

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) AT HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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### **Abstract**

*Education is a major source of productivity and growth because it increases the productivity of human capital and it contributes to overall increase in economic growth. Quality education is today's need as it is the source of development of skills and knowledge. It equips the learners with the arts and skills required for becoming successful professionals, decision makers and trainers. Skills and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and social development for any country. Countries with higher and better levels of skills face the challenges and opportunities of the world of work more effectively. On a long-term basis, up to 2022, it is expected that India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of about 8%. It is expected that India will be a home to a skilled workforce of 500 million persons by 2022. Thus various Central and State Governments and Universities are concentrating to impart vocational courses through innovative programmes / institutions especially launched for achieving these purposes. To achieve these goals, India needs flexible contemporary, relevant, inclusive and creative vocational education and training system that will provide the foundation for learning, secondary and tertiary education and to develop required competencies as means of achieving lifelong learning. Vocational Education and Training (VET) is an important element of the nation's education initiative. Tamil Nadu Open University is the pioneer for providing vocational education and training education in South India. In this paper the author emphasizes the need and importance for introducing vocational education at higher and tertiary levels by the Universities.*

**Keywords:** *Vocational Education and Training, Skill Development, Skill Education, University.*

### **Introduction**

India has one of the largest technical human resources in the world. However, compared to its population, there is no significant level of achievement and there is a tremendous scope for improvement in this area. In India, the emphasis has been on general education, with vocational education at the receiving end. This has resulted in large number of educated people remaining unemployed or under employed. This phenomenon has now been recognised by the planners and policy makers. Hence there is a greater thrust on vocationalisation of education.

Another shortcoming in the area of technical and vocational education is that till now, the number of engineering graduates is more than the diploma holders. This is creating an imbalance, as more workforces are required at the lower level. India is in transition to a knowledge based economy, and its competitive edge will be determined by the abilities of its people to create, share and use knowledge more effectively. This

transition will require India to develop workers into knowledge workers who will be more flexible, analytical, adaptable and multi-skilled (Goel, 2009).

In the new knowledge economy, the skill sets will include professional, managerial, operational, behavioural, inter-personal and inter-functional skills. To do this, the work force of the nation must have education and training that equips them for the labour market. One of the sources of the skilled workforce is the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system.

#### **Status of Vocational Education and Training in India**

In a globalized economy, a large pool of skilled workers is indispensable for attracting foreign direct investment. Developing skilled workers enhances the efficiency and flexibility of the labour market; skill bottlenecks are reduced, skilled workers are more easily absorbed into the economy, and their job mobility is improved.

It is crucial to invest in quality secondary and tertiary education and in Vocational Education and Training (VET) if India's economy is to develop and remain competitive in the world markets. For this majority group, access to secondary education and VET is crucial and for most of them secondary education and VET will be the last stage of their formal schooling.

An effective school to work transition for these young people, made possible by higher quality secondary and tertiary education and VET, will improve their employment prospects and lifetime earnings (National Institute of Open School- 2012).

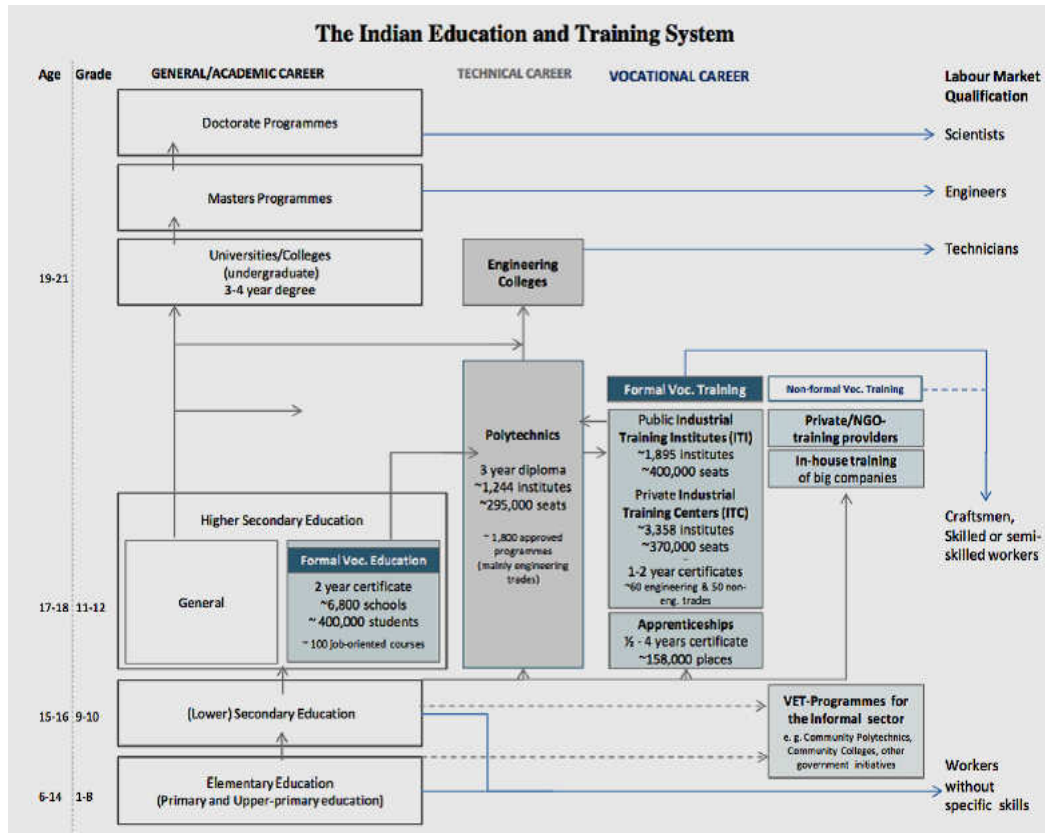


Fig. 1: Academic, Technical and Vocational parallel training structure/system in India-a flowchart (Pillay & Ninan, 2014, p.11).

India lags far behind in imparting skill training as compared to other countries. Only 10% of the total workforce in the country receives some kind of skill training (2% with formal training and 8% with informal training). Further, 80% of the entrants into the workforce do not have the opportunity for skill training (ILO, 2011, p.7). The accelerated economic growth has increased the demand for skilled human resources that has highlighted the shortage of skilled human resources in the country.

Employees in general state a variety of reasons for their inability to fill-in jobs. India is one among the top countries in which employers are facing difficulty in filling up the jobs. For India, the difficulty to fill-up the jobs is 48%, which is above the global standard of 34% in 2012.

The lack of available applicants, shortage of hard skills and shortage of suitable employability, including soft skills, is some of the key reasons in finding a suitable candidate for available jobs in the country (FICCI, 2012, p.3).

According to the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) in 2004-05, only about 26 million (about 6%) of the total workforce (459 million) is in the organized sector and about 433 million (about 94%) is engaged in unorganized sector in India. The World Economic Forum indicates that only 25% of the total Indian professionals are considered employable by the organized sector. The unorganized sector is not supported by any structured skill development and training system of acquiring or upgrading skills.

The skill formation takes place through informal channels such as family occupations, on-the-job training under master craftsmen with no linkages to formal education training and certification (FICCI, 2012, p.3).

#### **Importance of VET**

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is an important element of the nation's education initiative. For Vocational Education to play its part effectively in the changing national context, there is an urgent need to redefine the critical elements of imparting vocational education and training to make them flexible, contemporary, relevant, inclusive and creative. The Government is well aware of the important role of vocational education and has already taken a number of important initiatives in this area (Mujumdar, 2011). The Report of the Education Commission (Kothari, 1964-66) set a number of goals to be pursued; one of them was "to Vocationalise Secondary Education". Today the training provided in the VET institutions in India is not aligned to the demand for skills from the labour market. Evidence for this mismatch exists in the skill shortages for different sectors of the economy on the one hand, and the high unemployment level of VET graduates on the other. 'Survey on emerging skill shortages in the Indian Industry (2007)' conducted by FICCI shows that significant skill gaps exist in key sectors where one of them is education (FICCI, 2007, p.3-12). The major weakness of the present education system is the "dysfunctional linkage between education and the world of work" (CRRID, 1985). The introduction of Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) as third dimension with a hope "to occupy the central place in the school curriculum" (CRRID, 1985) has been reduced to a ritual and teachers were unable to tune themselves with the original conceptual basis of the SUPW. Basic education is regarded by urban middle class parents as suitable for the rural children and not for their children. Thus, even with the government efforts to strengthen vocational education the country has huge shortage of skilled people and this is hampering the growth of service and manufacturing sectors (Gore, 1995).

When India is referred to as a 'Young Nation' with 28 million populations of youth being added every year, only about 2.5 million vocational training seats are available in the country whereas about 12.8 million persons enter the labour market every year. About 90

percent of employment opportunities require vocational skills, something that is not being imparted on a large scale in schools and colleges. The major reforms proposed for bringing about necessary 'flexibility' in the vocational courses offered and development of 'modular competency based curricula' in collaboration with industry to suit the needs of both target groups and the employers (industry) will be useful in reducing the shortage of skilled human resources. It would be beneficial if large number of secondary school children, who have the inclination for vocational education but are compelled to join formal secondary schooling, to be channelized into vocational education. This would lead to a system of education which is more meaningful and relevant in the local context. Gradually the ambit would be expanded to address the needs and aspirations of those engaged in traditional means of livelihoods too. The contribution of such educated youth would boost the state of the Indian economy through the thrust of the Government on universalisation of secondary education, skill development and social justice through inclusive education and training.

#### **Incorporating VET within Mainstream by the University (NKC, 2008)**

Universities can increase the flexibility of VET within the mainstream education system through the following steps:

- Aspects of general education (such as numeracy skills, etc.) should be retained in VET as far as possible, to enable students return to mainstream education at a later stage.
- Courses in training institutes/polytechnics should have distinct tracks for students of different educational attainments.
- Entry requirements for certain trades should reflect the requirement of the trade (as appropriate, for instance the entry requirement of Class X could be relaxed to Class VIII in some cases).
- Students should be permitted multiple entry and exit options in the vocational education stream.
- Links should be established between the vocational education stream and school education as well as higher education.
- Courses devoted to certain skills training at the primary and secondary level should be introduced in all schools/colleges
- Vocational training should be made available in various literacy and adult education schemes.
- Schemes for lifelong skill up-gradation, through short training programmes, should be introduced.
- There should be a provision for generating a cadre of multi-skilled persons.

**The Basics of Vocational Education Training**

- Vocational training in India is provided on a full time as well as part time basis.
- India is a pioneer in vocational training in Film & Television, and Information Technology.
- Often the curriculum for the courses is prepared after taking suggestions from the local employers.
- These type of courses are mostly certificate or diploma courses.
- Vocational education training institutes impart graduation and post graduation courses to students.
- The best part of these institutes is that even working people can join the course, and even select the timings as per their convenience and nature of job.
- Financial aid is also often provided to students who are economically weak.
- According to the National Skills Development Commission (NSDC) report, India will need 83 million skilled workers across different industry verticals by 2015. Unfortunately with our current training capacity India will produce only 3 million.
- In India, vocational education is imparted through Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and polytechnics.
- The skill shortage in the Indian economy today is largely due to neglect of vocational education.

**Major Challenges and Issues in VET**

The following are considered as major Challenges and Issues in VET:

- Low priority for Vocational Education.
- Shortage of trained teachers and trainers.
- Inadequate linkages with Industries.
- Absence of a National Competency Testing and Accreditation system.
- Lack of infrastructure - building, modern equipment and raw materials.
- Inadequate or non-coverage of trades in service sector which has higher employment potential.
- Lack of equivalence for employment purposes.
- Lack of vertical mobility.
- Inflexible curriculum.
- Lack of convergence between various agencies.
- Lack of overall social recognition.

**Problematic Areas in present Vocational Education and Training System**

Based on the prevalence of Vocational Education System in India the following problem areas have been identified:

1. There is a high dropout rate at Secondary level. There are 220 million children who go to school in India. Of these only around 20% students reach higher education . A large part of the 18-24 years age group in India has never been able to reach Colleges/Universities. Comparing India to countries with similar income levels - India does not under perform in primary education but has a comparative deficit in secondary education.
2. Vocational Education is presently offered at Grade 11th and 12th - however students reaching this Grade aspire for higher education. Since the present system does not allow vertical mobility, skills obtained are lost. Enrolment in 11th & 12th Grade of vocational education is only 3% of students at upper secondary level. About 6800 schools enroll 400,000 students in vocational education schemes utilizing only 40% of the available student capacity in these schools.
3. International experience suggests that what employers mostly want are young workers with strong basic academic skills and not just vocational skills. The present system does not emphasize general academic skills. The relative wages of workers with secondary education are increasing.
4. Private and Industry Participation is lacking. There are no incentives for private players to enter the field of vocational education.
5. Present regulations are very rigid. In-Service Training is required but not prevalent today. There is no opportunity for continuous skill up-gradation.
6. There is a lack of experienced and qualified teachers to train students on vocational skills. In foreign countries, Bachelors of Vocational Education (BVE) is often a mandatory qualification for teachers. However, in India no specific qualifications are being imparted for Vocational Education Teachers.
7. Vocationalization at all levels has not been successful. Poor quality of training is not in line with industry needs.
8. There is no definite path for vocational students to move from one level / sector to another level / sector. Mobility is not defined and hence students do not have a clear path in vocational education.
9. No clear policy or system of vocational education leading to certification / degrees presently available for the unorganized / informal sector. No Credit System has been formulated for the same. Over 90% of employment in India is in the Informal sector. JSS offers 255 types of vocational courses to 1.5 million people, Community Polytechnics train about 450,000 people within communities annually and NIOS offers 85 courses through 700 providers. None of these programs have been rigorously evaluated, till date.
10. Expansion of vocational sector is happening without considering the present problems.

**Government Initiatives:****National Vocational Education Qualification Framework (NVEQF):**

To stimulate and support reforms in skills development and to facilitate nationally standardized and acceptable, international comparability of qualifications, a “National Vocational Qualifications Framework” is being established by the Central Government. Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) has resolved to set up an inter-ministerial group which would also include representatives of State Governments to develop guidelines for such a National Framework. The unified system of national qualification would cover schools, vocational education and training institutions and higher education sector. NVEQF is based on nationally recognized occupational standards which details listing of all major activities that a worker must perform in the occupation or competency standards - a detailed listing of the knowledge, skills and attitude that a worker should possess to perform a task written by the particular employment-led sector skills council.

**Recommendations regarding Vocational Education**

The following Unique recommendations are put forth for Vocational Education:

1. A National level Board for vocational education should be established, called as National Board for Vocational Education.
2. A National Vocational Policy should be formulated. The policy should establish equivalence for degrees, diplomas and certifications in the vocational education sector for lateral and vertical mobility across various learning sectors that is, secondary, vocational and higher education.
3. National Vocational Assessment & Accreditation Council should be established to formulate a regulatory and quality/standards framework.
4. Secondary School Leaving Certificate(SSLC-Vocational) or its equivalent 10th grade certification in vocational stream should be created on similar lines as HSC (Vocational) at both National and State level. Vocational Stream should be introduced at 8th Grade through Bivalent Schools which may provide both conventional and vocational stream of education at secondary level. Statistics reveal that employers prefer students with some general education skills in addition to vocational skills. Thus, in all schemes related to SSC (Vocational) general education courses should be emphasized. .e.g. Problem Solving, English, Soft Skills, Business Management etc.
5. To ensure vertical mobility, ITIs, MSBVs, Community Colleges and other State Vocational Education Institutions may be granted recognition and accreditation from the respective State Board for Vocational Education to award Secondary School Leaving Certificate(SSLC-Vocational) certification. Vocational Education Providers, Community Colleges, JSS, CP's, Vocational Junior Colleges may also be allowed to award Diplomas and Associate Degrees in addition to Higher Secondary



Certificate (HSC-Vocational) certification. Students from Vocational Institutions can be given opportunity for lateral mobility into conventional stream by providing bridge (preparatory) courses.

6. Private Participation from Industry and other players must be encouraged and is critical for the success of the vocational education growth in India. Industry participation must be at all levels especially in Governance, Curriculum Designing, Placements, Funding, and Monitoring Outcome.
7. Industry participation shall be sought on the Board of Management. Industry representatives will be involved in governance and curriculum design. Production oriented Research and Innovation Labs will be setup in collaboration with Industry to promote regional economic growth. Industry collaboration shall be sought for funding, placements and apprenticeship for students. Department of In-Service Training shall be setup to encourage industry to send employees for regular skill development and up-gradation (this will also gain additional income for teachers).
8. Teachers training will be given special emphasis by the University. The Vocational University will setup a separate department for Teachers Training and Development in order to build teaching resources and research component. Continuous teacher training programs shall be emphasized by the University Management. A separate degree called Bachelor in Vocational Education (B.V.Ed.) or Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) with specialization in vocational education is proposed to be introduced. This would be a mandatory requirement for hiring teachers for vocational education and training.

#### **Benefits of Vocational Training**

- Enhances skills and knowledge - vocational education provides job specific skills and contributes to career success. It imparts specialized knowledge, which is the need of the hour today.
- Promotes entrepreneurship - In certain cases, the completion of this sort of course provides the learner with a license to allow them to start working immediately. The individual is also equipped enough to start his/her own business.
- Offers a wide range of options - It prepares the youth for a vocation of their own choice and interest by providing a diverse range of subjects.
- Builds up a formidable work-force of international quality, which would be in demand not only in India but also in all other countries. In India, only IT training is world class. In the manufacturing and service sector, there is worldwide shortage.
- Demand for skilled persons - A recent study by global HR consultancy Manpower Inc says that 41 per cent of employers worldwide are having difficulty filling positions due to lack of suitable talent in their markets. We need millions of trained people

in agriculture, floriculture, horticulture, sericulture, fishery, healthcare, tourism and in other manufacturing sectors.

- Easy employment - It is often seen that employers prefer to hire a student who has done a vocational course rather than a college pass out, as by doing a vocational course, a student is trained specifically for a particular job. Thus, the student gets a job faster, is able to support and provide for his/her family and self, becoming a responsible citizen of the society instead of an unproductive burden.
- A way to earn early - With the changing face of technology, the world requires an individual to be specialized in a particular skill. Only a person who is expert in a particular field can get a good job. Vocational education training helps them to become independent at a particular age. After completing a vocational course, the student already possesses the right temperament, skills, qualities and education for the job.
- Helps to develop the economy - Vocational Training provides an instrument for the promotion of worker employability through the enhancement of human capital and for productivity improvement and competitiveness at the level of the firm or nation. Human resources shortages can cripple economic growth. It can escalate wage rates, thereby reducing the competitiveness of the country.
- Reduces unemployment by supplying world-class skilled people. Vocational courses increase the number of small businesses, which further increase employment, thus reducing the stress on the government to provide jobs for the unemployed.
- Serves as an alternative to those who cannot afford to take a three-year break to pursue a college degree. The time duration for a vocational course is less and the skills which are imparted to the students are highly adequate.
- Lesser education costs - It is the most effective way to gain the right career resources in exchange of minimum amount which costs much less than the regular forms of learning in colleges.
- Flexible form of learning - They are often provided by various community colleges with proper learning infrastructure. Some organizations also use online education system to help students learn at their own convenience. It is suitable for working people also as they can select the timings as per their convenience and nature of job. The vocational institutes allow the students to study online and attend either evening or morning classes.
- Financial aids are also readily available from various public and private sectors for these types of courses. Government funding is also offered to students of vocational training in certain countries.
- Contributes to national development - Enhancing the employability of a student is extremely important since it will, not only help in youth empowerment, but also contributes to national development.

- More practical-oriented - Vocational courses offer the students not just classroom learning but also hands-on practical training in various aspects like customer relationship, people management, personality development etc., are in top demand now.
- Offers a wide range of job opportunities - Retail, Hospitality & BFSI are the fastest growing sectors and would need 20 million skilled candidates by 2015. Specialized sectors like Auto and Hair & Beauty are projected to need 5 million resources while the Construction sector alone will require over 15 million skilled workers.

### **Conclusion**

Vocational Training and Education (VET) is a sure way to add a new dimension to the career for a successful future. These courses enhance the employability of a student and are vital as they not only help in youth empowerment, but also contribute to national development. Today, it has become important for employees in every sector. Vocational courses must be seen as a necessary addition to the regular school or graduate education, since the college education will only provide knowledge enhancement while the vocational courses gives training to get a job and start a successful career. Vocational courses can also be incorporated in regular college environment, wherein the students will have easier access to the skills, training and can complete the course easily along with his/her graduation. Vocational education is also as good as college education. Vocational training can be considered as a launch pad for a career that can lead to participants becoming masters in their field. Vocational training is a must and should be compulsory as it provides the learner with practical knowledge of the theoretical concepts learned in school. Vocational training should be considered as a stepping stone to success. This type of knowledge is surely going to be an enabler to help India shine in the future years.

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