**[Mainstreaming TVET](https://www.dawn.com/news/1861645/mainstreaming-tvet)**

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PAKISTAN’S construction industry contributes around 2.5 per cent to GDP and employs about 8pc of the workforce. Major projects like CPEC and private real estate developments have led to a construction boom, increasing the demand for skilled labour, such as masons, welders, plumbers, carpenters, and heavy vehicle operators. It is estimated that the construction sector will need 1.5 million additional workers over the next five years. However, most of the current workforce lacks the technical skills needed for modern construction.

Pakistan has 2,173 technical and vocational (TVET) institutes, with 278 offering courses related to construction, such as AutoCAD, welding, HVACR, project management, and mechanical and electrical trades. Most of the learning is theoretical, leaving TVET graduates struggling to find relevant employment due to a lack of practical experience. In addition, both KP and Punjab produce Diploma of Associate Engineering (DAE) graduates in construction-related fields. KP sees some 3,200 students graduate annually, while Punjab produces over three times that number. Alarmingly, about 20pc of enrolled students drop out before finishing their education, indicating the need for enhanced support mechanisms, such as work-based training (WBT), to improve retention and ensure job readiness.

WBT allows TVET graduates to gain real-world experience by working in construction environments. This hands-on training is essential for trades like masonry, plumbing, carpentry, and heavy vehicle operation. Globally, WBT has shown a 22pc success rate in employment outcomes. In Pakistan, a 2023 tracer study of 217 TVET graduates found that 188 had undergone WBT, and 40pc of these were able to secure jobs. Of those employed, 82pc found positions in the private sector, 14pc became self-employed, and 4pc joined government positions. Graduates with WBT earned an average monthly salary of Rs40,000, underscoring the importance of practical training.

The Apprenticeship Act of 2018 obligates companies in Pakistan to provide apprenticeship training, with Section 7 of the Act requiring employers to offer training for at least 5pc of their workforce. Construction companies are responsible for training apprentices, although the cost of institutional training is covered by the TVET authority. WBT programmes benefit companies by reducing recruitment costs, enhancing productivity, and ensuring access to a skilled workforce. By training TVET graduates, companies can shape their workforce according to specific needs, thereby reducing the time spent onboarding new employees. Additionally, trained workers tend to be more productive and deliver higher-quality work, crucial for large-scale construction projects.

To maximise WBT’s impact, construction companies should be mandated through the Act to hire a certain percentage of TVET graduates. This would not only improve the graduates’ employment prospects but also ensure that Pakistan’s construction industry has a skilled labour force. By making the hiring of TVET graduates compulsory, the government could address the challenges of labour shortages in the construction sector and youth unemployment.

TVET graduates struggle to find relevant employment.

At the federal level, there are about 40 ministries/ divisions in Pakistan. While some are directly related to construction, like the Communication Division, Housing & Works Division, and Water Resources Division, others also oversee construction-related projects. In the Public Sector Development Programme, construction-related ministries/ divisions are responsible for 516 projects, while other divisions/ ministries handle 407 construction-related projects, totalling 923 projects, or 73pc of all PSDP initiatives. The estimated cost of these projects is over Rs12 trillion.

A review of PSDP 2023-24 shows that 923 projects, constituting some 72pc of all PSDP initiatives, are either partially or entirely related to construction. Out of these, 26 are classified as small projects (below the Rs50m threshold). The remaining 897 could potentially provide training opportunities for TVET trainees. Around 18,000 slots for TVET trainees could be generated from federal government projects alone. The Communication Division, Housing and Works Division, Power Division, and Water Resources Division have the capacity to accommodate some 11,000 TVET DAE graduates each year.

By effectively implementing the Appr­enticeship Act for both government and private construction projects, WBT could be expanded, leading to increased employment for TVET graduates. This would help create a more inclusive and skilled workforce, driving national development and improving the government’s ability to address unemployment in the country.

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