

Economics Of Vocationalisation of Higher Education in Mumbai

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Abstract

This paper reviews the economics of vocationalisation in India in the arena of undergraduate commerce education in nine colleges of Mumbai. It briefly outlines the rationale, progress, and outcomes of macro policy initiatives in this pivotal area. Later, the field work findings are collated and recommendations suggested for better performance at the operational level.

Keywords: economics of vocationalisation, undergraduate commerce education, recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Pre-independent India during the British period followed Wood's Dispatch of 1854 that contemplated prevocational education. The Indian Education Commission (1882), popularly known as Hunter commission also recommended the introduction of practical subjects in secondary schools. Later, in 1937, Abbot and Wood submitted their report on general and vocational education that stated, "Manual activities should find a place in the curriculum". Mahatma Gandhi, for the first time, insisted that manual and productive work should not only be an integral part of education but should center round it. The Education Commission (1964-66) also recommended a 10-year schooling and diversification into two streams – academic and vocational at plus 2.

Education is an endless process needed for the development of any nation. India being one of the developing countries concentrates on four aspects of youth education as maximum percent of youth are in our country and who are going to build this universe. The four central aspects of youth education are identified as: (1) lifelong learning; (2) an amplified version of basic education which includes pre-school, elementary and secondary level education; (3) links between formal and non-formal education; and (4) education for work. First three are practiced by all the schools but the schools less concern the last one education for work. This aspect can be

affected by means of vocationalisation of education.

Rationale for Vocationalisation

One of the main functions of the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre is knowledge management, information sharing and Particular attention is given to promoting best practices and innovations and vocational education and training (VET) with special reference to meeting the needs of developing countries, countries in transition and countries in a post-conflict situation. Our country is in developing era and thus needs all the four aspects to be concentrated.

Vocational education is essentially the demand of every stage of its development because it is a means of advancing in occupational areas. Skilled and technically trained people are the capital of developing society, thus implementation of VET is an essential demand at all levels of education as an integral component of lifelong learning has a crucial role to play in education as an effective tool to realize the objectives of a culture of peace, environmentally sound sustainable development, social cohesion and international citizenship.

According to the draft National Policy on Education, 1979 an ideal system of education should enable individuals to know and develop to their fullest their physical and intellectual potentialities in order to prepare middle level of

man –power, improve the general educational attainments and at the same time to impart skills needed for employment without closing the door on further education while in employment. It will also enable us to move towards equitable sharing of the benefits of economic development towards social justice and socialism. Vocational courses can produce personnel with necessary drive towards society in the matter of self-employment, thereby enlarging the supply of technical leadership at grass-root level. It can help to accelerate the economic growth by producing the right type of personnel for initial level of absorption, and at the secondary level of education provide employment, thus solving child labour problem (<http://www.articlesbase.com/k-12-education-articles/vocationalization-of-education3126936.html>).

Progress of Vocationalisation of Undergraduate Education

The University Grants Commission in India launched the scheme of vocationalisation of undergraduate education in 1994. Several colleges in Mumbai have implemented this scheme. Since 2002 these courses have been restructured as add-on courses. The researchers carried out an empirical study in nine Mumbai colleges in the commerce stream over the period 1997 to 2002. We had high expectations from vocational education, and this study tried to investigate in detail whether these have been achieved. Almost three-fourths of the pass outs of the vocational courses (73.17 percent) feel the vocational courses are useful and should be continued. This is a very significant finding of this study which strongly pleads for the continuation of these courses and strengthening them in the future.

It should always be underscored that vocational education is not offered in lieu of general education but grows out of it. Supplementing and enhancing is the ultimate goal of our education. The main goal of vocational education is to fulfil the manpower requirement for national development and social requirement for employment. We feel that these courses are still in their infancy. Only with proper planning

and action by colleges and industry can vocationalisation of undergraduate education become meaningful and succeed in translating the rhetoric of employment into reality. We found very little awareness about the existing vocational course. Unless and until awareness is there, students cannot apply for these vocational degree courses. We would like to suggest that all colleges should follow a uniform criterion of admission for the selection of students. Great rush is noted for admission for some courses in some colleges whereas other courses and some colleges find it difficult to get the minimum number of students. Pre- investment surveys have to be undertaken before a college decides to introduce vocational streams. A careful educational planning is hence necessary.

It is difficult for the existing system to achieve its objectives, particularly when the work of coordination either falls primarily on the Principal or is entrusted to a part time faculty.

Another drawback is outdated curriculum which is unfit to meet the present challenges. Many teachers felt that the curriculum was unsuitable and needed revision. Specialised faculty repeatedly pointed out that the curriculum needs to be revised and suitably modified from time to time. It is clear that most of these vocational programmes depend upon the availability of expert guest faculty. Expertise available in the neighbouring community has been exploited for bringing in variety and relevance to the courses. At the same time we lament that there has not been adequate response from the business world for giving practical training to teachers.

FINDINGS OF FIELD STUDY

Our field study of the city's nine colleges reveals that vocationalisation at under graduate level has faced serious constraints like absence of clear guidelines, inadequacy of resources, lack of infrastructure, weak institutional capacity, inadequate practical training, weak information links between training providers and employers, absence of link-up with industries etc. However, most of the vocational courses introduced in these colleges have considerable employment potential. Also, colleges have made continuous efforts which would enhance

employment opportunities, many of which are ongoing. Recalling that among the objectives of vocational program was cultivating students for middle-level jobs in travel agencies, advertising firms, marketing concerns etc. technicians and craftsmen, it is now obvious that these objectives have been achieved. However employability depends not so much on individual capabilities but on a multiplicity of factors well beyond the scope of individual initiative. It is difficult to predict the characteristics of the employment scene with much specificity and certainty.

Right now there is not much involvement of business in supporting the vocational add-on courses in Mumbai colleges. Whatever little support is witnessed is ad hoc, informal and unstructured. In general, our findings from personal surveys of students show that economic usefulness needs to be assessed in light of realistically available opportunities that students have after college. If such opportunities are strictly limited and available according to other criteria it is fallacious to expect that vocationalisation of undergraduate employment will lead to employment even when student are keen to pursue occupations that will enable them to use these skills. While we agree that there are significant labour market advantages experienced by those who take up vocational subjects, it may not always succeed in its goal to help students find a source of livelihood under difficult labour market conditions. Training in greater magnitude and under less depressed labour market conditions might prove more effective.

Most employers point out that the problems faced in work situations are not technical. Rather these problems are complex, interdependent and have more to do with whether or not people are able to work with each other co-operatively and ethically. Principals have reported that this is the identical feedback they normally get from employers. Our study shows that vocationalisation of under graduate education has certainly enhanced the labour market outcomes of the pass outs but failed to prepare a student for any self-employment venture. Also, vocationalisation at under graduate level has developed certain qualities in students like

dignity and self-esteem, exposure to the world of work, work ethics, team spirit, positive attitude towards work and improvement of quality of life. Private training institutions provide relevant and demand-sensitive training. The colleges are not able to adapt their vocational courses to meet current labour market demands. Notwithstanding these responses, most firms seemed to be favourably disposed toward vocational training programs of colleges and rated them "rather good," and rated vocational graduates 'much better' than their other employees.

With respect to the match between education employment and earnings the following points were noted:

- We find that a majority of the vocational pass outs are engaged in middle level jobs in Sales (27.57) and several of them are employed in their family enterprises (22.65) followed by Administrative, Executive and Managerial positions (21.40) followed by Professional & Technical (10.49).
- Strict matching i. e., pass outs finding work in their field of study was reported in the case of 14 percent of the pass outs in our survey who were employed. A wider matching i.e., when we consider those who had found work in a related field was reported by 63.21 percent. 18.16 percent were working in an occupation unrelated to their vocational field of study.
- A strong conclusion of this study is that it is vocational education combined with relevant occupation that is conducive to higher earnings. When vocational pass outs are employed in occupations related to their field of study their earnings are significantly higher than those from the academic stream.
- The propensity to change their occupation appears to be very significant among graduates with vocational qualifications. Reasons cited are underemployment in the previous job, better conditions of service and promotion prospects and dissatisfaction with previous employment.

- A comparison between labour market experiences of vocational pass outs and academic pass outs reveals the following:
 - There is clearly a positive earning differential between vocational and non vocational graduates when vocational graduates obtain jobs related to their training
 - It may be said that on the whole graduates with vocational degrees are much less liable to unemployment than graduates with general degree.
 - Self employment does not seem to be prominent in either of the cases.
 - Not all who complete graduation are engaged in productive activity. However this percentage is lesser in the case of vocational graduates as compared to conventional commerce graduates.
 - Waiting period is relatively short for vocational graduates.

Our study clearly proves that returns to vocational education are high and higher than rates of return on physical or financial capital. Private rates of return are higher than social rates of return. It was also found that although the unit cost of vocational subjects is relatively high, in comparison to the generally prepared graduates, they are more flexible in fitting into a larger variety of occupations, thus maintaining a higher rate of return on their investment. There is thus a strong case for investing in education as also for vocational education linked with general education. This study suggests that the expansion of these career oriented vocational courses would be profitable investments quite apart from their other benefits, particularly when they are in addition to commerce education. Our results clearly support this expansion as the returns to vocational education is high.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Apart from the above micro level study, various macro initiatives at the national level would go a long way in strengthening vocationalisation of education that will further lead us towards equitable, inclusive, and sustainable development. The journey must begin at an

earlier stage of secondary education in order to make the passage smoother at undergraduate levels. "Vocational education is proposed to be made an important part of secondary education," stated Kapil Sibal, Union Minister for Human Resource Development (HRD), while addressing the meeting of the Consultative Committee of Parliament in August 2010.

Further, he stated that in order to make the vocational skills imparted relevant to the student, training curriculum should be flexible in order to address skill sets of vocations peculiar to a region, as well as relevant and useful to students from economically weaker sections that will also act as a support for the sustenance and development of handicraft industries. He also underlined the need to undertake geospatial mapping of the states with regard to the unavailability of primary, secondary and higher education institutions and match the availability with the geographical data on children population.

This will give the government the information for setting up institution as per the requirement, so that large areas are not left without schools and colleges, and in contrast some areas are clustered with schools/colleges. This mapping will also help students on exercising the choice of institutions for study. In fine, macro policies combined with micro level 'best practices' in vocational education will strengthen our educational system and add variety and resilience to our syllabus for meeting the requirements of the new knowledge economy and millions of aspirations of young Indians. The New Education Policy of the Narendra Modi Government of 2020 emphasizes on Skill India and vocationalization of education.

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