Vocational Education and Training System (VET) in India

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Introduction

The Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is one of the formal institutional frameworks established in India for development of skilled man power. The Government of India has also perceived that VET offers various possibilities for intervention on the supply side of the labour market (Thakur, 1979, p. 343). However, the current system is not fully equipped to respond to the requirement of labour market (Beddie, 2009; World Bank, 2008). The issues related to current work force, its engagement and the level of unemployment in different sectors in the economy created the problems and potentials for managing the work force in the country (Bino et al., 2008; Srivastava, 2008; Government of India 2010a; Government of India, 2010b). Given the population growth rate, there is also still a large workforce engaged in the unorganized sector[1] with a lower level of literacy or required skills needed for any professional engagement (Government of India, 2010c). However, gradual changes in schools and also in higher education, show good signs of achievement, especially with a gradual decline in school dropouts (31% in 2001 to 3% in 2008 in the age group 6–14 years) (Dutt, 2010, p. 6). No doubt, such achievements will lead to better literacy level among young population. Nevertheless, the critical issue however is, at which level and to what extent such young population will be provided with skilled training and, subsequently, gainfully employed.

[1] The term 'workforce in unorganized sector' is referred to those who are not able to organize themselves in pursuit of their common interest due to casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy etc. (see Government of India, 2010f, p. 77).

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Moreover, the National Council on Skill Development has also endorsed a vision to educate about 500 million people before 2022 through various vocational and other skill development mechanisms of different Ministries both at the National and the State levels. At present, however, only about 2% of the workforce has had any kind of such skill training as defined by the National Council on Skill Development (Government of India, 2010b, p. 1).

This paper attempts to analyze the current developments in the VET system in India and the strategies to be followed for further improvement of the system.

Vocational Education at Schools

In India, VET is carried out at two levels which are handled separately. At the school level, vocational schools are regulated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. The students of 11th and 12th grade undertake vocational education at schools. At higher educational levels, the Vocational Training Institutes (VTIs) conduct trainings, run through government sponsorships by Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and by private institutions through Industrial Training Centres (ITC). Thus vocational trainings are offered through two separate institutes namely Industrial Training Institute (ITI) and Industrial Training Centre (ITC) which are regulated by the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Many educational reforms have been introduced since Indian independence in 1947, based on recommendations of different committees appointed by the Government of India. At the time of independence, the University Grants Commission, headed by the former President of India, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, remarked vocational education as 'less exacting preparation of students who could not be trained for any professionalism' (National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2007). The Commission also felt that though many students could not achieve higher level of education, it is essential that these students should also be provided with job oriented skilled training. Later, Kothari Commission (1964–1966) (Debroy, 2009) had the view that by providing vocational education to children at schools, more job competencies could be created. The Commission also had the view that 25% of secondary school students could be diverted to vocational stream. Later, during 1976–1977, under the program of 'vocationalization of higher secondary education in schools', a formal Vocational Education Program (VEP) was launched. Subsequently, Kulandaiswamy Committee (1985) made further reinforcement in the educational system. This Committee after reviewing VEP had suggested promoting a centrally sponsored scheme under Ministry of Human

Resource Development. The National Policy on Education (1986) which, followed by an Amendment in 1992, also further emphasized the importance of vocational education at school levels. The decision was to take vocational education as a distinct stream and to consider it as a centrally sponsored scheme. Based on the needs, the central government also came forward to provide financial assistance to individual federal states for setting up administrative structure, area, vocational surveys, preparation of curriculum etc. (Government of India, 2010d, p. 81) in order to encourage vocational education at school levels.

Growth of Vocational Schools and the Missing Links

Not much takers are there despite such developments in vocational education system at the school level. Unfortunately, the progress in establishment of vocational schools and subsequent enrolment is rather slow. Currently there are only 9,619 vocational schools against 6,156 schools in the beginning of this century (Government of India, 2010e) compared to 171,862 secondary schools. The current enrolment of school children in these vocational schools is only about one million against 16 million children who managed to enrol at higher secondary level. Few critical remarks were however made in various case studies in the functioning of such vocational schools in the country. The major limitations seen in the system are that the academic stream (general education) seems to promise a higher employability than the vocational stream. In many countries, including India, the vocational schools create a sense of second-class citizenship (Foster, 1965, pp. 142–66; Blaug, 1973).

Slow achievements in the country are also attributed to many other social and economic factors. Negative attitudes to manual work (blue-collar jobs), perception of the 'vocational education system only for the poor' and also for 'educationally backward' (poor performers) are few other added reasons for slow achievements. Besides, there is also slowing down of growth in agricultural and industrial sector in the country as against relatively high growth in the service sector[2]. These growth imbalances, among the three major sectors, have also created less demand for trades related to agriculture and industry sectors. This often put pressures in modifying the trade courses to students with time lag. From an economic point of view, provision of vocational education is construed costlier than general education (Thakur, 1979, pp. 343–56). With regard to financial support from the central government, the

[2] Among the different sectors in the economy, the rate of growth of major sectors during 2008–2009 at factor cost (2004–2005 prices) were: Agriculture 1.6%, Manufacturing 3.2%, Transport and other services 11.6% (see Government of India, 2010b, p. 3)

extent of public expenditure on education was less than 14% (2008–2009) and the expenditure on education to GDP was only 3.78% during the above period. About 52% of such expenditure on education was incurred for provision of elementary education and about 29% for secondary education including vocational education. From these low spending, the allotment to vocational education is still rather very low (Debroy, 2009). This could also jeopardize the enrolment in vocational schools leading to poor capacity utilization of the already existing infrastructure.

Thus, contrary to the overall perception of the government to divert about 25% to vocational stream, in terms of overall enrolment, beginning from school class I, hardly one per cent of the students enrolled had entered into vocational stream at schools (World Bank, 2008). Nevertheless, because of inherently logical and simplistic appeal, vocationalism will be for years to come and more countries will attempt to tune their formal education system to world of work (Psacharopoulos, 1987, pp. 187–211).

Vocational Training in a Formal Way

ITIs and ITCs provide vocational training under the centrally administered Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS). These institutes however develop the manpower as semi-skilled workers. After successful completion under the CTS, the graduates could become skilled worker through Apprenticeship Training Scheme (ATS).

CTS was first initiated by Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGE&T) under Ministry of Labour and Employment in 1950, by establishing 50 ITIs. Later during 1980's several private ITIs were established. During the year 1987, there were only 1887 institutes. It was during this period that the private training institutes were distinguished from government training institutes by renaming them as 'Industrial Training Centers' (ITCs). Since during last two decades, the growth of ITIs had been faster and at the end of the year, 2009 there were 7,605 ITIs/ITCs (2,076 in government and 5,529 in private sector) with a seating capacity of 1.063 million. Currently (April 2010), there are 8,039 (2,133 government owned and 5,906 private) ITIs/ITCs with a seating capacity of 1.11 million.

Added to this, the National Apprenticeship Scheme was launched initially on voluntary basis during 1959. Later an Apprentices Act 1961 was passed and came into force on 1 March 1962. In the beginning, this Act envisaged training of only trade apprentices. In 1973, through an Amendment in the Act, the training of graduates and diploma holders in Engineering and Technology as 'Graduate and Technician Apprentices' was introduced. The Apprentices Act was further amended

Table 1 Seating capacity and utilization in skill development (Source: Government of India (2010e); NSDC (n. d., p. 21))

Skill Training	Seating capacity	Utilized	Utilization (%)
ITI/ITC	1,115,628	954,000	85.51
Trade Apprentices	278,123	195,703	70.36
Graduate	30,737	24,414	79.43
Technician	40,802	22,591	55.37
Technician (Vocational)	25,130	10,986	43.72
Total	1,490,420	1,207,694	81.03

in 1986, so as to train students passing out of the (10+2) vocational stream as Technician (Vocational) Apprentices.

Thus Apprenticeship Training Scheme (ATS) in the country comprises of (a) Trade Apprenticeship Training (b) Graduate (c) Technician and (d) Technician (Vocational). Among these training schemes, especially under Trade Apprenticeship Training, 188 trades in 35 trade groups have been designated. In other schemes namely Graduate, Technical and Technician (Vocational) Scheme, 122 subject fields have been designated.

The issues related to functioning of these formal training institutions at higher level also need critical analysis. Though major interventions are made to strengthen the institutions, especially the public funded institutes, these measures are still inadequate in terms of meeting the overall vision of creating a huge skilled manpower in the country. The seating capacity and the percentage of utilization of such capacities are shown in the Table 1.

The means of providing semi-skilled and skilled training through various institutes, their seating capacity and the percentage of utilization will clearly indicate that there is still under utilization of the facilities already created and existing. There is a need to improve the utilization level and also to create adequate demand. It is also clear that with the existing capacity of training of about 1.4 million, there is a long way to go to meet the target.

Skill Development in an Informal Way

Unfortunately majority of the work force is primarily engaged in the informal or unorganized sector while speaking of developing skilled manpower in the coun-

try. This sector is employing about 420 million out of the total workforce of 450 million. Such unskilled employees in the country are properly registered, but not adequately protected from major social security benefits. This situation not only indicates the seriousness of the issue but also the need for skilled development even in the informal sector. The problems of providing skill to such workforce are multidimensional. To cater the needs of developing the skills among the unorganized, many initiatives are taken by the various ministries of the government. Special programs like Modular Employability Skill training (MES), National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), encouraging new training organizations like Voluntary Training Providers (VTP) to train the unskilled manpower etc. However, these measures could impact or cater to small number of workforce considering the huge workforce under the informal sector. Besides, there is a need to evolve more research agenda and also to evaluate such types of initiatives taken elsewhere. Such efforts will also help in focusing the unorganized sector in a more effective way. Meanwhile, the gradual means of providing skills to the upcoming young work force will no doubt reduce the huge burden of imparting skills to such unorganized sectors and in long term will convert every area into organized sector.

The Needed Strategy

Given the institutional framework for VET in India, the question immediately arises now is what strategies or changes need to be followed? To realize the need to merge the vocational schools and training institutes, the Ministry of Human Resource Development and Ministry of Labour and Employment need to work together. Besides, International organizations like UNESCO and World Bank recommended provision of vocational education should be made an integral part of general education. Such blending might help in preparing the students for job orientation, acts as an instrument to reduce the mismatch between education and employment and also remove the low recognition in the society at large. Countries like Germany, Switzerland, USA, New Zealand, Thailand, Indonesia and Japan have years of experiences in fine tuning the VET system and thus have become industrially strong. One of the major reasons for the success in those countries is mainly due to the integration and blending of curriculum with the industrial and trade requirements. The societal partners also play a major role in promoting the VET system in these countries, though the level of participation and their commitment varies from country to country. India has to formulate its own policy agenda and strategies to meet the skill development among its population. Some of the areas the policy makers have

to bestow attention for developing skilled man power in the country are through encouraging and popularizing vocational education among young people with adequate support to provide gainful employment, promoting strong mutual benefits between societal partners and training providers, more support from government in establishing full fledged and well equipped training institutes and capacity building for the vocational stream trainers to update knowledge based on the trends in trade and industrial developments.

Conclusion

India is recognized as one of the oldest and largest education systems in the world. Although the country had inherited a philosophy arisen out of the Upanishad[3] it is, even now experiencing a large diversity in educational structure coupled with problems of low literacy levels. Developing skilled man power is one of the long-term agenda for the country. Such an ambitious programme to be realized needs interventions at various levels. Though at National level university education is given more priority, vocational education and skill development need to be addressed more seriously considering the vast number of young work force added to the population every year. The country need to tap such human resource to supply the quality and skilled man power not only to its own economy but also for abroad.

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[3] Upanishads deal with fundamental questions about existence, life, creation, death etc. (see Prasad, N. d.).

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