

Integrating National Policies for Effective Vocational Education and Skill Development: Addressing Challenges and Enhancing Employability

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ABSTRACT

Within the context of national goals and policies, this study investigates how vocational education and training (VET) and skill development are integrated and evaluates their effectiveness. The research emphasizes the changing role of VET in addressing skill shortages and enhancing employability by examining a range of policy documents and programs. An analysis of strategic frameworks and implementation issues provides insights into how various countries prioritise VET to meet labour market demands. The report also suggests ways to make policies more consistent and responsive to business needs to ensure that VET is a robust means of promoting social inclusion and economic growth.

Keywords: Vocational education, training, skill development, national plans, policies

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing global acknowledgement of the critical role vocational education and training (VET) plays in offering students both practical skills and theoretical knowledge essential for professional achievement. There is a growing need for robust strategies in VET and skill development as economies worldwide grapple with challenges posed by rapid technological advancements and evolving labour market demands. VET programs, which aim to bridge the skills gap between education and employment, are heavily influenced by national goals and policies.

This research examines how different countries' policies address vocational education, training, and skill development (VET&SD). The goal is gaining a better understanding of the processes involved in creating, implementing, and evaluating these policies, as well as their impact on meeting current and future skill demands. The study aims to provide a thorough analysis of the status of vocational education within national agendas by examining policy documents, strategic plans, and relevant literature. It also offers suggestions on how policymakers might improve the efficiency of VET systems by highlighting exemplary practices and common obstacles.

1.1 EVOLVING GOALS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TRAINING & SKILL DEVELOPMENT

A new understanding of education's purpose has emerged in response to significant societal, technological, and scientific developments in recent decades. Education, especially what is termed as "relevant education," is becoming increasingly important as a means to address challenges like rising competition, economic downturns, poverty, illiteracy, demographic disparities, and political unrest. Therefore, vocational and secondary education (VET & SD) must now play a significant role in our educational system. New connections between schools, businesses, and society at large are also needed. To address domestic and international technical needs, a system must promote and support lifelong learning, including VET and skill development.

A comprehensive foundation in VET and skill development is essential for achieving both horizontal and vertical integration within the educational framework, as well as between educational institutions and the workplace, to eliminate all forms of bias. Academic institutions must include vocational education and skill development for the VETSD model to be successful.

1. Labour Market Demands:

Given the rapid obsolescence of many skills in the workplace, vocational educators must provide their students with transferrable skills, including the capacity to learn and apply knowledge in various contexts. They need to ensure that their students are prepared for the changing realities of the workplace and the labour market by teaching them in-demand skills. Keeping up with students' evolving skill sets is a challenge for vocational educators, according to recent labor market information systems.

2. Learners' Needs:

A student's gender, age, study habits, learning style, and other attributes all influence their engagement in the learning process. When these characteristics are present, there is a strong relationship between student achievement and classroom participation. A person's preferred method of learning is known as their learning style. Educators and trainers in vocational fields need to meet their students where they are, both in and out of the classroom, to have an impact.

3. Skill-based Education and Training:

In skill-based education and training, learners are directed to develop the essential knowledge and abilities required to execute a job effectively within particular settings. It is a structured way of assessing and teaching that seeks to achieve defined goals. Providing competency-based education and training and conducting assessment procedures based on clearly defined learning objectives are critical for vocational trainers and instructors to prepare their students for the ever-changing workplace.

4. Technology-enabled Training:

As a result of significant technological advancements and innovations in the workplace, traditional skills have been supplanted by modern, tech-oriented abilities and computer-mediated talents. Increased productivity and wealth have followed from technologically enabled innovations in various fields. Preparing a workforce adept in technology-enabled jobs is a significant challenge for vocational educators and trainers in the 21st century. Therefore, educators must be ready to use computers and other forms of technology in the classroom.

1.2 VOCATIONAL TRAINING:

Some argue that without social reform in the desired direction, modern technological developments would be useless. Education has always been a crucial tool for human progress and well-being as it can transform society. An individual needs education to live a better, more independent life. Our government's massive Adult Education Programme seeks to provide education to the maximum number of individuals, with a particular focus on rural communities, in order to enhance their quality of life. We believe that by educating low-skilled workers and peasants, we can help them adapt to new agricultural methods and enhance their quality of life by teaching them new crops to plant. Various economists and organizations have defined human resource development in different ways, although the term human capital is central to it. The International Labour Organisation (1998) describes "human capital creation" as "the total skills of the people in relation to a nation's development." Human capital formation includes aspects such as migration, health and sanitation, on-the-job training, labor market understanding, and formal education. According to Schultz (1961), human capital formation occurs when human activities are enhanced, making individuals more productive and valuable as the economy progresses.

While HRD includes vocational training and education, it does not encompass them in isolation. The technical

capacity of a society is proportional to the quality of its public education and training programs. To achieve economic development and technological innovation, a technically and vocationally competent workforce is crucial. Pakistan and other developing nations must invest in their youth through technical and vocational education to keep up with the demands of a modernizing economy.

PROBLEMS FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATION IN INDIA:

Vocational training in India has only been successful in a few settings, including industrial training institutes and engineering crafts. Several private colleges in India offer vocational training courses; however, most are not officially recognized by the government. Finding institutions that meet these criteria must be the first priority.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development in India oversees vocational high schools. This is the foundation of vocational education and needs strengthening. Following an analysis of India's current vocational education system, we have identified the following issues:

- A large number of students do not complete secondary education.
- Vocational education is offered at the eleventh and twelfth grade levels.
- Involvement of private and public sectors is insufficient.
- The nation has a smaller network of vocational institutes.
- There is a shortage of qualified teachers.
- Vocationalization has not been successful at any level.
- There are insufficient new areas for skill training and vocational education.
- The nation is severely lacking in qualified educators.
- There are not enough opportunities for continuous skill improvement.
- There is a supply-demand mismatch because the current education system does not adapt to the skill needs of current and future industries.
- Alternative vocational training facilities are understaffed and only open to a small percentage of students with level 10 or 10+ credentials, making them ill-suited to meet the demand.
- There is a significant disparity between the supply and demand for skilled workers. More than 90% of employment opportunities in India are skill-based, yet fewer than 5% of India's youth receive vocational training.
- The centralised curricula used by most vocational education training institutes are outdated and do not align with market needs.
- There is no oversight committee.

1.3 INCORPORATION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TRAINING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT INTO NATIONAL PLANS AND POLICIES:

There are issues with equivalence, vertical mobility, and the recognition of credentials due to the wide range of programs in terms of length, admission requirements, curriculum, assessment, and certification.

Government Role:

To be flexible, up-to-date, relevant, inclusive, and innovative, vocational education and training must reevaluate its core components in light of changing national circumstances. The government has initiated substantial efforts to acknowledge the critical role of vocational education. The Central Government is in the process of creating a "National Vocational Qualifications Framework" aimed at advancing skill development, ensuring national standardization, and providing qualifications that are both nationally recognized and comparable on an international level. To achieve this, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) has established an inter-ministerial committee, including representatives from state governments, to draft guidelines for the National Framework. Indian education has undergone several reform efforts over the years. Conversely, vocational

education has persisted as a separate goal. Enrolling in a degree course in a student's chosen area is not an option for those enrolled in vocational programs. Lack of standardization, recognition, and fragmentation, along with other issues like low quality, have contributed to the failure of many vocational courses. Several government initiatives and plans have prioritized vocational education training and skill improvement. Various policies and tactics are discussed in further detail below.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 (modified in 1992):

This policy asserts that vocational education courses must be systematic, well-planned, and meticulously executed. By providing an alternative for students who lack the motivation to continue their studies, these components aim to help students develop a positive attitude towards work and life, increase their employability, and alleviate the supply-demand imbalance. Under certain conditions, students who have successfully completed a vocational training program may be able to obtain admittance into other academic programs via bridge courses and progress in their careers. The Kothari Commission's report emphasized vocational education at upper secondary levels, vocational institutions, and schools, and beyond the eighth and tenth grades.

Vocational Education in National Five-Year Plans:

One of the main goals of the Eighth Five-Year Plan was to make education more vocational. These changes ensured that the NPE's initial policy framework remained intact. Nevertheless, to achieve the revised objective, 10% of high school pupils were diverted by 1995 and 25% by 2000.

The Ninth Plan focused on several key objectives: restructuring teacher training, enhancing the use of information and communication technologies, revitalizing the curriculum with a focus on vocationalization and employment-oriented courses, broadening and extending the open learning system, and addressing inequities.

The Tenth Five-Year Plan placed a significant emphasis on vocational training and education, recognizing vocational education as crucial for maintaining a consistent supply of skills and meeting demand. As part of this initiative, the Vocational Education Mission was allocated an additional Rs 650 Crores. In response to the rising unemployment rate in 2000, the Planning Commission established a specialized Working Group on Vocational Education to address the issue.

In the Tenth Plan, the following changes were proposed to the centrally funded plan in line with the working group's recommendations:

- There must be a credit transfer mechanism and options for multipoint entry/exit for school vocational courses to be competency-based and modular.
- Connections between +2 vocational programs and university-level coursework are necessary. Additionally, the current graduation-level admissions requirement for vocational courses needs revision.
- Businesses should be involved in the course design, curriculum development, instructor/student training, and course certification processes through Memorandums of Understanding to bolster the current program.
- The program could be self-sustaining if schools start charging for classes and plan them that way. We need to make full use of the apprenticeship training facilities and make it mandatory.
- The Board of Apprenticeship Training should select where to send individuals who have finished vocational education for apprenticeship and training as soon as the +2 test results are announced.
- Local businesses and industries should be actively engaged in assessing demand and conducting district vocational surveys before vocational courses are begun in schools.
- The Kendriya Vidyalaya and Navodaya Vidyalaya systems of schools should be compelled to provide facilities for operating vocational courses.
- When developing vocational programs, it is important to consider people with disabilities and provide accommodations for their needs and abilities.

- The plan to implement state-level testing & certification systems in collaboration with user groups as well as professional bodies may offer financial support. Reviving the vocational education board within the AICTE is crucial for providing technical guidance to the school system and for fostering connections with other institutions nationwide.

- The Steering Committee on Secondary, Higher, and Technical Education, formed as part of the Tenth Five-Year Plan, recommended that vocational education at the secondary school level, along with polytechnic education and Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), be consolidated under a single state government department. This consolidation aims to enhance networking, streamline linkages, improve target specificity, and optimize resource utilization. The Centrally-sponsored scheme for Vocationalisation of Secondary Education was allocated Rs. 350 crores in the Tenth Plan. Additionally, the Tenth Plan emphasizes the development of new policies for the vocational education sector, including addressing the lack of vertical mobility.

The Plan proposes that future vocational education policies should address several key issues:

- o State governments and Union Territory Administrations need to be made aware of the critical importance of skill training and vocational education in addressing unemployment challenges.

- o There is an immediate need to accommodate the increasing number of Class VIII graduates, which will grow with the success of initiatives like the Universalization of Elementary Education and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

- o A careful evaluation is required to determine the appropriate stages for introducing trades such as Fitter, Turner, Blacksmith, along with courses in Accountancy, Typing, Book-keeping, and Secretarial practices.

- o The duration of various vocational courses needs thorough reassessment.

- o Vertical mobility within the vocational stream is crucial. Students completing +2 in a particular stream should have opportunities to specialize further and earn diplomas and degrees to enhance job prospects and access to higher-paying roles.

- o Vocational courses must be tailored to meet demand and industry needs, considering the rapidly changing technological and industrial landscape. Flexibility should be built into the programs to allow students to switch courses as demand patterns evolve.

- o The current system should be reinforced by engaging industries through Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) in the design and certification of courses and the training of both students and faculty.

- o Presently, most vocational courses are focused on the manufacturing sector. However, with the sluggish growth in this sector and the booming opportunities in the services sector, vocational education should increasingly concentrate on the latter.

- o Efforts should be made to integrate schemes such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Adult Education, and Vocational Education Programmes across schools, ITIs, polytechnics, community colleges, and other institutions.

- o The vocational education scheme needs re-evaluation, particularly in districts with a weak industrial base, such as those in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh.

- o Vocational subject syllabi should be regularly updated to keep pace with technological advancements, particularly in trades such as food processing, dairy technology, leather and tanning technology, etc.

- o Vocational institutes should establish networks with professional bodies such as the Central Food and

Technology Research Institute (CFTRI) in Mysore and the Central Leather Research Institute (CLRI) in Chennai to stay informed about technological developments.

o The focus of the vocational education scheme should be on ensuring that the local industry can absorb the students trained in specific trades. Overproduction of students in any one trade must be avoided, highlighting the need for diversification within trades.

o Immediate attention is required to improve the training of vocational education teachers.

o Vocational educators, master artisans, and trainees should frequently exchange ideas and skills. Industry organizations such as FICCI, ASSOCHAM, and CII must play a more active role in executing vocational education programs and imparting practical skills.

Although the Tenth Five-Year Plan made strong recommendations, the **VET&SD** sector did not fully implement the proposed measures. At the national level, the Indian government is currently developing a "National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework" (NVEQF).

The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) has convened an inter-ministerial committee, with state government representatives, to draft guidelines for this National Framework as part of the Eleventh Plan Policy. This framework will create a unified national qualification system encompassing schools, vocational training centers, and post-secondary institutions. The occupational standards for the NVEQF will be defined by employer-led sector skills councils, outlining the comprehensive knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for performing specific tasks as set forth by those councils.

Recommendations by the Central Advisory Board for Education (CABE) Committee:

In its 2005 report on the Universalization of Secondary Education, the CABE Committee recommended the following reforms:

- To ensure that vocational education is not perceived as a terminal option, successful students in vocational tracks should be allowed to pursue higher education. This will help avoid the vocational stream being viewed as a last resort.
- Increasing private sector involvement in the management of institutions and curriculum design is crucial to establishing a direct link between graduates and the labor market, thereby fostering organizational and productivity innovations.
- Enhancing the general education component within vocational programs is necessary to provide foundational knowledge in humanities and sciences, thereby preparing students for diverse occupations, problem-solving, and lifelong learning.
- Transitioning from a government-only funding model to one that increasingly includes private sector investment and student user fees is essential. Private sector contributions will be motivated by the production of relevant graduates, while students will be more likely to invest if they perceive clear labor market advantages from vocational education.

The National Skill Development Policy 2009 (NSD):

The NSD Policy aims to skill approximately 12-15 million youth annually. To facilitate the execution of this ambitious plan, the Government of India has established the National Skill Development Mission, the Coordination Committee, and the National Skill Development Corporation. Among its various initiatives, the Policy includes the creation of a National Vocational Education Qualification Framework.

1.4 CONCLUSION:

The study underscores the critical role of VET in national development strategies. It reveals that while many countries have made significant strides in integrating VET into their national plans, persistent challenges related to policy coherence, industry alignment, and resource allocation remain. Effective vocational education policies require continuous adaptation to the evolving economic landscape and proactive engagement with industry stakeholders to ensure relevance and impact.

To optimize the benefits of vocational education, policymakers need to focus on creating flexible, responsive, and inclusive VET systems. This includes fostering public-private partnerships, investing in teacher training, and leveraging technology to enhance learning outcomes. By prioritizing vocational education and skill development, nations can better equip their workforce for the future, driving economic growth and fostering social inclusion. The study concludes with a call for ongoing research and collaboration to refine and strengthen vocational education policies globally.

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