

Acceptability of Vocational Education Programmes

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Abstract

The Vocational Education Programmes have started in India long ago. However, they have not been picked up for several reasons which can be categorized mainly into two. One is, the problem of the acceptability of the society, and the second is inherent problems in the design and offering of Vocational Education Programmes. There are still several issues that the society is not ready to accept the Vocational Education as a mainstream education for children or for themselves as has already been established in other parts of the world. We still feel that the Vocational training is meant for people who are otherwise academically weak and belong to socially and economically backward sections of the society. A Major portion of the population do not naturally allow their children to directly venture into vocational education. On the other hand, the education system of the country has not allowed the learners to feel and experiment with the vocational and training, thereby, they are not exposed to this part of the educational stream till the time they have already completed their schooling or university education. The developed countries have already established system of vocational training where the learners are given rich experience in the vocational field in the early age and given counseling and permission to pick up the Vocational Education streams over the Academic streams to choose their careers right during their schooling. It seems that our country has taken up the Vocational Education half heartily and thereby if we tend to name a subject, a Vocational course, if we have included the major portion of practical orientation in them. We may also try to organize good exposure to the learners in laboratories and workshops, however, the major requirement of a vocational course of having a direct connect with the world of work is often missing, which can provide the learners on the Job Training or apprenticeship. This problem is also seen in the development of courses and curriculum which are traditionally developed and the requirement of the market is not considered in their formation and offering. Most of the time the Vocational Courses are also offered on the similar pattern of Academic Programmes and, thus, they are not

able to provide the right kind of training and exposure to the learner, which can help them in acquiring necessary skills of the trade and getting the right kind of placement. Many a times the formative evaluation portion is also not included in the scheme of studies. The other major problem is that the benefits given by the market to the trained or untrained skill people do not have any major differences and, thus, this situation does not attract many people towards training. This paper discusses these issues in detail and try to suggest a design of Vocational Courses which can be more effective for developing and offering vocational education programmes.

Key words: vocational, training, market, industry, service sector, on-the-job training, apprenticeship, work

Backdrop

The Vocational Education is not new in India. As a country, we had been able to offer several experiments in this field. There had been focus in this area in one way or the other from the Government and from Academic institution. We have a National institute to device policies and development programmes in this field in the name of Pandit Sundarlal Sharma Central Institute of Vocational Education (PSSCIV), we have Directorates of Technical Education in all States of India, and now we have a full-fledged Ministry of Skill Training and Entrepreneurship. The Government is giving special emphasis on skilling of India with Prime Minister himself giving the slogan of *Skill India*. There had been several National and International discussions, forums, and documentations to discuss this issue. Some of these are Policy on Education (NPE) (1986, 92)ⁱ, National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (2005)ⁱⁱ, Learning: The Treasure Within (1999)ⁱⁱⁱ, the Second International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (1999)^{iv}, the Secondary Education Reform: Towards a Convergence of Knowledge Acquisition and Skills Development (2005) by UNESCO. It is anticipated that the world will have a scarcity of skilled people for various jobs and India is well positioned to fill that gainfully gap. However, when it comes to looking for a plumber or electrician or for such some petty jobs, we are not able to find a good person and if we can find a good person it come with very high cost. Where does the problem lie?

It seems that we have the problem of acceptability of vocational courses at two levels:

1. At the level of the society
2. At the level of offering of programmes

Let us discuss in the above order.

Problem of acceptance of vocational education by the society

When it comes to providing vocational education, generally parent does not feel comfortable in sending his/her child for a vocational programme^v. They always prefer that the child should take academic education, excel in that and take up white collar professions. Blue colour is not looked at by the society as a first choice. We see that the children are not able to cope up with the stress of higher academic education, they fail, and they even leave their programmes in between, which however, do not change our minds set.

In contrast, we see that the other part of the world, and which is a developed world, has been able to recognize the importance of vocational training centuries ago and can build their nation on a strong base of skilled people and provide necessary products and services on that basis and in turn earn huge strength. In those countries, they had devised a kind of educational system where the learners are exposed to academic and vocational training simultaneously. They are given the opportunity and guidance to check their aptitude, and choose their preferred path of learning. They were providing counseling for selecting suitable stream for them and accordingly, they are, right at the level of middle schooling or secondary schooling streamed either to be in the academic education or take up a profession for them and acquire skill and experience in that area. Be it Germany, Finland, Netherlands, their economy and their prosperity heavily depend on the kind of educational experience they have made available to their children from an early age. Definitely, there is a learning field available for us.

Problem in the offering of programmes

In India, for various reasons the vocational education has not been able to make available the way it should have been. Can putting more emphasis or more weightage on practical aspects of the courses make it a course, a vocational education programme? There is a concept of vocationalization of education where some practical experience is provided to the learners and that ends the responsibility of the offering institutions in providing vocational education.

Age old courses

It has also been seen that the courses offered by various institutions do not change at an appropriate interval. Although the Microsoft has been able to introduce its 2010 version and would be seriously working on the next generation of their software, we may still be teaching at best Windows 2007. This holds goods for many courses being made available by various institutions. It is never thought that the learner should be given an experience of vocational education which is required in the market so that they are not lost when they go for employment with the certificate they have in their hand.

Standard of learning

The setting up of standards in terms of National Occupation Standards (NOS) and Qualification Packs (QPs) is rather a new initiate by the Government of India under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. There are Sector Skill Councils which are vigorously working

to develop curriculum and courses and set up service providers so that the right kind of experience and exposure is made available to the learners opting for skill training. However, in many areas these standards are not taken very seriously. The courses are offered without any plan, sometimes even without any curriculum or course material which leaves to a set of passing out learners without having appropriate skills in the field. I have experience of interviewing several candidates having very higher degrees in the field for the position of a software developer, however, I have not found a suitable candidate for several years who can actually develop programs.

Control by the Government

Most of the time the Vocational Education is controlled by the Government, which means that the curriculum, the courses, the practical experience etc. are provided by the Government. This is true to the examination also. In contrast, if we see in several countries^{vi} this is being controlled by the Chamber of Commerce. A definite advantage can be seen in this difference. More than the Government, it is pertinent of the Chamber of Commerce to see the requirement of people in each trade/service. Further, they are the people who decides as to what kind of skills are required for a particular trade. This means that there is a direct understanding of the requirement of a vocational course by the Chamber of Commerce as compared to the Government. The examination and certification are also being done by the Chamber of Commerce, which again means that they can put up the kind of standards in certification which leads to a responsible and just certification. There lies the importance of giving a proper exposure to the learners in terms of giving them the opportunity to work in the field of their trade to have direct experience of their skills which in many cases found missing in several of Indian vocational areas. Therefore, it needs to be considered seriously as to where we need to take our vocational education.

The NIOS experience

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is offering Vocational Education Programmes for the last nineteen years. It has 101 courses in different areas which are: Computer and IT, beauty and Wellness, Engineering and Technology, Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, Business and Commerce, Ayurveda and Yoga.^{vii}

NIOS has also confronted time and again with the problem of acceptability of its programmes. The trainers who pass several of NIOS courses are not registered for Government jobs in the Employment Exchanges, or as practitioners for para-medical courses. There is problem of accessibility of programmes offered through open and distance learning mode, which is more so with vocational training. NIOS receives several complaints, including court cases in this regard. A quick survey of NIOS Vocational Programmes reveals that these are no more than academic programmes except that there is more weightage or an emphasis on practical component of the courses. There is no way to ensure that the skill training is happening on a continuing basis and training on the job is almost missing.

Suggested Model of a Vocational Training Programme

Under the above circumstances, the following structure of a programme may make a difference which may include:

1. Less emphasis on theory
2. Development of portfolio, ensuring everyday skill learning, and its recording
3. Learning of theory at home
4. Continuous experience of practical work
5. On the job training
6. Acquiring soft skills

None of the above is anything new in the field of vocational education, however, there is a need to emphasize on them and give them a proper weightage and appropriate place during learning.

The NIOS is a Distance Learning Institution. The question would be how a vocational training can happen through distance. However, the NIOS do not propose to train the learners with any skills through distance. It only suggests that the theory component of the programme may be learned on their own with their own place with specially designed self-learning material. It is proposed that the emphasis on theory in terms of learning and examination may not go beyond 20 per cent.

The practical experience should be arranged in a way that it conforms to the requirement of modern industries and services. Workshops may be arranged at the Training Centres so that the trainers can feel as if they are working in the actual industries or service. This experience will help them adapt to the actual word of the work. It is suggested that there may be about 30 per cent of weightage for practical training and examination.

There is a need that the learning takes every day. The trainer shall maintain a daily diary where they record their everyday learning and make a portfolio based on major learning during their programmes. This not only gives a window to the trainees to see how their trainings are progressing, it also provides a sense of achievement to the learner to see how much they have learned and progress. 20 per cent weightage in terms of learning and examination may be suitable for this component.

No one can deny the importance of on the job training in a vocational training programme. It serves several purposes. The trainers are immediately able to relate their learning to the actual workplace. Whatever gaps have been found in the training can be fulfilled by work situation and that training can be gainfully complemented by this experience. Further, the learners can actually see what is expected from them in the world of work. There are several skills required in the field of work which can be observed and adopted. In several cases, trainers also get some type of satisfaction by producing at the workplace which make them happy about their learning. The best part of on the job training is that it gives opportunity for the employer and the employees to continue their relation as employer and employee if both are satisfied with each other. If the trainers can get stipend during on the job training, then they are actually able to feel the difference in learning and

working having real money in their pocket. Weightage of 20 per cent may be useful for this purpose for learning and examination.

The soft skills are necessary for learning the tricks of the trade by way of acquiring a command over language and communication, attitudes and other related skills, the learners become more employable and can see the benefit of the training without much delay. Weightage of 10 per cent may be useful for this purpose for learning and examination.

This information has been presented in the following table for easy reference:

<i>Item</i>	<i>Weightage in %</i>
1. Theory	20
2. Development of portfolio	20
3. Practical work	30
4. On the job training	20
5. Soft skills	10
Total	100

Table: Weightage to different components of education training program

There may be a requirement of acceptability or recognition of programmes by the Government or such agency which is authorized to accredited programmes, however, in this scenario prescribed above where it is possible to connect the trainee and the industry or service sector, it is possible that the acceptability follows such kind of training. After all, there are many good products which do not require endorsement from the Government.

ⁱ National Policy on Education 1986 – with Modifications undertaken in 1992 and its programmes of Action (1992), Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education, New Delhi

ⁱⁱ National Curriculum Framework (2005), NCERT, New Delhi

ⁱⁱⁱ Learning: The Treasure within, 1999 – Report of UNESCO’s International Commission on Education for the 21st Century

^{iv} The Second International Congress on TVET, 1999

^v Vocational Education and Training, Initiative through Open and Distance Learning, 2008, National Institute of Open Schooling, NOIDA

^{vi} <http://www.howtogermany.com/pages/germanschools.html>

^{vii} http://www.nios.ac.in/media/documents/prospectus/AcadProspectus_2016_17.pdf