

Introduction: Why India's Focus on Preparation for the World of Work is Highly Relevant

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Labour and employment have a central significance in the social discourse of many countries (cf. e.g. OECD 2000). There, not only questions of structure and organisation of work are analysed, but besides income also aspects of personal satisfaction and social recognition play an important role among others (Rifkin 1995).

In this book, a special focus should be taken up: It deals uniquely with the preparation of youths and young adults for the 'world of work'. Here, this so-called construct 'world of work' should be understood comprehensively. It deals with the aspect of 'school to work transition' in the broadest sense (Raffe 2008; Stern and Wagner 1999; Ryan 2001; Müller and Shavit 1998). Besides realised income, aspects of socialisation, personal development, social participation and classification, the specific occupation, and the personal perception regarding satisfaction etc. need to be examined (Heinz 1999). In addition to the personal and societal side of 'school to work' transitions, attention needs to be paid to the structural and institutional conditions necessary for managing transitions between educational stages and different types of vocational education and training (Ecclestone and Kumpulainen 2012). Besides all forms of initial (technical) vocational education (Goel 2008), pre-vocational education (OECD 2002: 372) as well as the field of academic education, which prepares for the working life, consequently belongs like further education to this book's focus.

The aspect 'preparation' stated in the title should be understood in terms of the classic claim in educational science to enable the next generation through the transfer of knowledge and skills as well as experience to cope with the requirements of the world of work.

The answer to the question, why the discussion about the 'Preparation for the World of Work' is especially in India of enormous importance, is one side of the coin. The other side arises from the international context. Here, it needs to be asked why particularly India is a crucial country to be analysed regarding the topic.

Both perspectives are of multidimensional nature because some aspects or rather challenges are of exogenous origin, thus are located outside the education system and others relate to the education system itself. Without trying to realise a

completed discussion at this point, there are at least the following essential points to state:

- India is a huge country and its area is the seventh largest worldwide. With a population of more than one billion inhabitants and a number of persons employed of over 500 million people, it even ranks second. Despite the global economic crisis of the last years, the country reached an economic growth by an average of 8.5% p.a. in recent years and belongs to the fastest growing national economies worldwide (UNESCO 2011). Consequently, from an international perspective it is crucial, to deal in-depth with the developments in the context of the education and employment system in this globally important country.
- Furthermore, the country has a very young population. In 2021, about 66% of the population will be between 15 and 59 years old and thus at an employable age (World Bank 2013). With this, India has averagely one of the youngest populations worldwide. Due to high birth rates, this number will even increase over the next years. According to estimates, 70% of all Indians will be at an employable age by 2025. This can be an important advantage compared to other nations, but it assumes that the high number of young people actually also find employment. At the same time, it also confronts the country with huge challenges to qualify the potential workers appropriately in order to participate in the growth and to generate prosperity and satisfaction (Hajela 2012; Agrawal 2013). If the majority of this manpower will remain unused, this ‘demographic dividend’ could also change quickly into a ‘demographic disadvantage’ (Mehrotra 2014).
- At the same time, India faces a skill gap (Mehrotra 2014) because especially at the intermediate skill level (below academic track), and here in the blue collar sector, there is a huge demand due to the economic development on the Indian labour market. However, the available workers on the market only rarely have adequate qualifications for this part of the employment system. Thus, manifold mismatches emerge where, for example, on the one hand, the craft and manufacturing sector desperately looks for skilled workers and, on the other hand, young job starters cannot find adequate employment.
- From an international perspective as well as from an internal viewpoint, a dominant, special characteristic needs to be considered in India, too. India has a large informal sector that accounts for around 60% of the country’s economic output and employs more than 90% of all workers (World Bank 2008; ILO 2002). This economic and labour market is very

large by international standards, and no one can ignore it in terms of training and labour market policy (ILO 2002; King 2012). In the informal sector of the Indian economy, ‘skill acquisition’ takes place in many cases through non-formal or informal learning (cf. underneath). The National Sample Survey of India (2006) reveals that among persons of age 15-19 only about 2% reported to have received formal vocational training and another 8% reported to have received non-formal vocational training. For the employees in the informal sector, there is no certification of acquired skills which limits the transparency and mobility.

- It is surprising that despite the important role of the topic, there is a relatively low number of research findings existing. Particularly empirical research findings on vocational education are mostly only available in a fragmented and shattered way or rather focused on single, partial aspects. Consequently, there is a research desideratum which should at least be approached by bringing together the existing findings through this book.
- One reason for the rudimentary and shattered state of research is that there is no comprehensive research community in the context of TVET research in India so far. Important research institutions like, for example, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education (CEDEFOP) in Europe are missing as well as bigger, research-oriented, academic training courses. The absence of a research community cannot be healed by bringing together distinguished Indian researchers from different sub-disciplines. However, it could be a step towards an interlinking and thus a formation of a research community in the future. It is also necessary to revisit some current research priorities in India, which tend to concentrate more on the traditional supply-demand orientation (Majumdar 2011) rather than on creating reliable data and information on the type and purposes of different kinds of vocational education vis-à-vis employment, social equality, innovation, and opportunities for further education and qualifications.
- Finally, it strikes that there is in fact a large number of introductions and overviews dealing with the Indian education system. However, they are in many cases of shorter and more rudimentary nature, they only exist as reports, or they only have a low scientific substance. In addition, there are various books and articles in scientific journals which solely deal with single parts of the Indian education system. According to our knowledge, there is no comprehensive standard work about the entire Indian spectrum of learning and the preparation for the world of work so far.

Therefore, this volume aims to provide a comprehensive access to the topic from an educational science and vocational pedagogics view. This should offer Indian and international readers an overview in a problem-oriented, detailed and up-to-date way.

In light of the above outlined realities, the crucial question arises, how Indian youths get prepared for the world of work, or as Majumdar (2008: 2) states:

“The challenge therefore facing the country is how to train and equip this young population with ways and means of gaining productive and meaningful employment”.

For the elaboration of the topic ‘Preparation for the World of Work’ it was important to acquire well-known and distinguished Indian scholars with a long-standing experience in the elaboration of individual partial aspects.

The intention during the planning of this volume was to approach the topic ‘Preparation for the World of Work’ problem-oriented and not to focus only on structures of the education system. Although these structures largely serve for the introduction and outline of the articles (from primary, secondary, and higher education level up to vocational education), they are not dominant in the articles themselves. The primacy of the approach was the critical analysis and interpretation of the problem definition or rather of the topic.

It is self-explanatory that through this approach a profound basis for descriptive-oriented structures and data was set, because for readers with less prior knowledge the analysis and interpretation have to be complemented with a respective, descriptive background and basic information. These descriptive aspects, however, are not lexically introduced in the articles but they are rather embedded in the respective problem context so that they serve as a thread for the necessary introduction of descriptive parts.

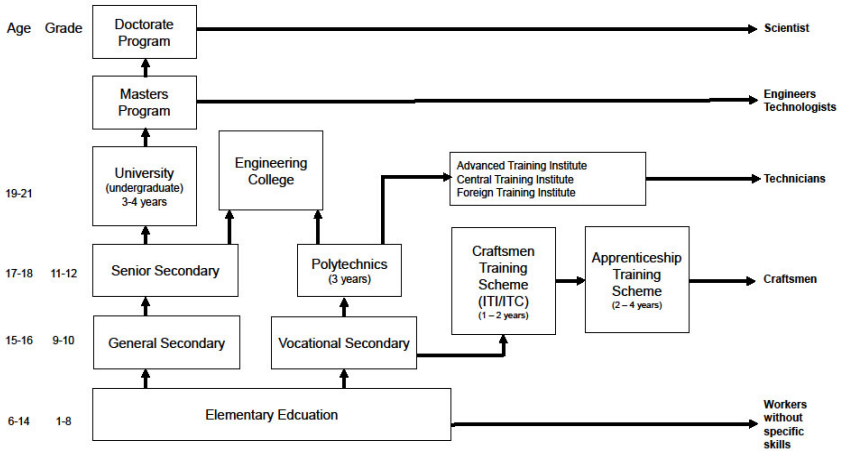


Figure 1: Indian Education System. Source: Own illustration (based on World Bank 2008)

For the reader who is less acquainted with the formal Indian education system, a first overview is provided at this point which is respectively focused and differentiated in the following chapters. Therefore, the subsequent overview deliberately includes solely the main paths through the system in order to offer basic information and to not block the view on the essentials.

As already explained, the form of the topics and the order of the articles are mainly oriented towards the structure of the educational institutions gone through by Indian children, then youths and finally young adults.

As already indicated above, there are, however, also other forms of learning which play a significant role. These were to be considered here in own paragraphs and chapters. For a definition, it was consequently reverted to a recognised construct by the UNESCO (2012: 9), which states:

“Formal learning takes place in education and training institutions, leading to recognised diplomas and qualifications. Non-formal learning takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training and does not typically lead to formalised certificates. Non-formal learning may be provided in the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations and groups (such as youth organisations, trades unions and political parties). It can also be provided through organisations or services that have been set up to complement formal systems (such as arts, music and sports classes or private tutoring to prepare for examinations). Informal learning is a natural accompaniment to everyday life. Unlike formal and non-formal learning, informal learning is not necessarily intentional

learning, and so may well not be recognised even by individuals themselves as contributing to their knowledge and skills.”

All authors received key questions in advance (cf. figure 2) which – depending on the topical focus – were to be considered when elaborating the articles with different emphasis and intensity in order to achieve a certain structure and coherence of the articles in a very diverse topic area and also to provide the reader with a central theme as orientation. These key questions have been formulated relatively open to integrate as many facets as possible. Moreover, these questions were supposed to offer the authors a first access to their topic from which the detailed analysis and the interpretation should follow subsequently.

As regards content, the key questions were derived accordingly to the topic ‘Preparation for the World of Work’ from the international discourse, particularly from the areas occupational orientation, transition research, curriculum research, skills development as well as acceptance and labour market research.

- What are the main aims to prepare persons for the world of work (official government and other key players)?
- What kind of institution is offering programs (on your level of the education system)?
- How is the funding and other financial aspects (budget) organised?
- Is there a special curriculum (or part) to prepare for the world of work and what are the details (separated subjects or embedded structure, how many teaching hours per year)?
- Who is responsible for the design and implementation of the curriculum on national, regional, and institutional level?
- Which part of the curriculum is compulsory or elective?
- Please describe the related content and give proper examples in detail.
- Is there a gap between the prescribed /written and the enacted curriculum (what are the reasons)?
- What kind of teaching and learning environments and methods are suggested and are in use?
- What kind of teachers (education, practical experience, etc.) is involved and what is their formal qualification to become a teacher?
- What kind of certificate can the students get?
- What is the expectation of pupils /students to join the classes?
- What are the advantages to join the classes (smoother transition, lower unemployment rate, improvement of general VET knowledge in the workforce, etc.) from the macro-economic perspective?

In addition, the cultural aspects and the understanding of society are of great interest:

- What are the value / status / reputation of this kind of content in comparison to general education contents in society (and parents)?
- What do the employers (organisations) articulate about the content (important, realistic, up to date, acceptance of certificates)?
- Is there any national or regional political strategy or initiative to force the preparation for the world of work in your sector of the education system?
- What will be the future of the preparation for the world of work?

Figure 2: Key questions for the authors

The chapters intend to show the interaction and to offer further opportunities for information. The final chapter written by the two editors tries to provide an overview of the topic as a whole. Thereby, relations between the parts are disclosed and conclusions are drawn.

I would like to warmly thank all authors for their high level of commitment to elaborate the topics and research meticulously. Without this admirable motivation it would not have been possible to accomplish such a sophisticated and relevant analysis on the topic ‘Preparation for the World of Work’.

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