Innovative Approaches of Vocational Education and Training

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Abstract

Selecting a career is an uphill task and most crucial decision in one’s life. Occupation of a profession of a person determines his mode of living and economic prospects. Moreover, a particular working atmosphere and service structure influences attitude and behaviour of an individual. A particular line of work is the focal way to accomplish goals, materialize ambitions and realize dreams in the twisting and meandering life course. Therefore, appropriate information and guidelines are mandatory to select a vocation according to one’s aptitude. Lack of awareness about career planning has grave implications for the future of the candidates. This paper focuses attention on innovative approaches of vocational training, methods of vocational training, an interactive and self-directed learning process, working conditions conducive to learning about vocational training, problem areas in present vocational education and training system and training.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Selecting a career is an uphill task and most crucial decision in one’s life. Occupation of a profession of a person determines his mode of living and economic prospects. Moreover, a particular working atmosphere and service structure influences attitude and behaviour of an individual. A particular line of work is the focal way to accomplish goals, materialize ambitions and realize dreams in the twisting and meandering life course. Therefore, appropriate information and guidelines are mandatory to select a vocation according to one’s aptitude. Lack of awareness about career planning has grave implications for the future of the candidates.
Vocational training is training for a specific career or trade, excluding the professions. Vocational training focuses on practical applications of skills learned, and is generally unconcerned with theory or traditional academic skills. A large part of the education in vocational schools is hands-on training. Vocational training thus provides a link between education and the working world.

2. DEFINITION AND MEANING OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING:

Vocational education is defined as “a practically illustrated and attempted job or career skill instruction”. As such, a variety of components fall under the vocational education umbrella: agricultural education, business education, family and consumer sciences, health occupations education, marketing education, technical education, technology education, and trade and industrial education.

The figure above shows how general education (academic), vocational education and professional education are connected to working life.

2.1. VOCATIONALISM:

Vocationalism is defined as the method used by schools, particularly high schools, to organize their curricula so the students may develop skills, both vocational and academic, that will give them the strategic labour market advantages needed to compete for good jobs. Overall enrolment in vocational courses has fallen. However, an incoming current has
brought a growing number of participants into new programs and curricula. While traditional vocational offerings have been geared toward immediate entry into specific occupations, new programs and course sequences are intended to prepare students for both colleges and careers, by combining a challenging academic curriculum with development of work-related knowledge skill.

Stevenson (2005) researching on VET in Australia remarks that wherever one looks, the place for the vocational appears to be similar – the vocational is at the bottom of a hierarchy of knowledge and value, it is a stream of learning available to the “lower achiever”, it is governed in a paternalistic way with highly circumscribed degrees of freedom over content and process, it is legitimated solely in industrial and other utilitarian terms, rather than in the connections among different kinds of meaning making, and it is preserved for occupations of lower status. Instead, Stevenson adopts a view from John Dewey in that a ‘vocation means nothing but such a direction of life activities as renders them perceptibly significant to a person, because of the consequences they accomplish, and also useful to his associates’.

However, while such a definition does raise the status of what ‘vocational’ is, it does not solve the practical problem of difficulties in being able to identify VET provision in certain institutions. In such an approach, vocationalism is important for all types of studies. Indeed, even for academics, meaning to their own work often arises in application.

2.2. CAREER:

The word “career” is used to refer to one’s progress through his/her working life, particularly in a certain profession or line of work. When we talk about a “career in teaching” or a “career in technology” we mean that a person will study and then work in
teaching or in technology, perhaps changing jobs from time to time in the interests of advancement. The goals that one has for one’s working life are called “career goals,” and planning how we will reach them is called setting a “career path.” Carpentry, engineering, nursing, hospitality, social work, banking, and farming are just a few of the many possible careers people might choose. Generally, vocation and career are used interchangeably. A vocation is a career or calling and the word is derived from the Latin vocare, which means “to call.” Vocational guidance means helping someone find his or her calling or at least a suitable career choice. Vocations or careers can be loosely categorized into areas such as service, technical, mechanical, creative, health and business.

2.3. VOCATIONAL TRAINING:
The term vocational training refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies as a result of the teaching of vocational or practical skills and knowledge that relate to specific useful competencies. It forms the core of apprenticeships and provides the backbone of content at institutes of technology (also known as technical colleges or polytechnics). In addition to the basic training required for a trade, occupation or profession, observers of the labour-market recognize as of 2008 the need to continue training beyond initial qualifications: to maintain, upgrade and update skills throughout working life. One can generally categorize such training as on-the-job or off-the-job:

1. On-the-job training takes place in a normal working situation, using the actual tools, equipment, documents or materials that trainees will use when fully trained. On-the-job training has a general reputation as most effective for vocational work.

2. Off-the-job training takes place away from normal work situations — implying that the employee does not count as a directly productive worker while such training takes place. Off-the-job training has the advantage that it allows people to get away from work and concentrate more thoroughly on the training itself. This type of training has proven more effective in inculcating concepts and ideas.

3. INNOVATIVE APPROACHES OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING:

There are few methods of vocational training

3.1 An interactive and self-directed learning process: One of the main objectives of vocational training is to provide not only an adequate answer to these needs but also a greater
flexibility, thus enabling students to benefit from an interactive and self-directed learning process – one with a capacity for continual evolution and occupational re-adaptation. This is one of the greatest challenges currently facing the vocational training industry. Vocational training should be seen as more than a simple tool used to obtain a diploma or professional certificate. It should also enable practices to be updated in accordance with existing vocational training trends, as well offer apprentices the possibility of changing occupations and be able to provide an answer to the problems inherent to the professional labour world.

The vocational trainer’s role can no longer be limited to ensuring that students learn the basic theories of certain areas of knowledge. They must now also be encouraged to think for themselves, to select and prioritize information, to draw up work-plans and to coordinate resources. But this cannot be achieved solely through the application of traditional teaching methods, based as these are on teacher’s presentations and textbook learning. Within this referential framework, and before expounding the characteristics and various phases of the project method, we need to determine the precise relationship between the project method, the curriculum, and skills based training. The user can learn in this section about different self-training methods for employees. Three possibilities are offered for training internally collaborators in small enterprises workplace instructions quality circles and coaching. The enterprise does not need any particular educational proficiency for using these in-house training forms. At the same time they also serve to sharpen the awareness of competencies' needs in the interest of the organisation and the management process.

3. 2. Working conditions conducive to learning:

The term – work conducive to learning – means the conditions and possibilities to enable learning in the working process. Learning processes are consolidated by the implementation of the new knowledge gained in the process of working. Possible mistakes can serve as feedback and can also be useful to modify behaviour, learning from mistakes. Small enterprises are under heavy pressure to improve due to structural changes. These changes and the subsequent higher complexity of practical tasks place a heavy load on the learning and innovation potential of employees and executives. They have to be open-minded and flexible and learn to fit into permanent, lifelong and manifold processes of change and work content in new situations in order to assure individual development of competences and the success of the firm. Only then will enterprises remain competitive in the long term, if they
succeed to reach learning ability on the individual and organisational levels to continually develop new ideas and implement them in innovative products and services. There is a number of proven procedures and methods for doing that. Three possibilities for training employees are presented here, that shall support the managers and the persons responsible for operational training within the organisation.

3.3. Innovative public–private partnership:
Innovative public-private partnerships are needed to meet the diverse skill needs of the informal sector – which involves not only training but support services such as assistance with running a small business, marketing and information on technology.

3.3.1. Future vocational guidance via mobile phones:
One of the ways to improve young people’s career guidance is through mobile phone applications. What I think we will see in schools and colleges in the future, is analysed and organized data released by social enterprises in the format that young people can use and available on mobile phone as direct personal communication. By creating mobile phone apps that enable young people to check out organized material on line, it will provide career guidance to young people and at some point, they will be motivated to contact someone who has direct experience.

3.3.2. Brain Scans may help guide Career Choice:
General aptitude tests and specific mental ability tests are important tools for vocational guidance. Researchers are now asking whether performance on such tests is based on differences in brain structure, and if so, can brain scans be helpful in choosing a career? Using MRI, the researchers correlated gray matter with independent ability factors (general intelligence, speed of reasoning, numerical, spatial, memory) and with individual test scores from a battery of cognitive tests completed by 40 individuals seeking vocational guidance. They found that, in general, the grey matter correlates for the broad and narrow test types were different. Researchers concluded that a person’s pattern of cognitive strengths and weaknesses is related to their brain structure, so there is a possibility that brain scans could provide unique information that would be helpful for vocational choice. This result forms a basis to investigate this further.
3.3.3 Vocational guidance and lifelong learning:
In an ideal world, everyone who needed it would have free access to a vocational guidance and counselling service, which in turn would be at the centre of a network of agencies and organisations with the resources to offer lifelong learning to those who most need it but find it difficult to access. This would enable guidance services to move beyond working to remove dispositional barriers into collaboration to remove institutional barriers and ameliorate the effects of situational barriers.

4. MATERIALS ABOUT VOCATIONAL TRAINING:
Finding curriculum materials, lesson plans, classroom activities, and other instructional materials in vocational education can be complex and time consuming. The vocational curriculum can be identified as a combination of classroom instruction, hands-on laboratory work and on-the-job training; augmented by an active network of student organizations. Vocational preparation must always be viewed against the backdrop of the needs of society and of the individual. While meeting the demands of the economy, the abilities of individuals must be utilized to the fullest. Meeting the internalized job needs of individuals is a crucial objective of vocational education.

The ERIC database is a good source of information about instructional materials. A search will lead you to curricula, project descriptions, lesson plans, classroom activities, task lists, and other resources. The database also includes materials on how to develop curricula. You can search ERIC on the World Wide Web<www.eric.ed.gov> and at most university, state, and resource center libraries. And List serves Networking is an excellent way to find information and materials. Talking to colleagues about their successes and failures in finding materials and their most and least favourite resources provides educators with valuable leads.

List servs such as CAREERTECH, maintained by the National Dissemination Center for Career and Technical Education, are excellent for getting recommendations for materials. Subscribers are very willing to share their expertise and experiences.

Other list servs interest include those for business education<nbeal@vml.cc.uakron.edu>, technology education <technology-edu@unixg.ubc.ca>, school-to work <stw-lc@ed.gov>, and training and development <trdev-l@psu>.World Wide Web. The World Wide Web is another great source of information for vocational/technical educators.
Many commercial and non-profit publishers some of which listed here have websites that describe their products. Vocational Education Resources:
<pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~sorg/vocation.html> consists of annotated links that will lead you to a wealth of resources.

5. PROBLEM AREAS IN PRESENT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM:

The study of the prevalent Vocational Education System in India the following problem areas have been identified;

1. There is a high dropout rate at Secondary level. There are 220 million children who go to school in India. Of these only around 12% students reach university. A large part of the 18-24 years age group in India has never been able to reach college. Comparing India to countries with similar income levels – India does not under perform in primary education but has a comparative deficit in secondary education.

2. Vocational Education is presently offered at Grade 11, 12th – however students reaching this Grade aspire for higher education. Since the present system does not allow vertical mobility, skills obtained are lost. Enrolment in 11th & 12th Grade of vocational education is only 3% of students at upper secondary level. About 6800 schools enrol 400,000 students in vocational education schemes utilizing only 40% of the available student capacity in these schools.

3. International experience suggests that what employers mostly want are young workers with strong basic academic skills and not just vocational skills. The present system does not emphasize general academic skills. The relative wages of workers with secondary education are increasing.

4. Private & Industry Participation is lacking. There are no incentives for private players to enter the field of vocational education.

5. Present regulations are very rigid. In-Service Training is required but not prevalent today. There is no opportunity for continuous skill up-gradation.

6. There is a lack of experienced and qualified teachers to train students on vocational skills. In foreign countries Bachelors of Vocational Education (BVE) is often a mandatory qualification for teachers. However, in India no specific qualifications are being imparted for
7. Vocationalization at all levels has not been successful. Poor quality of training is not in line with industry needs.
8. There is no definite path for vocational students to move from one level/sector to another level/sector. Mobility is not defined and hence students do not have a clear path in vocational education.
9. No clear policy or system of vocational education leading to certification/degrees presently available for the unorganized/informal sector. No Credit System has been formulated for the same. Over 90% of employment in India is in the Informal sector. JSS offers 255 types of vocational courses to 1.5 million people, Community Polytechnics train about 450,000 people within communities annually and NIOS offers 85 courses through 700 providers. None of these programs have been rigorously evaluated, till date.
10. Expansion of vocational sector is happening without consideration for present problem

6. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES:

National Vocational Qualification Framework: To stimulate and support reforms in skills development and to facilitate nationally standardized and acceptable, international comparability of qualifications, a “National Vocational Qualifications Framework” is being established by the Central Government. Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) has resolved to set up an inter-ministerial group which would also include representatives of State Governments to develop guidelines for such a National Framework. The unified system of national qualification will cover schools, vocational education and training institutions and higher education sector. NVQF will be based on nationally recognized occupational standards which details listing of all major activities that a worker must perform in the occupation or competency standards – a detailed listing of the knowledge, skills and attitude that a worker should possess to perform a task written by the particular employment-led sector skills council.

7. CONCLUSION:

Indian curriculum is prescriptive, and is based on a more general syllabus which merely specifies what topics must be understood and to what level to achieve a particular grade or standard. Examples of the purpose of schools include: develop reasoning about perennial questions, master the methods of scientific inquiry, cultivate the intellect, create positive
change agents, develop spirituality, and model a democratic society. Vocational subjects may foster an interest in the types of work for which the subjects are broadly intended and the skills learned may have private uses but tracer studies have found no positive impact on access to work after students leave school and no strong effect on access to relevant further technical training. Ideas and suggestions put forward by young people (in the same survey) to tackle the challenges of entering a professional career include: Open days for the professions with placements for those interesting in pursuing a career. An expansion in good quality work placements in careers where experience and contacts are the key, providing role models of people who actually get into top professions. Life skills are incorporated in education curricula of developed nations while life skills are ignored in education curricula of developing nations. The traditional view of the distinction between academic and vocational courses is simply not adequate to describe the actual relationships that exist between them, particularly in the context of informatics courses in higher education. We must move on from the “tired and outdated” academic versus vocational debate and focus on creating a new pedagogy.

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