

National Education Policy 2020 and reinventing the possibilities in vocational skill education

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those in humanities are prepared for higher education. China, with the largest population and labour force in the world, has achieved astounding economic growth substantially built on low-cost and low-skill manufacturing for export. A former Director-General of the Institute of Applied Manpower Research, Delhi, who visited China to study the Chinese vocational

system, observed China's vocational integration to the school system as stunning and mind-blowing. Experts attribute China's superpower manufacturing status in the world to its successful integration of vocational training, strongly interfacing at junior high school (grade 7-9) and higher vocational education for senior high school students. A strong foundation of vocationalism and skilling workforce in China begins from the school level that in China above 47% senior secondary students enter the vocational stream as against 3% in India in which the situation is described as a "big black hole". China's success story is mainly due to its implementation design by strictly following the rules laid down in the Vocational Educational Law. Waving off tuition fees and providing incentives for needy students also boost the morale of vocational students. The experience of Latin American countries is equally inspiring. Recently, Latin American countries witnessed considerable changes in vocational education and training systems as an integral programme of addressing youth unemployment challenges. One significant model is the implementation of a large number of skill development initiatives with a strategic focus on post-primary formal education; and employment services such as assistance to job-seekers in the form of career counselling, direct job placement, classroom and on-the-job training, web portal and so forth. Outside the formal education system, there are skill and entrepreneurship capacity building programmes for youth largely funded by development cooperation agencies with the aim of integrating into the labour market. Social protection programmes such as Conditional cash Transfer as part of Chile Solidario are other important strategies to promote skill development for youth.

Considering India's extensive network systems for education, it's only through the use of this system that can put vocational skill education programme wider reach, effective and aspirational. India introduced vocationalization of secondary education policy (2012) with a renewed commitment by integrating skill component into it to make vocational education aspirational. The policy aligns with the National Skills Qualification Framework set up by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), 2014. National Skill Development Council under MSDE envisions the integration of schools with the skill development programmes by developing a robust skill policy framework for skilling its millions of youth within a time-bound to make them skilled workforce and employable. The Government has identified 40 major sector skills, ranging from automotive, agriculture, security, retail, textiles, handlooms, beauty and wellness to media, entertainment and so forth. Each of these sectors comprising hundreds of sub-trades are under the purview of Sector Skill Councils whose main job is to ensure that skill training needs and its implementation are relevant to industry requirements and market demands. The new policy framework on vocationalization of education is strategically a breakthrough from the previously existing system by allowing flexibility and creativity in its structure, management and delivery through democratization and participation by involving all relevant stakeholders—training institutes, industries, local governments and schools. The policy development is a response to address the given realities of India's rapidly changing economic landscape; youth aspirations for employment and skill competency challenges—national and international.

With our hierarchical consciousness and false perception, we tend to devalue the meaning of vocational education. On the contrary, the main aim of vocational education is to increase the employment potential of young people by imparting appropriate skills and training from early on in life. When skills of different trades, crafts and arts are learned through vocational education with its aesthetic sensibilities, it not only promotes meaningful pedagogy—learning through 'doing' but also prepares an individual to be more productive, joyful, and self-reliant as Gandhi's experiential account at Tolstoy Farm in South Africa reminds us of the great value of vocational education that, "the weak became stronger in the Tolstoy farm and labour proved to be tonic for all".

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At a time when a highly over-populated country like ours is experiencing the spectre of youth unemployment, it's important to rethink our educational practices, and reinvent the possibilities in vocational education for a sustainable living and positive contributions to society.

The National Education Policy, 2020 is a bold step in declaring a sense of urgency of restoring vocational education in its rightful status in school education. The policy recognizes that one vital role of formal education is to impart gainful skills to enable students earn decent income for sustainable livelihood when they enter into adulthood. Currently, India stands at a threshold of demographic divide with the largest young population in the world and is experiencing the spectre of youth unemployment. While unemployment remains high among young population, joblessness has become a bigger challenge for the educated youth. According to a recent study by Srija and Sanghi (2014), India's unemployment rate at usual status among educated youth—graduate and above is 88.4%. While India has witnessed massive expansion of schools, and educational institutes, the increased significance of propelling India's growing economy by addressing its unemployed youth of a momentous scale by providing a range of specific skills training is long felt due.

India's large young population is yet to be equipped with the right kind of job oriented skills. According to various national and international reports, only a minuscule proportion, 5% to 8% of the Indian labour force in the age group of 20-24 years obtained vocational skills through formal means; whereas the percentage of skilled workforce in industrialized countries varies between 60% and 96%. Countries such as the UK, Germany, Australia, Japan, France, and China supported vocational education at the school level on a large scale since the early decades while countries of Latin America started much later in the 1990s. The high proportion of vocationally trained labour-power in these countries is a result of massive and systematic skill interventions at different stages of school education. For example, Germany's world-famous dual system is the largest provider of vocational education and training at the upper secondary level. The system is based on a long tradition of apprenticeships where dual system—general education and firm based specific-training co-exists at the school level. In the UK system, it is during the secondary stage students join vocational education programs in broad industries including tourism, health-care, manufacturing, business, engineering, social care etc. In France, the system is based on streaming secondary students into vocational course and who would later be prepared for entry into the labour market, while