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To cite this article: Malaka Samara (29 Jul 2024): Promoting TVET excellence in Palestine: a case study of WBL in secondary vocational schools, International Journal of Training Research, DOI: 10.1080/14480220.2024.2374411

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14480220.2024.2374411>



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Published online: 29 Jul 2024.



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Promoting TVET excellence in Palestine: a case study of WBL in secondary vocational schools

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ABSTRACT

Reporting findings from action research in Secondary Vocational Schools (SVSs) in Palestine contributes to our understanding of the five criteria that underpin excellence in Work-Based Learning (WBL). This paper presents a new model for promoting WBL performance for SVSs in Palestine by focusing on five key indicators derived from previous research analysis and findings for the researcher of this paper, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) and the Quality, Cost and Delivery (QCD) model. This paper addresses the question of how to promote WBL in SVSs in Palestine? In-depth interviews with 52 school personnel and 85 students from three SVSs in Palestine were conducted. A five-question descriptive questionnaire was administered to all respondents to assess the five key performance indicators to identify performance gaps. Analysis of the responses provides an understanding of the causes of the gaps and helps provide explanations to develop an action plan to improve performance.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 9 December 2023
Accepted 21 June 2024

KEYWORDS

TVET; secondary vocational school; excellence in TVET; European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM); Work-Based Learning (WBL)

Introduction

Researchers and experts define ‘excellence’ in different ways and do not carry one singular meaning (Arribas, 2023). Excellence is not defined by any specific tool or technique that the organization adopts, but rather by the mindset, culture, and attitude that focuses on continuous improvement to go from the good to the great (Hines & Butterworth, 2019). It is also used to refer to outstanding performance relating to the quality of teaching, the capabilities of students, available resources and student achievement (Brusoni et al., 2014). In other words, a culture that consists of habits and behaviours that occur over a period of time inside the institute and enhance positive and good practices of individuals (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education [ENQA], 2014; Mintrom & Cheng, 2014). In a more specific context, there is ‘vocational excellence’, which refers to a high quality of training and education that is relevant to the market, employers and the community needs. Thus, vocational excellence includes aspects such as innovation, pedagogy, social justice, lifelong learning and community needs (European Training Foundation [ETF], 2020). Accordingly, promoting and developing a culture of excellence

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requires time, collective efforts that engage all stakeholders and strategic planning (Suciu, 2017).

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutes have a specific role in qualifying and equipping students with skills and knowledge and developing their vocational competencies. To achieve such success and development, TVET institutions are required to strive towards excellence, to respond to the rapid change in the market and thus enhance economic development, social responsibility and the creation of national wealth. This in turn would have the long-term impact of leading to reduced poverty and social inequality as another objective (UNESCO, 2021b). In this context, 'excellence' is defined by how organizations ensure to remain competitive and responsive to the market needs.

Excellence is considered a key driver to enhance TVET and increase its responsiveness and relative skills to the market (Arribas et al., 2020). Excellence within educational institutions enhances their reputation and attractiveness to potential students and the local community. It contributes to improving the quality of education, enhancing students' experience and innovation, as well as achieving excellent educational outcomes through a sustained impact on the students' practices that improve their competitiveness (Mintrom & Cheng, 2014). In addition, it leads to increased trust between the parents, the local community, the donors and the implementing agencies. Furthermore, adopting new strategies and new services both enhance, excellence and the responsiveness of TVET institutes to the changes not only in countries with strong economies but also during uncertainty and economic recession (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2021). Thus, TVET excellence is essential for a country undergoing rapid change and any risks, by offering focussed training programmes. This striving for excellence drives effective and confident decision-making and thus contributes to a higher level of performance (Mintrom & Cheng, 2014) achieved through collecting data, analysing data that assist in measuring practices and then working to enhance and develop best practices.

One essential objective of the TVET strategy in Palestine is to promote the acquisition of practical skills through adopting efficient Work Based Learning (WBL) approaches and practices (GIZ, 2010). Successful WBL practices, however, do have many dependencies including the school environment, school leadership, financial resources, and the local labor market.

WBL or learning in the process of working (Dehnbostel & Schröder, 2017), is a powerful form of pedagogy that can improve individuals' career development, and entrepreneurial skills and enhance school-to-work transition (Sweet, 2013). Quality WBL can enhance learners' professional and academic skills by connecting youth with the real world of work bridging the gap between theory and practice and ultimately achieving the learning objectives. The quality of WBL approaches and practices requires efficient design, implementation and evaluation of the learning experiences that take place in the workplace. This also requires cooperation with the scientific community, especially with TVET researchers to generate knowledge, solve existing problems and enhance innovation based on the learners' and institutes' needs (Schröder, 2019).

There is a case for understanding that excellence should apply holistically to institutions and not just to selected aspects of what they do (Brusoni et al., 2014). Nevertheless, this article does not consider WBL as one specific subcategory or separate cause for analysis under TVET but rather should be examined.

A comprehensive exploration and examination of TVET's best practices. This is because when introducing WBL, it automatically involves almost every other aspect of TVET such as teachers' qualifications, teaching and learning methodologies (Samara, 2021a; Schröder, 2017), curriculum aspects (Samara, 2018), public-private partnership (PPP) (Samara, 2016), local cooperation and governance (Samara, 2023b), education systems and implementation (Samara, 2022) social-cultural aspects (Samara, 2023a) and forms of adopted WBL methodologies (Samara, 2021b; Schröder & Dehnbostel, 2021) which all influence WBL and thus TVET's overall objectives. This is due to the intersectional and co-dependent nature of TVET elements. UNESCO (2021a) acknowledged this essential and co-dependent nature of TVET identifying the six sets of factors that influence and shape the provision of WBL experiences to create effective and inclusive work-based learning arrangements. These factors include governance, social partnership, kind and scale of workplaces, funding, TVET provisions and societal views.

Methodology

Initiated in 2020 and employing Action Research (AR) methodology (Kaye & Harris, 2017), an expert researcher in TVET started to work closely to support and enhance the implementation of WBL practices in three secondary vocational schools by joining meetings and working with school personnel and students and with other involved TVET partners such as the Local Employment and TVET Council (LET), the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Agricultural relief (AR) the Ministry of Labour (MoL) and other partners. The researcher conducted an in-depth exploration of the area of study through in-depth interviews with 52 school personnel and 85 students from three secondary vocational schools in Palestine. Secondary vocational school students are considered of TVET level 2&3 who study at the school from the age of 16 to 18 to get prepared theoretically and practically to join the market as skilled and craftworkers after they study two years in the secondary vocational schools (Samara, 2018). The data collected were coded and grouped systematically according to the five key performance indicators that were used in this research to collect data. A descriptive questionnaire comprising of five questions were asked to all the respondents to evaluate the five key performance indicators for WBL to identify the performance gaps. The researcher as a WBL expert conducted regular meetings with stakeholders and created an action plan to implement a contextualised model. The research explored in-depth respondents' personal stories, perspectives, points of view, challenges and opportunities to promote WBL approaches and practices. The data collection was carried out in Palestine from February to May 2023.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Key Performance Indicators (hence, KPIs), are measurable values that demonstrate how an institute is achieving its objectives. Their use includes measuring an institute's overall current performance, strategies achievement, financial and operational effectiveness. In general, KPIs can be classified into different types, such as strategic (quality), operational (performance), financial (cost), customer-focused (responsive), and process-focused (delivery).

The EFQM is an international excellence model that measures the strengths and areas for improvement of an institute across its activities. This Excellence Model focuses on what the institute does or could do, to provide an excellent service to clients and thus to the market (Brusoni et al., 2014). The EFQM model is structured into seven key criteria distributed across the three structural components: people, strategy and resources. It is also based on three questions: Why, How and What. These questions concern the institute's objectives, how to achieve these objectives and what is the current and intended status of desired achievement. Reporting these here, this paper identifies Innovation and Responsiveness as the two main indicators to be used to show the current status of the performance of the school and the students concerning WBL practices in secondary vocational schools in Palestine. Referring to the previous definition of excellence as creating an environment which strives for betterment, EFQM itself is used to develop a culture of improvement and innovation. It aids an organization in understanding gaps, coming up with possible solutions, managing change and improving performance. It also serves as a self-assessment tool for the institute and plans accordingly for improvements.

The main role of the Quality, Cost and Delivery (QCD) approach is to put the whole organization under observation to provide the organization with facts and figures that help in making decisions based on the collected data (Samara, 2018). QCD also helps to raise standards in three key areas: quality, cost and delivery.

Combining previous research analysis and findings for the researcher, The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) and the Quality, Cost, Delivery (QCD) approach, thereby identifying five main Key Performance Indicators with which to measure the current WBL performance and output of these Secondary Vocational Schools. These five indicators are based on Quality, Cost, Delivery, Innovation and Responsiveness that we can name 'Secondary Vocational Schools (SVSs) to Excellence Model' (Table 1) as a model that was created by the researcher to measure the current WBL performance and output of these Secondary Vocational Schools. The following table provides details of the model to illustrate its objectives, description and instructions to use.

An analysis of the questionnaire data (Figure 1) identified performance gaps, the causes of which were then identified via examination of the in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews of both school personnel and students, reveal both causes of under-performance and these respondents' performance aspirations.

Quality of WBL

The Ministry of Education (MoE) requires teachers to ensure that the learning output must meet the market demand. However, in response teachers have expressed a difficulty in meeting this request, stating it is currently challenging to meet the market demand without adequate resources. Despite the updated goals of education to meet the market needs, there has been no update in the curriculum, leading to educators being unable to reach their intended goals and essentially fulfil their job requirements. Concerning the curriculum, the school staff indicated two main points of interest. Generally speaking, the curriculum requires teachers to teach separate skills in each activity, the curriculum does not adopt modules where teachers can teach more than one skill in one activity and can teach more than one dimension of the skill (Samara, 2018).

Table 1. Secondary Vocational Schools (SVs) to excellence model.

Item	Objectives	Description
Secondary Vocational Schools (SVs) to Excellence Model	The overall objective is to promote Work-Based Learning (WBL) approaches and practices.	Schools are continuously aiming for further developments in order to respond to the changing market needs. SVs to Excellence Model helps schools to achieve their own educational objectives and the desired objectives and aspirations of all stakeholders.
Description of SVs to Excellence Model	SVs to excellence model is based on five key indicators that are based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Previous research analysis and findings that the researcher conducted during the last six years. ● The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM); and ● The Quality, Cost and Delivery (QCD) model. The five key indicators are quality, cost, delivery, innovation and responsiveness.	KPIs can be classified into different types, such as strategic (quality), operational (performance), financial (cost), customer-focused (responsive), and process-focused (delivery). Thus, their use includes measuring an institute's overall current performance, strategies achievement, financial and operational effectiveness.
Instructions to use SVs to Excellence Model	Planning Process	The overall objective is to develop an action plan with all stakeholders. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a leadership team inside every school to cooperate and work closely with external TVET experts and/or scientific-based researchers in TVET ● Identify and clarify the school objectives of promoting WBL ● Promote the culture of excellence within the school and all the stakeholders (engage all stakeholders). ● Provide focused training for school personnel to understand SVs to excellence model, its objectives and its instructions ● Use the identified five main KPIs which are Quality, Cost, Delivery, Responsiveness and Innovation. ● Identify best practices in order to use them to achieve the objectives ● Identify the current status. ● Identify and understand gaps. The first gap between respondents and the second gap towards excellence (Figure 2). ● Identify causes ● Identify the desired outcome ● Define available resources and allocate responsibilities, roles and resources for each stakeholder. Put the action plan into effect. Working on the delegating responsibilities of each stakeholder in their position
	Implementation	Continuous monitoring for the ongoing activities of WBL and implementation of SVs to excellence model to get regular feedback and collect data for continuous improvements
	Monitoring	Evaluate the achievements and inspirations of the respondents end of every academic year. (Two academic semesters).
	Evaluation	Use participatory evaluation that is part of the Action Research to include all stakeholders' experiences (Schrüder, 2019).
	Remeasure	Identify the gap again to adjust for the new cycle.

Key performance indicators	Ranking
Quality (Q)	From 1 to 10, how do you evaluate the quality of WBL at the school?
Cost (C)	From 1 to 10, how do you evaluate the cost of WBL at the school?
Delivery (D)	From 1 to 10, how do you evaluate the delivery of WBL at the school?
Innovation (INN)	From 1 to 10, how do you evaluate the innovation of WBL at the school?
Responsiveness (RES)	From 1 to 10, how do you evaluate the responsiveness of WBL at the school?

Figure 1. Five key performance indicators questionnaire.

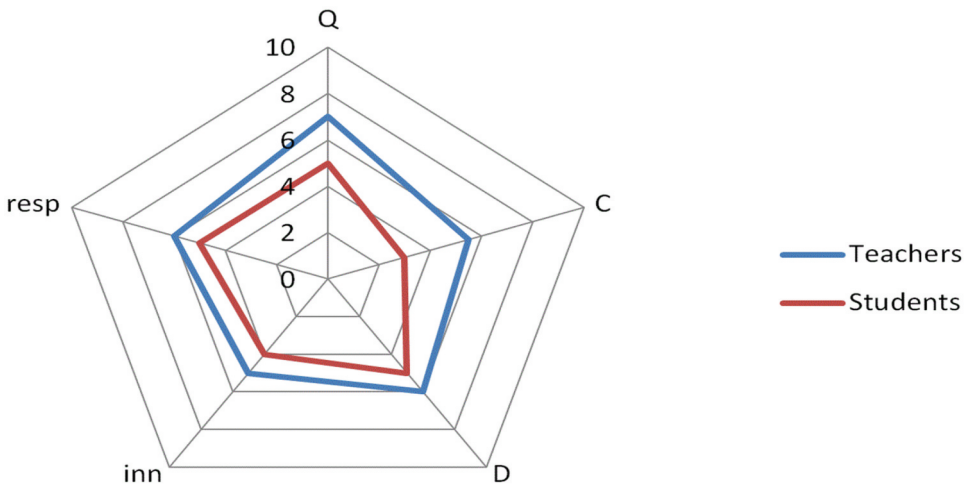


Figure 2. Two gaps.

The curriculum, particularly from the teachers' perspective, is highly theoretical. When it comes to subsequently applying the theoretical information, it depends on the exercise itself and the resources available. Sometimes it is easy for students to apply each task individually and sometimes they seek teamwork and group work to perform and accomplish the task. This comes for many reasons, including the limited time to complete the task by each student, the limited time to provide feedback for each student and follow up in one class and also the ingredients and material available are expensive to be used by each student individually. Hence, group work facilitates the practice of giving each

student one step to master. Conversely, students have different perspectives, some indicated that they are able to buy the raw materials and practice at home, and some indicated that they are already working in the same field outside the school and can practice easily as all the resources are available. However, this does not apply to all students.

For some majors such as agriculture, teachers and students indicated a higher level of quality than other majors for their WBL practices because they conduct WBL practices with a local university partner close to their school that runs one of the biggest agricultural colleges in the country. This university facilitates advanced levels of practical skills for students and allows students to utilise more techniques and machines that are not available at the school. As a result, this allows students to be familiar with new practices and new knowledge in the field of agriculture which also include animal products, livestock products and agricultural products. Some students indicated that it is easy for them to visit the local agricultural university even individually whenever they require more knowledge about certain topics. However, this geographical proximity of WBL partners is a privilege only for the agricultural students, with no other cooperating partners for other majors close by.

Business partners and local partners also play an important role in enhancing the quality of learning skills. Some majors that produce services such as electronics and communication reported lower course evaluation because of the difficulty of finding companies that accept students for practical training and internship.

There is a lack of practical engagement of students with real work. Employers welcome students and their teachers for a short visit to observe the work and working machines but not to use them. This is because there is no legal framework or health and safety agreement between the school and the employer to safeguard students. Thus, the school makes their maximum efforts to provide students with skills within their available resources and time that allow the teacher to finish the curriculum. Subsequently, most of the practices of developing professional skills are limited to the school and inside-the-school workshops. Students' experience is limited to the school, limited to their teacher's experience and available resources inside the schools.

Starting from 2021, the school started to intensify their networks with clients and increase providing their services and production to the market and to clients. Teachers' business backgrounds are one of the main factors that assist students to become more engaged and part of real-world work. Teachers themselves bring materials and technologically advanced equipment that the school does not have to provide efficient work and provide students with knowledge, technology and practical skills. They are not limited to only learning basic skills and knowledge, but in this way students are open to a wider set of skills and competencies.

There is also a supporting factor which is the school leadership that facilitates such initiative. Autonomy has an important role in increasing the quality of educational output and thus enhancing excellence (Arribas et al., 2020). In 2023 the MoE introduced the concept of school autonomy for secondary vocational schools in Palestine. Autonomy otherwise called decentralization of activities is one of the most important elements of strategic planning. Furthermore, autonomy allows the leadership of the school to make decisions to adopt successful WBL practices that could not be successful in other cities' local markets or in other schools in Palestine because the differences in adopting WBL

forms depend on a range of factors such as the nature and the capacity of the private sector and the local market (Samara, 2021a). Autonomy will give the school leadership the authority and flexibility to empower teachers, utilize resources, create collaboration, encourage risk-taking, increase extracurricular WBL activities, adopt innovative ideas and practices, work with diverse communities and build strategic partnerships. Thus, enhancing WBL practices and education output.

Cost of WBL

How WBL programmes are financed is an essential part of how they are designed and managed (Sweet, 2018). This is the reason that available funds and school budget affect the design and the implementation of the WBL practices in secondary vocational schools adopted by teachers and students. Concerning WBL costs, partnerships can help to save on the costs due to the contribution of the partners in the training process and thus can share of financial burden (UNESCO, 2019, 2021a).

Secondary vocational schools are government public schools, financed under the umbrella of the MoE. The MoE is responsible for defining the annual budgets for each secondary vocational school and for each major specified for WBL activities and practices. These costs include teachers' salaries, teachers' and students' insurance, training facilities and training equipment inside the school workshops, and student's transportation for field trips and training. The school provides students and teachers with any cost for tools, materials and ingredients that are required for practical activities inside the workshops. However, this is only limited to what is mentioned to be taught in the curriculum.

Often, the only time certain activities can take place is on the weekend, which requires teachers to participate outside of their regular working hours. While the school allows teachers to do so, it does not provide funds for any extra activity (incentives) or material as it falls outside of the regular teaching schedule. Sometimes students themselves offer to buy required materials because they are motivated to participate in new activities and engage in the current sought-after market labor activities.

Limited financial resources and experts to apply new things prevent students and teachers from pursuing innovation. It is also a challenge for the teacher that hinders their creativity and implementation of new ideas.

Teachers indicated that the school's available budget to some extent can help to cover performing and implementing the main practical skills mentioned in the curriculum. However, when it comes to students' projects, some students said that it's very expensive and it makes a real financial burden on the student and their families.

Acquiring extra funds or new tools or equipment for some workshops at the school depends on the teachers themselves and their efficient network and efforts with the market business people and local institutes. For example, majors such as carpentry and agriculture are to some extent successful because there is support from their local partners who can provide certain extra equipment, experts and facilities for students to come to their place and learn practical skills.

There are successful WBL practices by the school. Some majors started to produce and sell their products. This allows for financial return for the school to then invest in WBL activities as well as students' transportation and material required for the practical training. This has reduced the financial burden on the school and on students and has

increased the school's opportunity to conduct more practical activities and workshops inside and outside the school.

As introduced by the ETF report on the importance of the partners and quality network for providing deeper engagement in the labor market and a provider source of skills (ETF, 2020). Similarly, for secondary vocational schools in Palestine, partners play an important role in providing equipment, costs of field trips and sometimes providing small funds for small projects to be implemented by the students inside the school. Unfortunately, this is not applicable to all majors of the school.

Delivery approaches of WBL

Teaching delivery refers to the formats and strategies used to deliver instruction and facilitate learning. Effective teaching delivery takes account of the interrelationship of different pedagogies, delivery modes, learning and teaching methods, assessment, and systems of learning support and development that lead to effective, quality delivery (Bhardwaj et al., 2015). Hence, students can acquire competencies that achieve the education objectives.

The majority of WBL that the school practices either formal or informal, inside the school or outside are implemented by the school teachers. Very limited activities of hosting an expert or an employer from an industry or private sector. A few field trips to visit private employers but they are short and limited to theoretical issues. However, to some extent, such activities enrich student's experience and knowledge and it is considered as part of change for students to be outside the school and get to know how some factors or industries work.

The adoption of teaching and learning delivery methods depends on numerous factors. Teachers and students simultaneously stated some of these factors including the type of content, skills and knowledge required to be taught, available material and resources (especially financially) private partner's availability and support and the level of support from the school leadership, teacher autonomy to make a decision on conducting or joining activities that require students to practice their professional and personal competencies and finally students' motivation and teachers qualifications. Thus, achieving the education objectives is subject to the above-mentioned factors and varies from one situation to another.

Teachers and students pointed out that most of the practical skills and activities occur inside the school workshops facilitated by teachers. It includes activities such as 1) Individual learning where the time is given for each student to practice the skills individually. This is necessary to be performed when each student is required to learn and master all the skills and the steps of producing something 2) Group learning work. This is an alternative to individual learning when it is possible that students can work together, divide tasks and then come up with the product. This also allows students to learn from each other. It is also used by teachers when there are insufficient resources such as raw materials and an adequate budget.

Certificate of professional competence or project-based learning

Each student who chooses this WBL track must work on a project individually and present it at the end of the semester. Every student proceeds through their project

step by step, in every step they learn new skills and competencies with regular feedback provided by the teacher. A project is intended to be independent work, however, teachers remain available for any support, or inquiry by the students. Project concepts and notions are suggested by the teacher and the MoE, with very little input from the student, thereby essentially disregarding their own interests and pursuits. This is because teachers often lack the skills and qualifications to teach project-based learning skills, and they limit their teaching to working on projects (Samara, 2021a).

For all the above-mentioned WBL practices, teachers ask students to write reflections and then teachers provide feedback to serve as a follow-up and assessment. This is to make sure that students understand what they have learned and critically reflect on the skills taught. It includes writing information about the task, the steps, the ingredients, and the challenges of applying it.

Meanwhile, teachers teach some entrepreneurship skills that assist students in conducting their own individual projects at a higher level of proficiency. However, the school doesn't give importance to teaching entrepreneurship and there is no specialized teacher to deliver this course, teachers of other majors such as carpentry, welding, and cosmetology teach entrepreneurship curriculum within their limited basic skills and knowledge of entrepreneurship, the market and business.

Another aspect that students lack is being part of experiential learning and Lifelong Learning. Information is imposed on students and strictly guided by the teacher as a lecturer, not a facilitator who is working to comply with the curriculum requirement on time (Ord, 2012). Thus, teachers lack qualifications and background in theories of psychology (Lefa, 2014) and sociology (Thompson, 2017) in the workplace which are important for knowledge and skills acquiring when WBL is conducted.

Due to the lack of efficient governance mechanics and cooperation with local TVET main actors and training providers such as the Chamber of Commerce, Ministry of Labor and the Local Employment TVET (LET) council, students are not involved regularly and sufficiently in vocational programs or any activities that these providers could offer to students (Samara, 2023b). Additionally, there is a lack of connection with TVET actors across the world. UNESCO-UNEVOC emphasised the importance of having international connections with TVET actors that could help in knowledge building, lessons learning and enhancing promising practices (Bahl & Dietzen, 2019). Furthermore, a lack of network and cooperation with the scientific community, especially with TVET researchers. For all involved parties, cooperation with researchers helps to generate knowledge and enhance innovation (Schröder, 2019).

Innovation of WBL

Innovation is defined as practising something in a new way to solve certain problems (Kogabayev & Maziliauskas, 2017), or even involving multiple activities to uncover new approaches. This means that once in the workplace and students are able to extend their competencies, they can explore new ways of innovation or have the mindset to encourage change and alternative practices.

Innovation is also crucial in the uncertainty such as the COVID-19 lockdown that hindered vocational students from implementing practical skills. Thus, innovation was

an important issue and a real challenge for vocational teachers to discover new ways to address and teach practical skills to students (Samara, 2021b).

This section will explore and analyse if the schools are open to seeking and practising new notions concerning WBL practices and what competencies students learn in the new practices that cannot be acquired in the traditional WBL practices.

Teachers seek new and innovative ideas in the way they teach competencies to students, mainly through practical skills in the workplace. Thus, there are numerous innovative ideas that the school has but there are numerous challenges to implementing them in practice. This includes the deficiency of materials, time and limitations to what is in the curriculum and funds as well. However, these challenges have not prevented the school and the students from seeking new ways to create change and start new strategies that can improve the learning outcome.

As part of innovation strategies, the school started to participate in production and then sell their products in local markets and exhibitions in the city where the school demonstrates their products of different majors including fashion, design, carpentry, cosmetology, food manufacturing, painting, drawing, and sewing. This strategy has enabled students to work from their homes and learn by themselves using available online resources that teach skills and competencies. This has enhanced students learning, knowledge and skills such as marketing, cooperation, creativity, time management, planning, negotiation, and market demand on their products, prices, and material qualities. However, it is very difficult for every student to participate in such activities, it is limited to a few students who are given the opportunity by their teacher's own individual choice to participate. Thus, learning through this new experience must involve every student because learning will only occur through participation and engagement (Bhardwaj et al., 2015).

Teachers and students found this to be both an effective form of learning new skills and, for the students, motivating to be part of a market enterprise. Teachers and students found that there is a high demand for their products that present culture, and heritage and it has been sold in the regional markets. This provides a financial return to the school to produce more of such products and get an extra budget for their workshop activities, increasing the school and motivation among graduates and the local market and the community's trust in the vocational school. It also has enabled individual students' projects and products, by allowing students to trust their practical competencies and their ability to start their own small business from home and gain income even before graduation.

Despite all the advantages, these practices remain irregular and still do not have the required support to be in a more formal and regular strategy for WBL. This is because innovation requires systematic, more organised and continuous activities (Mintrom & Cheng, 2014). Above all, it requires all stakeholders' support and cooperation to foster the new practices.

To be innovative in the workplace, students have to have the mindset of innovative thinking and have certain characteristics such as critical thinking, problem-solving, strategic thinking, and motivation (Angove, 2019). However, students in the school lack such characteristics because vocational schools are unable to equip students with these skills which are also considered as 21st-century skills (Bell, 2010). Students are limited to

learning skills that are defined by the curriculum and indicated by the teacher, therefore, the innovation possibilities are limited.

Responsiveness of WBL

Responsiveness in the workplace refers to quick and appropriate reactions to changing ideas, responsibilities, strategies, and other processes as well as their subsequent implementation if necessary. The quality of reacting quickly and positively. Responsiveness means timely decisions that lead to timely actions that enhance WBL forward.

Initially, there is a real challenge to make the school responsive to the changing needs of industry, technology or any change. This is due to numerous factors that include; (1) the need to improve the performance of the whole skills provider network and partners, not only the school. (2) Secondly, a need for specialist skills providers. Currently, teachers do not have such skills and it requires time and effort to provide teachers with training to equip them to teach the new emerging skills to respond and deal with new situations.

There are many emerging industries in the market that require skilled workers to work for them. Thus, the school is one of the main institutes that is responsible for providing its students with skills to meet the market demand. However, it is again a challenge to respond to this. For example, Hydroponics is an emerging industry in the Palestinian labor market and thus the secondary vocational schools' updated curriculum indicates that the teacher must teach hydroponics. The teacher doesn't have any previous practical experience and even does not have adequate information and knowledge, thus, it is difficult to get training outside the school because of the lack of experts. Teachers and students work together and cooperate together and learn together new skills and knowledge to respond to the emerging new industry. Teachers and students utilize online websites and YouTube to learn new knowledge and skills. Besides, utilizing local partners who also have limited experience.

The responsiveness of the schools was tested by the COVID-19 health crisis. Secondary Vocational Schools faced challenges to respond to this crisis to adopt a new mode of learning and teaching, it required a higher level of cooperation from parents, students themselves and teachers. The challenges were for all stakeholders of TVET not only limited to teachers and students. This required a fundamental change of culture and mindset of all stakeholders (Samara, 2023a).

Conclusion and outlooks

Developing and building TVET capacity through enhancing excellence to meet the emerging demand for skills is crucial. Secondary vocational schools as TVET institutes could become centres of excellence (Ode Sri et al., 2020; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2021; European Training Foundation [ETF], 2022). In fact, the school is the place where exploring and adopting new technology tools, techniques, or practices can be practised and examined, thus, it has the potential to be a site of excellence. To achieve this potential, it requires a leading competent team such as a TVET expert and a competent TVET researcher to introduce 'Secondary Vocational Schools (SVSs) to Excellence'. TVET experts also provide a source of knowledge and guidance for the school and students and help to increase the school's cooperation and networks

with international TVET experts or learn from international best practices (Lamichhane, 2021). All respondents referred to the lack of experts in their profession. This is why they struggle to get advanced knowledge, experience and competencies to implement more quality and organised WBL practices.

Enhancing excellence within Secondary Vocational Schools is a continuous process. It requires commitment and cooperation from management, staff, students, parents and the local community. Hence, cooperation and buy-in of all stakeholders are essential for responding to any change (Samara, 2023a). This is why the school should develop programs and activities that target parents and involve them in decision-making to develop and enhance all main actors' support endangerment. By adopting the basic principles and following the appropriate steps, educational institutions are capable of enhancing the quality of education and achieving excellence. It also requires strong and committed school leadership and autonomy to enable decision-making and enhance education quality and responsiveness (Arribas et al., 2020).

Excellence is not a strategic goal, but rather a methodology to reach a status where an institute can achieve certain strategic goals through strategic planning (Winckler, 2016). There are several factors that assist Secondary Vocational Schools in achieving their goals and overall objectives. Such factors are, defining the institute's objectives, strategic planning, a leadership that is able and qualified to lead and achieve the objectives and able to enhance the culture of excellence and innovation. Excellence is a process of continuous change for improvement, thus, it has no end as long as the Secondary Vocational Schools (SVSs) adopt new tools, strategies or methodology. Accordingly, if the questions of this research are repeated after practising school autonomy, the responses of the employees and students may vary again.

Secondary Vocational Schools (SVSs) are capable of measuring their WBL performance current status and enhancing excellence by using appropriate steps and tools and enhancing cooperation between all stakeholders. Additionally, the school could adopt a measuring system for one academic semester (four months) or for one academic year (eight to nine months) and record factors and indicators that make changes in progressing towards excellence. Thus, this article provides a definition of excellence that introduces the model that was created by the researcher 'Secondary Vocational Schools (SVSs) to Excellence Model' (Table 1) as an approach to continuously measure performance and provide data that helps Secondary Vocational Schools to respond in times of change and crisis. Continuous measurement provides the school with data to measure strengths and weaknesses thus facilitating decision-making that in turn helps to enhance the quality of TVET and adopt strategically and systematically the best practices of teachers and students to improve competitiveness. Otherwise, all the best practices mentioned above will remain only pilot and random practices that are only dependent on an irregular outside fund or invitation to participate in a local activity or with a local partner.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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