



VOCATIONALIZATION OF SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND ISSUES

Dr. Priti Chaudhari

Assistant Professor in, Department of Education [CASE], Faculty of Education and Psychology, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara- 390002.

ABSTRACT

According to the Government of India (2010), India is making a distinction between work-centred education, which is known as 'vocalized education', and 'vocational education' at the upper-secondary level. Currently, there are no relationships between these two components. Work education is included in the primary standards (grades 1–8) to make the students aware of the concept of work. At the lower secondary level (grades 9–10) pre-vocational education does exist, and aims to increase students' familiarity with the world of work. The need to bring together vocational and academic education at the level of policy plans was recognized by the Indian government. On the one hand, it identified a need to reconstruct the entire school curriculum around a common core curriculum that will incorporate work-based pedagogy. A set of work-related generic competencies (basic, interpersonal and systemic) is planned to be addressed at all stages of education and be included in assessment. Among others, such generic competencies as 'critical thinking, transfer of learning, creativity, communication skills, aesthetics, work motivation, work ethics of collaboration, entrepreneurship and social accountability' are to be included.

The rapid transformation of societies in their social, political, economic, technological, and education spheres has changed perspectives on the need for and nature of vocational skills. A historical change of views on vocationalization from more educational to more functional (where the development of employability skills became the main focus) has broadened the nature of vocationalization and included separate technical courses under its umbrella. Within general secondary education there is a diverse pattern of provision of Technical and Vocational Education and Training. This includes at least two levels, lower secondary and upper secondary, and is delivered within two modes, as embedded learning and as separate course/programmes. Many versions of post-secondary and tertiary delivery are in place. The degree to which vocationalization occurs and its nature depends on the level of economic development and on cultural traditions. Social, economic and technology rationales are used by governments to decide on their particular vocationalization policy.

Introduction:

The process of 'vocationalization' of secondary education began in the 1970s with the aims of promoting the social inclusion of less privileged groups in education and training, narrowing educational gaps and avoiding social fragmentation (Lauglo, 2005). Vocational skills were viewed as a coherent part of the overall education system.

At that time, the vocationalization of secondary education referred to the process of including practical skills in the educational process. Vocationalization is designed to prepare students for the world of work better than does just 'academic' education. Traditionally it was interpreted as not being oriented towards a specific class of occupations or trades, and it does not lead to a qualification that is relevant to the labour market (Lauglo, 2005). The difference between the vocationalization of general education and a vocational stream in secondary education refers to the degree of institutional integration of vocational training into education.

Vocational Education in India:

According to the Government of India (2010), India is making a distinction between work-centred education, which is known as 'vocalized education', and 'vocational education' at the upper-secondary level. Currently, there are no relationships between these two components. Work education is included in the primary standards (grades 1–8) to make the students aware of the concept of work. At the lower secondary level (grades 9–10) pre-vocational education does exist, and aims to increase students' familiarity with the world of work.

Vocational education is a distinct stream in upper-secondary education (grades 11–12). It was introduced in the year 1976/77 and then revisited in 1992/93 as a way to diversify educational opportunities, enhance individual employability, and reduce the mismatch between supply and demand of a skilled labour force. It was also aimed at diverting a substantial portion of students away from the 'academic' stream.

The need to bring together vocational and academic education at the level of policy plans was recognized by the Indian government. On the one hand, it identified a need to reconstruct the entire school curriculum (from pre-primary to senior secondary) around a common core curriculum that will incorporate work-based pedagogy initially until grade 10 and then up to grade 12 for all children. A set of work-related generic competencies (basic, interpersonal and systemic) is planned to be addressed at all stages of education and be included in assessment. Among others, such generic competencies as 'critical thinking, transfer of learning, creativity, communication skills, aesthetics, work motivation, work ethics of collaboration, entrepreneurship and social accountability' are to be included.

On the other hand, strengthening the general education component of vocational education has been recognized as an important development. Vocational programmes are to provide sound basic knowledge in the humanities and sciences, preparing students to work in various occupations, teaching students to be problem-solvers and encouraging them to continue learning.

Currently, vocational education in schools at upper secondary level is mainly offered by government schools, although in some states private schools are also offering these courses. As of 2007 9,583 schools were offering about 150 educational courses of two years' duration in the broad areas of agriculture, business and commerce, engineering and technology, health and paramedical, home science and science and technology (GoI, 2010). Only 3 per cent of secondary school children are enrolled in the vocational stream.

Despite the fact that the 11th Five Year Plan aimed to double the number of schools offering Technical and Vocational Education and Training (from 9,583 to 20,000, so that the intake capacity would increase from 1 million to 2.5 million), there has been very slow change. The report (GoI, 2010) questioned the quality and relevance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training provided at the upper secondary level for equipping schoolchildren for the requirements of the world of work. Most of the courses are school-based. However, some of these have been perceived on a collaborative model with industry. The theory part and some basic skills are developed in schools, and there is further refinement of skills in industry.

India is among the countries with the lowest proportion of trained youth: 80 per cent of new entrants to the workforce have no opportunity for skill training. The existing training capacity is 3.1 million per annum compared with 12.8 million new entrants to the workforce annually. The government has taken due recognition of the skill gaps and plans to take new initiatives for bridging them. In this regard, the National Policy on Skill Development (GoI, 2009) provides a direction for skill development in the country.

Vocationalization of Secondary and Higher Education: Challenges and Issues

The challenge is to link higher education with the constantly changing needs and opportunities of contemporary society and economy, and this is seen as an increasingly important issue by universities and politicians. Creating a fruitful and dynamic partnership between higher education and society at large has become one of the basic missions (together with teaching and research) of universities (Griffith University, 2002). At the level of structural change the following three trends can be seen as important in that respect:

- The distinction between top universities (highly selective admission) and mass universities (open to all school leavers) might influence the scope of

their responses to the trends discussed above.

- Improvement of the reputation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training through developing it within the university sector is seen as one way of establishing close relationships between higher and vocational education. Higher vocational institutes in PR China are an example of this approach. They have been developed as an independent branch of the university sector.
- A common qualification framework for vocational and higher education that reflects the interrelationships between the structure of educational qualifications and the occupational structure of the labour force, and between education and social change, could provide possible synergies between higher education and vocational education.
- Development of interdisciplinary links across traditional academic disciplines, blurring the boundaries and developing new approaches towards knowledge production.
- Development of employability skills required for all sectors of the economy can be seen as a priority for both vocational and higher education. In Germany, for example, it is quite common that graduates with a bachelor's degree undergo an apprenticeship in order to improve their employment opportunities (Rauner, 2005).
- Life-long learning as a way of responding to rapid knowledge development and market change is considered as essential for both sectors.
- Change in the nature of societies, which relates to global economic competition and a request for graduates relevant to the economies.
- Quality and standards. The distinction should be considered between short and medium-term orientation in qualification demands that are met through vocational training, and long-term educational profiles for university qualifications. Thus, the goal of tertiary education must be sustainable and provide long-term usable professional education (Schulte, 2005).
- Vocational qualifications should provide access to university education.
- University education for vocation education teachers is required which should include occupational domains and pedagogical qualifications.
- There is no one model approach that fits all because frameworks for the vocationalization of higher education will be different in different contexts.
- At the higher education level, programmes have been redesigned to incorporate a more vocationally-oriented content, such as workplace problems being used as learning resources, professional placements (internships, work placement schemes, innovative provision of work-based learning/work experience through opportunities within, or external to, programmes of study), negotiated learning contracts for individual students, and the development of complementary ICT, language and management skills to equip graduates for future careers.
- Cross-faculty courses and interdisciplinary research centres have been established by the universities to overcome a segmented approach to knowledge development and acquisition.
- Higher education institutions are marketing new programmes more oriented to market needs, such as programmes related to business, commerce and the human professions.
- Employability-enhancing activities that are not related to content teaching, such as enhanced support (usually via career services) for undergraduates and graduates in their search for work; enabled reflection on and recording of experience, attribute development and achievement, alongside academic abilities; the appointment of specialist staff such as skills advisors and pathway officers.
- Embedded attribute development within programmes of study to make skills explicit, or to accommodate employer inputs by securing involvement of the industry representatives in higher education policy-making, strategies and implementation (as is done for example in PR China's vocational institutes).
- Postgraduate, on-the-job training and experience both as a compulsory part of educational programmes (for instance, for the medical professions) or as a non-compulsory part of the programme required by professional associations as a prerequisite for joining the profession (for instance, for lawyers).
- Recognition of prior learning for both vocational and higher education programmes particularly as part of an increasing stress on the importance of life-long learning; arrangements for articulation, provision of enabling or bridging courses for those lacking knowledge and skills for the higher education programme.

- Inter-institutional collaborative arrangements (for example some technical colleges in Tajikistan have the same first two-year programmes as their 'linked' universities, so high achievers from colleges can transfer to the third year of study at the university; institution from both sectors use same campuses and deliver joint courses).

Trends, concerns and examples of the vocationalization of higher education represent the ways education is adjusting to changes in the socio-economic environment. These processes can be viewed as a way of self-organization where economic, vocational and higher education systems exchange information by interpreting the actors' understanding of approaches and issues. This dynamic is viewed as a way of achieving harmonization of universities with the country's economy.

Conclusion:

The rapid transformation of societies in their social, political, economic, technological, and education spheres has changed perspectives on the need for and nature of vocational skills. A historical change of views on vocationalization from more educational to more functional (where the development of employability skills became the main focus) has broadened the nature of vocationalization and included separate technical courses under its umbrella. This pattern is due to the gradual blending of general and vocational programmes, which sometimes share up to 75 per cent of their content.

Within general secondary education there is a diverse pattern of provision of Technical and Vocational Education and Training. This includes at least two levels, lower secondary and upper secondary, and is delivered within two modes, as embedded learning and as separate course/programmes. Many versions of post-secondary and tertiary delivery are in place. The degree to which vocationalization occurs and its nature depends on the level of economic development and on cultural traditions. Social, economic and technology rationales are used by governments to decide on their particular vocationalization policy.

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