

APPOINTMENTS

Grow with us

You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream — CS Lewis

Curriculum check: Are colleges teaching what companies want?

Every year, thousands of students graduate from colleges in Nepal but one big question remains: Are they really learning the skills that companies are looking for, or just collecting degrees with no practical value?

Youth unemployment in Nepal has crossed 22.7 per cent, even as the number of university graduates continues to grow. A recent study by Skill Lab, which analysed over 1,000 entry-level job listings across Nepal and Southeast Asia from 2022 to 2025, found that soft skills are often the deciding factor in hiring. However, most graduates are not equipped with these essential skills, and Nepali university programmes currently meet only 58.1 per cent of job market requirements. The gap between what students learn and what employers need is a key reason why many graduates remain unemployed or underemployed.



Why is it important? What do we want to extract?

pectives on Medical Education revealed that nearly three-quarters of students overestimated their soft skills compared to how their teachers assessed them. Skill Lab findings align with this. While students frequently list these skills on their CVs, most have not developed or demonstrated them in situations that matter to employers.

WHAT EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR

The 21st century skills are a set of abilities like critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy that help students succeed in today's fast-changing world. The 21st century skills (21CS) framework was first developed in 2002 by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21), a group of educators, tech companies, and policymakers. It focuses on preparing learners for both modern workplaces and global citizenship.

Here's a closer look at the skills:

COGNITIVE SKILLS: Students might think these are about tricky puzzles or abstract theory, but employers see them as the foundation of problem-solving and innovation. Alarming, only about 21 per cent of IT curricula in Nepal align with these market needs, revealing a serious gap between education and industry expectations.

INTERPERSONAL AND COL-

LABORATIVE SKILLS: Many students assume technical skills are enough. However, employers, especially in international and remote work settings, value communication, teamwork, and negotiation just as highly. These soft skills are in high demand across sectors, yet they remain underrepresented in Nepali curricula.

DIGITAL LITERACY: Comfort with social media or basic computer use can be misleading. What employers seek is fluency in advanced digital tools, including virtual collaboration platforms and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. Nepal's IT education significantly trails behind countries like Malaysia, where curricula align far more closely with industry standards.

ADAPTABILITY AND SELF-EFFICACY: In today's fast-changing job market, resilience, initiative, and independent learning are key. These traits, however, are rarely developed through the traditional, teacher-centred models still common in Nepalese higher education, particularly in fields like IT and Finance.

CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL AWARENESS: Skills such as ethical reasoning, cultural intelligence, and the ability to work across cultures are increasingly

expected by employers. While students may see these as secondary, their absence in university curricula contributes to Nepal's struggle to retain and attract globally competitive talent.

These competencies are particularly vital in fast-growing sectors like information technology, tourism, healthcare, and digital marketing. Yet, according to Skill Lab's study, Nepal's university curricula currently address only 58.1 per cent of market needs which is far behind countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, where alignment exceeds 58.5 per cent and 69.9 per cent. Curriculum mismatch has contributed to higher unemployment rates by creating a gap between workers' skills and job market demands. Studies show that skill mismatch can explain up to one-third of unemployment increases, with a one per cent rise in mismatch leading to a 0.13 per cent increase in unemployment.

CHALLENGES WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Recent studies in Nepal show that higher education needs to change how students are taught by including more soft skills and interactive teaching methods. A study titled *Pedagogical Use of 21st Century Skills in Nepal* by Dr Bed Prasad Dhakal reveals that university teachers across Tribhuvan University (TU) are in teaching



at only a moderate level, with no significant variation across faculties or institutes. The findings indicate while awareness exists, there is a need for improved and redefined pedagogical approaches to integrate these skills into classroom practices. Key barriers include the lack of digital tools, supportive institutional policies, and strategic direction for both teachers and students.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

To reduce the current skill gap, colleges and universities in Nepal can take effective steps in the short term. One way is to offer more career focused courses through non-credit and vocational courses, especially in digital and technical skills that are in high demand. Working together with companies to provide certified training can help students skills outside the classroom.

Integrating soft skills like leadership, adaptability, and strategic thinking into college learning should start from the first year. Early industry collaboration through internships connected to course work, grading, and final results can make the experience more useful and linked to

what students study. Industry experts can also teach mini, non-credit courses that match the latest industry needs, and students should have to finish and pass these in addition to their exams. One-time short sessions may create interest for a moment, but they do not bring lasting improvement, making them less valuable. Soft skills and teamwork are better learned through practice projects, not only class presentations. Research shows that job training and work-integrated learning can greatly improve employability, as seen in South Africa where it cut graduate unemployment from 63 per cent to 26 per cent.

To prepare students for the job market, teacher training should focus on Continuous Professional Development that matches the skills and knowledge companies need today. Without this, many teachers depend on their own study background and past work experience, which may not be correct in the current situation. While many have moved away from only lecture-based teaching, not all student-centred methods fit what the industry is looking for. A key gap is the shortage of local case studies, as

foreign examples often fail to reflect Nepal's real challenges.

Skill Lab's discussions with colleges and companies revealed interest in working together, which led to the development of locally relevant, job-specific courses which are approved by the companies. These non-credit programmes are encouraged by college and are helping bridge the gap between academic learning and the practical skills employers require.

LOOKING TOWARD A MORE PREPARED WORKFORCE

Fixing Nepal's soft skills gap does not mean giving up on academic excellence. It means expanding our definition of what it means to succeed. A student with perfect grades but poor teamwork or communication may struggle more in the workplace than one with average marks but strong practical skills. Nepal is at a turning point. We can continue producing graduates who are well-read but under-prepared for the workplace, or we can rethink our approach and create a generation of professionals ready to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. — SKILL LAB

UNDERSTANDING THE GAP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

In today's workforce, soft skills have shifted from being optional to essential. Entry-level jobs across Nepal and Southeast Asia now demand an average of 10.15 distinct skills. In another analysis of 410 entry-level jobs by Skill Lab, 80 per cent of jobs needed communication skills, 44.6 per cent needed collaboration and 38.8 per cent needed problem-solving skills making this the top three skills in demand. Despite this, students often misinterpret or devalue soft skills.

For instance, communication skills most jobs demand is more than just about speaking confidently in front of a class. It includes listening carefully, writing clearly and professionally, and adjusting messages to suit different audiences. Leadership is not simply about managing a group project. It involves taking initiative, resolving conflicts and making decisions under pressure.

A 2016 study published in *Per-*

Keywords to make your resumé shine

In today's highly competitive job market, landing more interviews requires more than just experience and qualifications. One of the most effective strategies to stand out is mastering job description keywords and incorporating them strategically into your resume. This approach not only enhances your visibility to employers but also demonstrates that you possess the exact skills and qualifications they're seeking. When identifying job description keywords, it's essential to extract keywords directly from the job posting to ensure your resume aligns with what employers and applicant tracking systems are looking for. Whether you're actively job hunting or planning your next career move, understanding how to leverage these keywords can significantly boost your chances of getting your resume noticed and securing valuable interview opportunities, ultimately supporting a successful job application.

WHY KEYWORDS?

Job description keywords are specific terms and phrases that employers use to outline the skills, qualifications, and experiences they seek in candidates. These keywords are crucial for several reasons:

APPLICANT TRACKING SYSTEMS (ATS) NAVIGATION: Many companies now use ATS to filter and manage job applications. These systems scan resumes for specific keywords to determine which candidates move forward in the hiring process. Using the right keywords increases the likelihood of being selected by the system.

RECRUITER SEARCH OPTIMISATION: Recruiters frequently search their applicant databases using specific terms. Including relevant keywords ensures your resume appears in these searches, as recruiters use keywords to identify qualified candidates.

DEMONSTRATION OF JOB FIT: Tailoring your resume with relevant

keywords shows that you understand and meet the specific requirements of the position.

INCREASED INTERVIEW PROBABILITY: A keyword-optimised resume is more likely to pass through screening filters and grab the attention of hiring managers. It further increases your chances of landing an interview.

IDENTIFY THE KEYWORDS

Extracting the most important keywords from job postings involves a few strategic steps. AI-powered tools can help extract keywords and find keywords from job descriptions quickly and efficiently. These tools enable users to discover key terms that are critical for resume optimisation, such as job titles, skills, and qualifications. Using a keyword finder or job description keyword finder can make this process easier and more effective.

ANALYSE MULTIPLE JOB LISTINGS: Examine several job postings for similar roles, analysing multiple jobs and job titles to identify patterns in the keywords used. Look for patterns in the skills, qualifications, and experiences emphasised by different employers in your target field.

FOCUS ON FREQUENTLY MENTIONED TERMS: Pay special attention to terms that appear multiple times within a single job description or across various listings, especially identifying specific words that are repeated. These repetitions signal high-priority skills and qualifications.

CATEGORISE DIFFERENT TYPES OF KEYWORDS: Distinguish between different types of keywords.

HARD SKILLS: Technical abilities like programming languages, software proficiency, or specific methodologies

SOFT SKILLS: Interpersonal qualities like leadership, communication, or problem-solving



INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGY: Specialised jargon relevant to your field

QUALIFICATIONS: Degrees, certifications, or years of experience

REQUIRED SKILLS: Essential qualifications or abilities needed for the job, such as specific experience, technical expertise, or other necessary competencies

UTILISE ONLINE KEYWORD EXTRACTION TOOLS

Tools like job description keyword finders allow you to paste or paste the job description into the tool for instant analysis. These tools can generate lists of resume keywords and job specific keywords in seconds. Many of these tools are free and represent the easiest way to extract keywords from a job description. These tools can be particularly helpful for:

- Identifying keywords you might have missed
- Discovering skill gaps you need to address
- Understanding which terms are most relevant for ATS optimisation

UNDERSTAND THE JOB CONTEXT

Look beyond isolated words to understand how terms are used contextually. This helps you incorporate keywords naturally and appropriately in your resume, demonstrating that you are a good fit for the job.

TAILOR RESUME WITH JOB DESCRIPTION KEYWORDS

Once you've identified the relevant keywords, the next step is to tailor

your resume for each job application. This means you may need to adjust your resume content and add keywords to ensure it matches the job description and passes ATS scans. Here's how:

CUSTOMISE PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY: It should encapsulate your skills and experiences, including the job title from the job description and incorporating keywords from the job description.

INCORPORATE KEYWORDS INTO

WORK EXPERIENCE: Align your job responsibilities and achievements with the keywords. Use action verbs and quantify your accomplishments to provide context, and organise your experience using bullet points for impact.

HIGHLIGHT SKILLS AND CERTIFICATIONS: Create a dedicated skills section that mirrors the job description's requirements. Include relevant certifications to strengthen your qualifications.

ALIGN EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ensure your educational background and any professional development courses align with the job requirements. Mention relevant coursework or honors if applicable, and provide examples to illustrate how your education matches the position.

USE KEYWORDS IN ADDITIONAL SECTIONS

Incorporate keywords in sections like Projects, Achievements, and Professional Affiliations to reinforce your expertise and improve resume matches with the job description.

USE THEM EFFECTIVELY

Here are some tips for effectively using

MAINTAIN READABILITY: While it's essential to include keywords, ensure your resume remains readable and flows naturally. Avoid keyword stuffing, which can make your resume look like a spam and reduce its effectiveness with both ATS systems and human reviewers.

USE CONTEXTUALLY APPROPRIATE KEYWORDS: Think of your resume as a mirror that should reflect the essential elements of the job description. However, it must be authentic and only include keywords that genuinely align with your experience and skills.

BALANCE KEYWORD DENSITY: Strategic placement matters more than quantity. Consider the ATS as a sophisticated digital bouncer at an exclusive club, with keywords being your VIP pass. But even VIPs need credentials — keywords should appear naturally.

PRIORITISE THE MOST RELEVANT TERMS: Focus on the keywords that most closely match your strongest qualifications. Your resume and the job description should fit together like puzzle pieces, with keywords serving as the connecting edges. — HEDRUS.COM

JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Nepal works with the people and Government of Nepal, and other development partners to pursue equitable and sustainable human development goals through eradication of poverty, increase in livelihood opportunities, improvement in community resilience against conflict, disasters, and impact of climate change, while laying down strong foundations for a society based on rule of law with an inclusive and participatory democracy.

UNDP Nepal is seeking applications from qualified and result oriented Nepalese citizens for the following assignments:

S.N.	Position Title	Level	No. of Positions	Duty Station	First Date of Publication	Application Deadline
1	Monitoring and Evaluation Analyst – HIV	NPSA 9	1 (One)	Kathmandu, Nepal	4 September 2025	18 September 2025

Weblink for application: <https://www.undp.org/nepal/jobs>

Only short-listed candidates will be contacted, and UNDP retains the right to contact referees directly during the selection process.

UNDP is committed to achieve work force diversity and has a policy to have gender balance among staffs at all levels. Work experience and/or academic knowledge in relation to gender and social inclusion will be an added advantage. Qualified Women, Dalits, Janajatis, Madhesis, Persons with Disabilities, gender and sexual minorities and other minorities are specially encouraged to apply.

United Nations has a zero-tolerance against Sexual exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH). Everyone is responsible for Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment (PSEA and SH), and all UN personnel must adhere to the standards of conduct that preserves PSEA principles (both during work hours and outside work hours). All selected candidates will, therefore, go through a safe hiring process.

All applications will be treated with highest confidentiality.