discussed in answering this question mentioned in the below table:

Table: Themes on “Factors that Affect Effectiveness of the Recognition of the Prior Learning RPL Model in Sri Lanka”

Themes	Sub Themes
1. Operating environment	a. Availability of the vocational training opportunities b. Unorganized & unregulated skills sector employees c. Greater demand and economic need for skilled manpower
2. Atmosphere	a. Motivational factors for the skill workers b. Motivational factors for the industry/factories c. Motivational factors for the government institutions d. Motivational factors for the facilitators and donor agencies
3. Operating parties involved	a. Trainees - direct recipients of the vocational training b. Trainers - workplace trainers/direct supervisors, trainers from the VT institutions, c. Certification authority TVEC d. Facilitators such as VTA, and private training institutions.
4. Interaction process	a. Individual level b. Organizational level d. Larger society level

Source: Authors' own creation

Operating environment: Researchers such as Chan (2014); Collin et al. (2005); Evanciew et al. (1999); Gurtner et al. (2012); Onnismaa (2008); Reegård (2015); Smith (2000); Tanggaard (2005); Wegener (2014) have discussed this issue in the past research into the workplace learning model, especially in the discussion of how the entire workforce as a team including designated trainers; fellow workers and employers & other interacting parties involved in the process. Onnismaa (2008) & Smith (2000) have highlighted that the outcome of workplace learning is largely dependent on the quality of the relationship of the parties working together (involved). This is a clear indication that the relationship between the parties involved, the workplace/training atmosphere & the environment in which the parties operate for example, Senaratne et al. (2022) stated that Vocational Education in Sri Lanka commenced with the establishment of the Government Technical College by the British rulers of Sri Lanka in 1893 in Maradana.

Availability of vocational training opportunities: “Skills Sector Development Program – SSDP” monitoring and evaluation framework prepared by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development in the year 2014, clearly states that “Availability of training programs, instruction and learning materials in Sinhala, Tamil and English - Develop mechanisms to target school dropouts” (page no. 43.). Although the workplace learning model of vocational training seen as an economically efficient way of knowledge transfer, is closely related to time constraints on individual trainees, the issue of the availability of VT opportunities for the thousands of school leavers. In the past, researchers such as Nanayakkara (2004); Dundar (2017) have attempted to highlight the phenomenon of economic survival, many enter the workplaces without a prior qualification due to economic hardships.

Unorganized & unregulated Skills sector employees: Finding shows that Sri Lanka has provisions for awarding NVQ Level 1 to 4 craft level certificates through the RPL Model. According to the Labour Force Survey 2019, the country has 1,307,767 Craft craft-related trade workers and 1,375,540 Skilled Agricultural, Forestry, and Fishery workers of whom only about 20% have skills certification. Under the “Gender and Social Equity Framework for TVET implementation” it is being monitored annually” & a marking plan to raise awareness of training programs, particularly in rural areas has been identified as a key action item.

Demand and economic need for skilled manpower: Hettige (2004) observed that the changing livelihood opportunities to production and service-oriented private firms demanded youth with specialized skills at different levels thus resulting in a greater demand for vocational and technical education in Sri Lanka. Employment data in the recent past show that, more people look for overseas job opportunities. For example, an ILO report shows that less than 25 percent of the job vacancies in the Middle East construction sector targeting Sri Lankan migrant workers were filled (ICTAD, 2014). Wettewa, (2015) recognized this as the vocational educational component and thus plays a vital role in facilitating the development of knowledge-based experts.

Atmosphere: Atmospheric factors of vocational training exist outside the direct interactive process yet are connected largely to the bigger meaning of the interaction; thus, influencing the outcome of the interaction process. Krishnan (2013) recognizes this phenomenon exists as an outside force of the work, which is impacting the outcome of the interaction process in the workplace. For example, Wettewa (2017) notes, that by introducing pre-vocational studies at the junior secondary level, the enrichment, diversification, and partial vocational of the secondary curriculum will hope to correct the prevalent ‘white-collar’ bias within the island. The vocational training atmosphere in Sri Lanka is generally positive, with the government, employers, and other stakeholders working together to promote and support vocational training as a means of addressing the skills gap and reducing unemployment in the country.

Motivational Factors for the skill workers: Tynjälä (2008) observed that the way people are defined and treated in the classroom, the workplace, and the public sphere is the sense of who we are and what we can do. Thus, skills workers in this research seek employment-based learning opportunities; those who come under the RPL category. Lucas et al. (2010) suggested that many students’ sign up for vocational education because they are keen to leave the school environment at the earliest opportunity. Commenting on the type of person in this category, he said that:

“The vocationally inclined young person ... is aware of the world ‘out there’, beyond school, and wants to join it, and school feels like it is holding him or her back. So, it’s not just a matter of their interests or their mentality; the vocational route is the one that seems to respond to that urgency. (William Richardson, quoted in Lucas et al., 2010, p. 28)”

The findings of this research show that the main motivational factor for an individual who is following vocational training is economic / financial.

Motivational factors for the industry/factories: Kézdi, G. (2006), stated that vocational training provides a link between education and the working world. It is usually provided either at the high school level or in a post-secondary trade school. Yorke (2010) argued that a set of achievements, skills, understandings, and personal attributes, that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy. Noon et al. (1997) stated that new people management ideas, technologies, and practices have been replacing the old ones. There are several motivational factors that encourage industry and factories in Sri Lanka to support and engage in vocational training initiatives, including meeting workforce demands, improving productivity and efficiency, and reducing worker turnover.

Motivational factors for the government institutions: Wettewa (2017) highlighted that Technical and Vocational Education too has a prominent place in history, having been established for over a century. Researchers believe that while there is a heightened interest in some stakeholders involved, there was lack of coordinated and concerted action mainly due to a self-motivated institutionalized agenda. On the other hand, Sri Lanka has been facing a supply and demand gap in the labor market for several years.

This situation is further worsened due to skill mismatch where some of the TVET graduates do not fit into the needs of the labour market (Labour Market Information Bulletin, 2011). Thus, the researcher believes that there are several motivational factors that encourage government institutions in Sri Lanka to support and promote vocational training, including: Addressing the skills gap and reducing unemployment, developing a skilled workforce, promoting lifelong learning, promoting social and economic development.

Motivational factors for the Facilitators and donor agencies: Abeysekera(2020) stated that the donor agencies are more concerned about poverty reduction in low-income countries and thus mostly provide funds to specific short-term programs, but what should have happened is to focus more on long-term skills sector development.

Operating parties involved: Researchers such as Filliettaz (2011); Edirisignhe (2022) & Koskela et al. (2011) have highlighted the collective nature of the workplace learning model. That is all the involved parties working together as a network for mutual benefit. While there are several operating parties involved in Sri Lanka's vocational training, including the government, the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC), the National Apprenticeship and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA), private training providers, employers, and trainees themselves.

Trainees - direct recipients of the vocational training: Powell (2014) observed that the trainees are the primary beneficiaries of vocational training, as they gain knowledge and skills that are essential to perform specific job roles. The training equips them with the practical knowledge necessary to enter and excel in their chosen field. At the same time, Rose et al. (2016) observed that vocational training helps bridge the gap between education and employment. Trainees are taught the practical skills required by the industry, thus making them more employable. For example, Chatterjee (2020) stated that the availability of skilled workers helps to increase productivity, thereby contributing to economic growth. In Sri Lanka's vocational training process, trainees can come from a variety of backgrounds, including school leavers, unemployed individuals, and employees seeking to upgrade their skills. How we view ourselves as individuals may influence both the opportunities and barriers we perceive as we make career decisions.

Trainers - workplace trainers/direct supervisors, trainers from the VT institutions: Joo (2018) explains that trainers at VET institutions often take on leadership roles within teams and at the managerial level of colleges, and concedes that “policy-makers have introduced measures to increase the knowledge, competencies, and skills of VET teachers and trainers, to prepare them for developments in pedagogy, technology, and the labor market”, but points out that their functions in leadership and management are both insufficiently addressed and under-researched. In a similar study by Atapattu (2009), pointed out that the trainers play a critical role in vocational training in Sri Lanka. Green A. (2002) & Kalimasi, P. (2018) point assessments of continuous improvement of the trainees and industry Liaison are critical involvement from the trainer’s perspective.

Certification Authority: In contrast to time and budget factors, research findings lead to the believe that in large organizations, workplace trainers are forced to plan, structure, document, and evaluate trainees' work and progress in order to measure the return on the investment from the company's viewpoint. Edirisinghe (2022) observed that there exists a multiplicity of the level of certification and the absence of specified relationships among different levels of certification made by different institutions for the above mention unemployed youth.

Facilitators such as VTA, and private training institutions: McGrath (2020), stated that Vocational Education and Training (VET) has moved to the center of political reform targeted at unemployment and economic growth. The importance of working together and different suggestions for how it can develop has been discussed in other marketing studies such as Colan (2009). Freeman (2007) noted that the overall outcome of the VT is largely dependent on the facilitators in the process.

Interaction process: The interaction between parties is characterized by collaboration and partnership. Not only government agencies, but private training providers also work closely with the government and regulatory bodies to ensure that the training programs meet the required standards. Employers, in turn, provide on-the-job training opportunities and apprenticeships to trainees to help them gain practical experience. Findings of this research reveal that the workplace is based on trust and satisfaction, which improves the relationship for the mutual benefit of the involved parties making this model a successful one.

Individual level: Mummert (2014), showed that “the real work time of a pedagogical teacher is subject to an extremely widespread” this is true when thinking of the workplace trainer. Atapattu et al. (2014) observed an individual-level interaction in vocational training in Sri Lanka involves the different parties interacting with each other to create value. Each party brings unique resources to the interaction, leading to value creation and the development of relationships. The findings of this research reveal that workplace trainers feel that their regular duties leave barely enough time to engage in the regular training of the juniors who are joining the workforce at an unskilled level. This highlights that the interaction process between individual humans as well as between institutions is very important for a successful interaction process.

Organizational level: Smith (2015) stated that the IMP approach is to simplify “environment” into “relevant relationships to others”, in which case what remains of “the environment” is rather regarded as part of the background. Systems theory does not focus on the activities in between two or more systems but turns its attention to the borderline between the inside and the outside of the given entity (system). In relation to such a phenomenon as industrial networks, it would either see the industrial network as a system and focus on the interactions between the entire network and its environments or turn its focus to the various parts (sub-systems), such as represented by individual firms in the network, to analyze how they might interact with, manipulate, or adapt to the other parts of the network.

Larger society level: McGrath (2012) pointed out that VT provides second-chance access routes to higher education. It was observed that the majority of the recipients considered under this research scope is craft personnel in different sectors such as carpentry, masonry, factory workers, etc., with long years of experience and are reluctant to appear for NVQ Level 2 or 3 because some of their junior colleagues may hold NVQ Level 4 through accredited courses. Widanagamachchi (2015) revealed that most of the RPL applicants belong to the unskilled category of an organization. In the IMP review paper Håkansson (1982) argued that the idea that interaction between individually significant actors is a primary characteristic of the business landscape. Therefore, when considering the relationship at the organizational level, organizations that are involved in vocational training are the real workplaces where the trainee gets prior work exposure and experience. Findings of this research suggest that the role of vocational training in emerging economies like Sri Lanka must be better understood as an implicit function of the development of society. Researchers' interactions with the trainees, trainers, VTA authority, and other involved parties such as donor agencies suggest that fundamental shifts in perceptions towards recognizing the status of trainers, whether in the workplace or full-time professional trainers, recognition of their work was inadequate.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study revealed that an effective vocational training system should focus on fulfill the required skilled manpower to suit the economic agenda of the country. Too many institutions' involvement in the implementation and administration process of VT underlined the lack of institutional accountability for the development and sustainability of the vocational training sector in Sri Lanka. VTA training centers situated across the country has not been fully utilized to get the best out of the RPL Model. This is partly due to the fact that the VTA establishment mandate does not recognize and promote the RPL model as one of its key objectives; as a result, although VTA has the greatest number of branches that reach out to the village level, only if a person voluntarily approaches VTA for the RPL certification, they will be facilitated. In countries that have mature vocational training systems such as Austria, Europe, the UK, do not focus on the recruitment of trainees, instead it is focused on the improving the VT sector to cater to the economic needs. Therefore, measuring the effectiveness has to be looked at with the ascospores factors at individual, organizational, and societal levels. Thus, measuring the effectiveness of the RPL Model in vocational training involves assessing the impact of the model on different stakeholders through participation rates, completion rates, employment rates, skills and knowledge improvement, employer satisfaction, and stakeholder feedback. Based on the findings of this research, the researcher summarizes the key recommendations as below:

Recommendation 1: Current discussions on addressing the skills shortage in certain skills trades in the job market fail to take into account the wider opportunities in the socio-economic situation in Sri Lanka. This is an underutilization of skilled labor. The researcher's observation is that this is partly due to not having a national policy on the skills sector development in the country.

Recommendation 2: Make RPL an integral part of any training and learning process in the country, and implement a National Skills development strategy that includes the RPL Model which recipients receive guidance and support beyond the certification. The Researcher proposes this to be done in a manner all the stakeholders in the VT sector can participate in the process. It is recommended to carry trainer training programs for the workplace trainers under the guidance of NAITA. This will enable the workplace training process both in public and private organizations alike.

Recommendation 3: Current NVQ framework, though created with employer input, does not cover the full range of skills industries require. It may be prudent for the authorities to create an environment where approval for a new skills sector is granted with a simple approval process. Researchers believe that as recommended earlier, if the government can establish a skills council, this problem can be addressed with much ease.

Recommendation 4: Success of the RPL model of vocation training is largely dependent on workplace trainers. These are senior employees in workplaces. However, the researcher believes that there needs to be a deeper understanding of trainers' roles in workplace learning processes. Although the trainee was at the center of the discussion, researchers noted that there was a notable absence of the role of the trainer in the discussion. While the skills assessment is purely focused on the ability of the participant/trainee to perform a task to the set standards by the authorities, there is no attention or at least a reference made to the trainer. For example, can or should a person without any skills or qualifications whatsoever be a trainer? The Researcher's view is that this may require comprehensive dialog among the parties.

This research contributed several tools and frameworks: Comparative investigation of practitioners' interpretations of terms surrounding teaching practice, such as 'pedagogy' and 'didactics', as well as their notion of 'workplace learning'. An in-depth account of teachers' self-perceptions as innovators including their aims and motivations as well as the influence of professionalism, outside factors, connections to communities of practice, and continuing professional development. The study results could help practitioners and policymakers improve the effectiveness of VT in Sri Lanka, leading to enhanced performance. In another words, they could look at the operating environment, atmosphere, interacting parties, and the interacting processes to improve the effectiveness of the RPL Model. Further, this study contributes to the vocational training knowledge domain. Future research can be done to examine other training interventions such as vocational training delivered through technical and vocational training institutions across the country using the IMP framework.

References

- Abeysekera, R. (2019). Business development services (BDS) offered by microfinance institutions (MFIs) in Sri Lanka: Case study as a research strategy.
- Abeysekera, R. (2020). Sustainability of business development services: Evidence from the Sri Lankan microfinance sector. *Journal of Enterprising Culture*, 28(01), 81-91.

- Atapattu, A. D. D. H., & Sewwandi, D. K. (2021) Impact of Training and Development on Performance of Executive-Level Employees In Licensed Special Banks: Employees' perspective (With Special Reference To Abc Bank Plc Head Office).
- Atapattu, A. W. M. M., & Jayakody, J. A. S. K. (2014). The interaction effect of organizational practices and employee values on knowledge management (KM) success. *Journal of Knowledge Management, 18*(2), 307-328.
- Boström, L., & Hallin, K. (2013). Learning Style Differences between Nursing and Teaching Students in Sweden: A Comparative Study. *International Journal of Higher Education, 2*(1), 22-34.
- Chan, C. Y., Chan, S. F., Chan, K., & Ip, W. C. (2006). Business planning for the vocational education and training in Hong Kong. *Quality Assurance in Education, 14*(3), 268-276.
- Chan, E. (2014). Learning behavior and leader workplace influence: The mediating effect of leader mentoring behavior. In *Academy of Management Proceedings* (Vol. 2014, No. 1, p. 14830). Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510: Academy of Management.
- Chatterjee, S., & Poddar, P. (2020). Women's Empowerment and Intimate Partner Violence: Evidence from a Multidimensional Policy in India.
- Chen, H., Richard, O. C., Boncoeur, O. D., & Ford Jr, D. L. (2020). Work engagement, emotional exhaustion, and counterproductive work behavior. *Journal of Business Research, 114*, 30-41.
- Çınar, Z. M., Abdussalam Nuhu, A., Zeeshan, Q., Korhan, O., Asmael, M., & Safaei, B. (2020). Machine learning in predictive maintenance towards sustainable smart manufacturing in industry 4.0. *Sustainability, 12*(19), 8211.
- Colan, G., & Petcu, C. A. (2009). The Role of Marketing in Adult Permanent Vocational Training in the Context of the Current Economy. *THE ANNALS OF*, 119.
- Collin, K. (2009). Work-related identity in individual and social learning at work. *Journal of Workplace Learning, 21*(1), 23-35.
- Dean, D., Pepper, J. V., Schmidt, R. M., & Stern, S. (2014). State vocational rehabilitation programs and federal disability insurance: an analysis of Virginia's vocational rehabilitation program. *IZA Journal of Labor Policy, 3*(1), 1-19.
- Dundar, H., Millot, B., Riboud, M., Shojo, M., Aturupane, H., Goyal, S., & Raju, D. (2017). Technical and Vocational Education and Training: The School-to-Work Transition.
- Edirisinghe, L., Siriwardena, S., & Ranwala, L. (2022). Creating a Psychological Paradigm Shift in Students' Choice in Tertiary Education in Sri Lanka through Education Vertical

- Integration. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, 14(2), 72-78.
- Evanciew, C. E., & Rojewski, J. W. (1999). Skill and knowledge acquisition in the workplace: A case study of mentor-apprentice relations in youth apprenticeship programs.
- Filliettaz, L. (2011). Asking questions... getting answers: A sociopragmatic approach to vocational training interaction. *Pragmatics and Society*, 2(2), 234-259.
- Ford, D. (2004). Guest editorial: The IMP Group and international marketing. *International Marketing Review*, 21(2), 139-141.
- Ford, D., & Håkansson, H. (2006). IMP—some things achieved: much more to do. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(3/4), 248-258.
- Freeman, S. S. (2007). *The intersection of policy and practice in one stand-alone vocational school: The ABC story*. Ph. D. thesis; University of Toronto, 2006), 6-9.
- Gamble, J. (2013). Why improved formal teaching and learning are important in technical and vocational education and training (TVET). *Revisiting global trends in TVET: Reflections on theory and practice*, 204.
- Goldstein, H., Poole, C., & Safko, J. (2002). Classical mechanics. A book review, Department of Physics, Reed College, Portland, Oregon 97202
- Green, A. (2002). The many faces of lifelong learning: recent education policy trends in Europe. *Journal of education policy*, 17(6), 611-626.
- Gurtner, J. L., Gulfi, A., Genoud, P. A., de Rocha Trindade, B., & Schumacher, J. (2012). Learning in multiple contexts: are there intra-, cross-and transcontextual effects on the learner's motivation and help seeking?. *European journal of psychology of education*, 27, 213-225.
- Håkansson, H., & IMP Project Group. (1982). International marketing and purchasing of industrial goods: An interaction approach. (*No Title*).Håkansson, H., & Snehota, I. (1989). No business is an island: The network concept of business strategy.
- Hettige, S. T., Mayer, M., & Salih, M. (2004). School-to-work transition of youth in Sri Lanka. *Employment Strategy Paper*.
- Joo, L. (2018). The Excellence of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Institutions in Korea: Yeungjin College Case Study. *International Education Studies*, 11(7), 136-154.
- Kalimasi, P. (2018). Assessment of entrepreneurship education trends in the formal education system in Tanzania. *Business Management Review*, 21(2), 53-65.

- Karlsson, T., Lundh Nilsson, F., & Nilsson, A. (2018). Vocational education and industrial relations: Sweden 1910–1975. *Nordic Journal of Educational History*, 5(1), 27-50.
- Kézdi, G. (2006). Not only transition: The reasons for declining returns to vocational education. Koskela, I., & Palukka, H. (2011). Trainer interventions as instructional strategies in air traffic control training. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 23(5), 293-314.
- Krishnan, P., & Shaorshadze, I. (2013). Technical and vocational education and training in Ethiopia. *International Growth Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science*.
- Liyanage, I. K. (2014). Education system of Sri Lanka: strengths and weaknesses. *Educ Syst Sri Lanka*, 116-40.
- Lucas, N. (2018). Mind the gap: the neoliberal assault on further, adult and vocational education. *Soundings*, 70(70), 129-148.
- Lucas, N., & Nasta, T. (2010). State regulation and the professionalization of further education teachers: a comparison with schools and HE. *Journal of vocational education and training*, 62(4), 441-454.
- Marshall, B., Cardon, P., Poddar, A., & Fontenot, R. (2013). Does sample size matter in qualitative research?: A review of qualitative interviews in IS research. *Journal of computer information systems*, 54(1), 11-22.
- McGrath, S. (2012). Vocational education and training for development: A policy in need of a theory. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(5), 623-631.
- McGrath, S., Ramsarup, P., Zeelen, J., Wedekind, V., Allais, S., Lotz-Sisitka, H., & Russon, J. A. (2020). Vocational education and training for African development: a literature review. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 72(4), 465-487.
- Mercado, F. M., Tad-awan, B. A., Bonoy, H. B., & Mauricio, J. D. (2021). Prospective Lifelong Learning Activities of Students and Faculty Members in Philippine. HEI Centers of Excellence and Centers of Development in STEAM Programs. *Mountain Journal of Science and Interdisciplinary Research (formerly Benguet State University Research Journal)*, 81(2), 55-70.
- Merikallio, R. (2019). *Recognition of prior learning (RPL) among international higher education students in Finland* (Master's thesis).
- Mujumdar, M. S. S. (2012). A Study of Significance of Vocationalization of Education and Skill Development in India-with special reference to the State of Maharashtra. *A Doctoral Dissertation of Symbiosis International University, Pune*.

- Mummert, A. (2014). Guidelines for an Employment and Labour Market Analysis (ELMA).
- Nanayakkara, A. G. W., & Nanayakkara, A. G. W. (2004). *Employment and Unemployment in Sri Lanka: Trends, Issues and Options*. Department of Census and Statistics.
- Noon, M., & Ogbonna, E. (1998). Unequal Provision? Ethnic minorities and employment training policy. *Journal of Education and Work*, 11(1), 23-39.
- Onnismaa, J. (2008). Age, experience, and learning on the job: crossing the boundaries between training and workplace. *Journal of employment counseling*, 45(2), 79-90.
- Otieno, J. O., & Nyambegera, S. M. (2019). Millennials and generation Z employees are here: is your organization ready?. *Journal of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship in Africa*, 10(2), 68-85.
- Patton, D. (2004). Training in smaller firms. In *Managing labour in small firms* (pp. 83-108). Routledge.
- Patton, D., Marlow, S., & Hannon, P. (2000). The relationship between training and small firm performance; research frameworks and lost quests. *International small business journal*, 19(1), 11-27.
- Powell, L. (2014). Reimagining the purpose of vocational education and training. *Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Nottingham*.
- Reegård, K. (2015). Sales assistants in the making: Learning through responsibility. *Vocations and Learning*, 8, 117-133.
- Rose, R., Garner, P., Thomas, E., & Somby, H. (2016). Evaluation of the Progress of the Inclusive Vocational Education System in Georgia 2013-2016.
- Santisteban, J., & Mauricio, D. (2017). Systematic literature review of critical success factors of information technology startups. *Academy of Entrepreneurship Journal*, 23(2), 1-23.
- Senaratne, S., Gunarathne, N., Herath, R., Samudrage, D., & Cooray, T. (2022). Institutional pressures and responses to the introduction of integrated reporting into accounting curricula: the case of Sri Lankan universities. *Accounting Education*, 31(5), 536-566.
- Smith, F. (2000). Attitudes, learning styles and the workplace. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 52(2), 281-293.
- Smith, M. J., Fleming, M. F., Wright, M. A., Losh, M., Humm, L. B., Olsen, D., & Bell, M. D. (2015). Brief report: Vocational outcomes for young adults with autism spectrum disorders at six months after virtual reality job interview training. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 45, 3364-3369.

- Tynjälä, P. (2008). Perspectives into learning at the workplace. *Educational research review*, 3(2), 130-154.
- Wedawatta, G., Ingirige, B., & Amaratunga, D. (2011). Case study as a research strategy: Investigating extreme weather resilience of construction SMEs in the UK. In *7th annual international conference of international institute for infrastructure, renewal and reconstruction*.
- Wettewa, V. (2015). School Choice: The case of Sri Lankan International Schools.
- Wettewa, V. (2017) The Impact of Economic Globalization On Sri Lanka: The Case of Vocational and Technical Education.
- Widanagamachchi, U. C. (2015). *The labour motivation of construction industry in Sri Lanka* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Yin, R. K. (1994). Discovering the future of the case study. Method in evaluation research. *Evaluation practice*, 15(3), 283-290.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). Designing case studies. *Qualitative research methods*, 5(14), 359-386.
- Yorke, M. (2010). Employability: Aligning the message, the medium and academic values. *Journal of teaching and learning for graduate employability*, 1(1), 2-12.