

Mitigating the "Skills Gaps"

A Realist-Constructivism Analysis of Work Competencies in the Global South

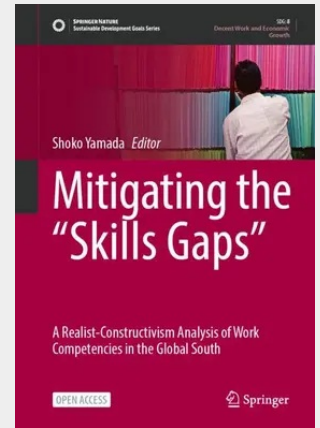
This book is open access, What makes people competent at work? This question is becoming complicated with the emergence of new technologies and the hastened pace of global economic exchanges. While there is less consensus about what people should know and be able to do to be rewarded in the workplace, the discussion about skills and competencies becomes even hotter among those who express concern about the gaps between the demands and supplies of "skilled" workforces.

Given this situation, one of the main objectives of this book is to clarify the true nature of often-discussed "skills gaps", using the cases of manufacturing workers in the Global South. Instead of discussing the issues based on a broad, ambiguous understanding of human abilities, after an extensive, cross-disciplinary review of the literature and theorization, the book proposes a detailed classification of cognitive, non-cognitive (including socio-emotional skills and personality traits), and technical abilities. Then, it presents both contextually relevant and generalizable explanations about relationships among them. By doing so, the volume offers insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking ideas to reform their human resources development policies and practices.

The second objective of the volume is to propose the analytical perspective of Realist-Constructivism, using the "skills gaps" analysis as the empirical case, to demonstrate its theoretical, conceptual, and practical capacities to overcome the dichotomy between induction and deduction through abductive reasoning with a set of instruments to collect data that enable such analysis.

Empirical surveys, using a set of questionnaires and skills assessment we developed, were conducted in four countries in the Global South: Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa, and Pakistan. With Realist-Constructivism, we can consider work-related competencies in close relation to the specific workplace requirements and culture, while situating them within broader industrial, economic, and regulatory frameworks. Our methods and instruments enable us to link the subjective epistemologies of competencies among individuals in the micro-ecologies of the workplace with the ontological realities of labor market opportunities and evaluations.

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