

Fostering Vocational Education among Students through the Lens of National Education Policy 2020

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E-mail: bhimsttc@gmail.com**Abstract**

Education being a major agency of socialization plays a pivotal role in bringing desirable changes in the behaviors of compatriots. In developing nations like India policy must be adopted to cater the luster of education at every corner of the territory so that development of human resource is ensured. Science and technological augmentation along with groundbreaking mastery of industrialization and market-oriented economical influences have fetched a new paradigm in the primordial objectives of education wherein eventual focus should be conferred on training and workforce skill development. So, there is an emergent need of skill-based training that provides professional competency to the youths. Vocational education serves this vigorous purpose with the outreach of which students may be enrolled in this stream and skilled and ingenious workforce may be obtained. Moreover, it will add to the economic prosperity of the country as learning and earning both are possible in vocational set up. The first education policy of the 21st century (NEP, 2020) has proposed to project a profound attention to vocational education by reimagining it through the implementation of National Skill Qualification Framework (2013). An attempt has also been taken in this study to foster the vocational education in the country through the lens of National Education Policy (2020). Some catalyzing measures have been portrayed by considering the present scenario in the landscape of vocational education. Stakeholders should aim at the proposed ways and means to involve more and more students in vocational education to establish a balanced and sustainable development in the country. The socio-economic status in the entire nation as well as the human resources will be developed potentially through the ideal motto 'learn and earn' with congruent vocational education. The impact of vocational education will be more robust on the Indian youths to foment loftier goals vital for a conducive society than the formal education system as the latter is rigid, chronologically graded structured and not flexible.

Keywords- Employment, policy, skill, students, vocational education**Introduction**

Every nation has its intrinsic cogitation to keep the inhabitants in pecuniary opulence and it is very cumbersome for an over-populated country to gratify this volition as the impact of population growth per capita income is very adverse. In developing countries like India, the increase in population has become a liability than asset and it has slowed down the pace of economic development (Agarwal, 2014). Students having Graduation, Masters or more scholastic degrees can prepare themselves very well and are filtered by service or job facilities but the residue population along with under-educated youths envisages myriads of challenges to get any type of financial assurance or occupational safety. In spite of having degrees and bona fide certificates they remain unskilled having scanty experience in productive work and get eliminated from employment. To get rid of this melancholic and morbid status, education must be re-oriented through the philosophy of vocational objectives in such a manner that the potent youths may be involved in their preferred activity zones and the productivity of the nation increases. Moreover, to enjoy the fruits of vocational education it should be redefined in a flexible, synchronous, pertinent, creative and inclusive manner (Rani, 2015).

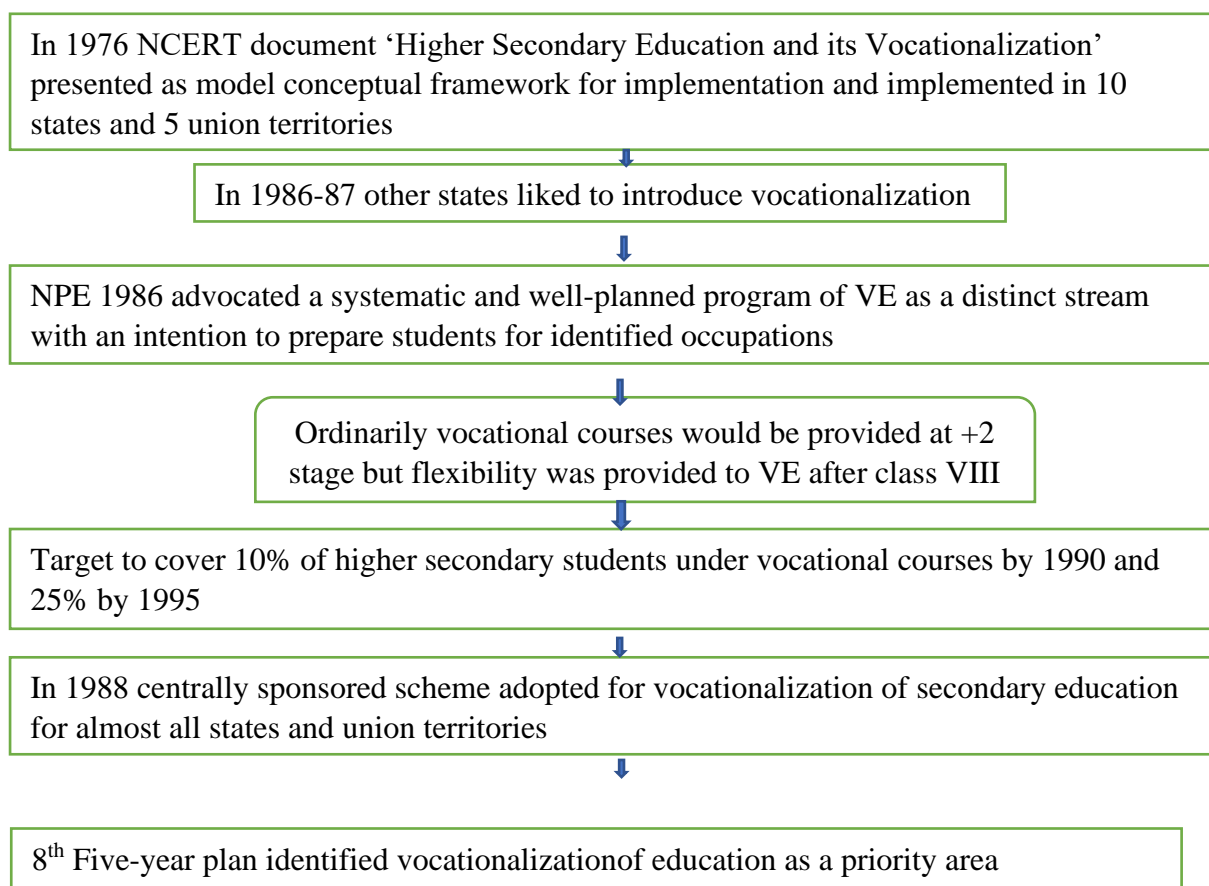
The quality of human life is enriched certainly in any educational system if it incorporates the principles of vocational education as vocation-centered education yields a cohesion with real life experiences by assisting the learners to become more knowledgeable (Bengeri, 2014). The concept of vocational education enables the learners to be equipped with practical training through a need-based curriculum and it entails all the niceties required for comprehensive experience. In the context of rapid industrialization, global marketing technology and economic development it is manifested that the general education system is not condign to accomplish the thriving demands of the diversifying economy. For the socio-economic development of the country, it is necessary to establish and develop more and more industries and technical laboratories but its cherishing can be acquired through the programmes of vocational training in educational institutions which are the principal pathos. The youths of our nation at these secondary and tertiary stage must be the part and parcel of this loftier goals as effective vocationalisation of school education is very badly needed in India (Singh, Grover, Padmanabhan & Chaudhary, 2015). Recently, the National Education Policy (2020) also has aimed to address the many growing developmental imperatives of the nation and put an urgency of the need to hasten the spread of vocational education in India.

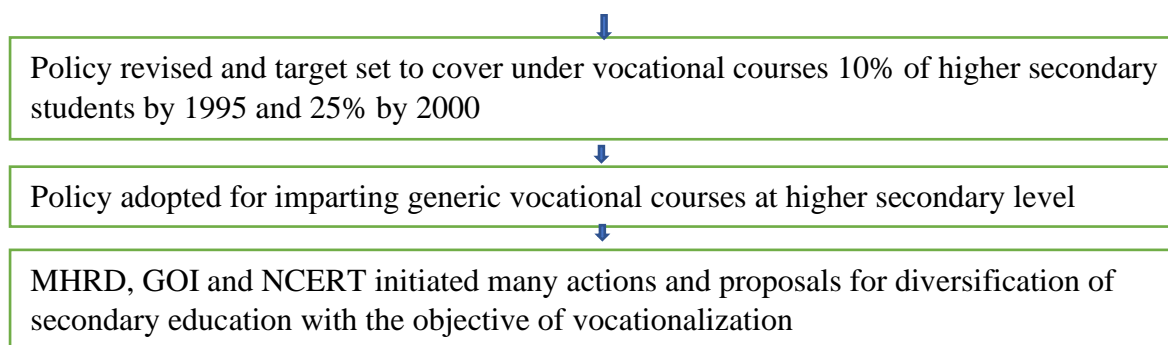
Vocational Education and its Ancient Glance

Vocational education refers to wide range of courses/ skills which help students to get ready for entering employment (Ireland, 2008). It is restricted to preparing young people and adults for working life (Clarke & Winch, 2007). From a school perspective, vocational education teaches people how to work effectively (Byram & Wenrich, 1956).

In ancient India the fundamental tenets of *ShilpaShastra* were followed everywhere like in town planning, stone studded golden stairways, iron pillars, gold coins, jewelry and metal sculptures without any formal education system. During Vedic cultures all practical aspects of knowledge like *hatu-vidya*, *chikitsa-vidya*, *sabda-vidya* etc. which were enveloped as *AparaVidya* comprising of Four Vedas and Six Vedangas inculcated the seed of vocational education among the learners (Kaibarta, 2018). Thus, vocational education has an indispensable genre from the ancient age of India.

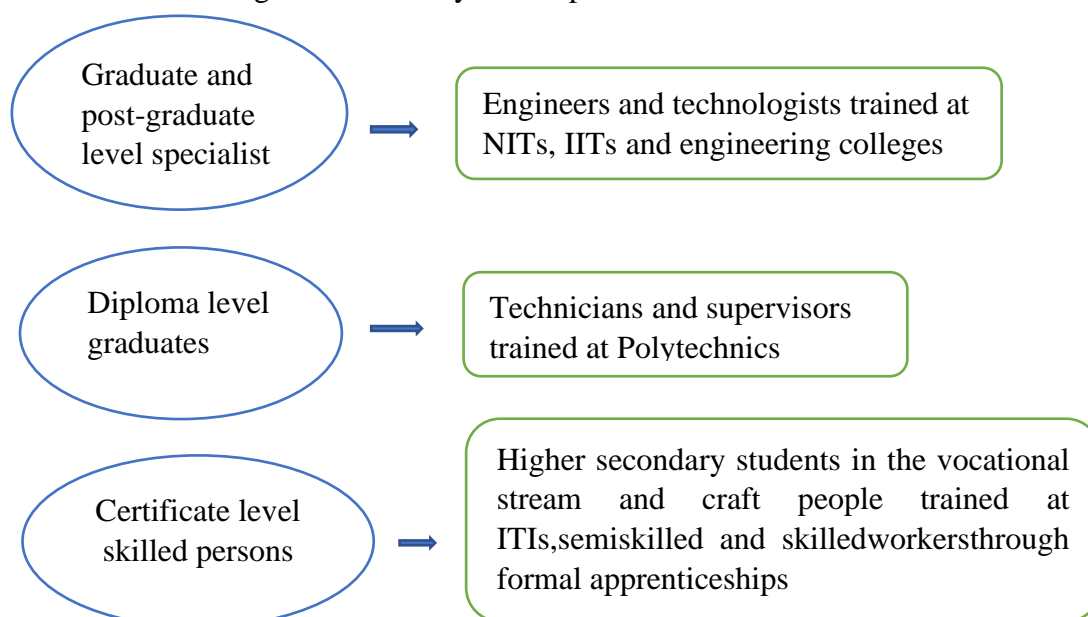
Flow diagram of Vocational Education





Present Scenario of Vocational Education

In present Indian scenario the technical and vocational education and training system develops human resources through a three-tier system depicted below.



NEP (2020, p.43) has recently put forward a very frustrating statistics which is furnished in Table 1.

Table 1: Country-wise workforce receiving vocational education

Sl. No.	Name of country	Workforce in the age group of 19-24 receiving formal vocational education
1	South Korea	96%
2	Germany	75%
3	USA	52%
4	India	Less than 5% as per 12 th Five-Year Plan (2012-2017)

This statistics reveals an exigent need of propagation of vocational education throughout the nation to engage the workforce into their chosen carriers and to strengthen country's employment.

Research Questions

In view of the present status of vocational education in India with the ventures adopted through NEP (2020) this study asserts following research questions.

1. What are the challenges in the progress of vocational education?
2. How can the vocational education be integrated into mainstream education?
3. How can the vocational opportunities be fostered after senior secondary grades?

Methodology

Various secondary sources like research journals, articles, books, websites, e-contents, government documents available in e-platforms and other related documents have been used to get desired information and all information have been analyzed and synthesized to seek for the answers for the highlighted research questions and furnished in a lucid narrative manner.

Key Challenges in the Progress of Vocational Education

The progress of vocational education has been facing myriad of challenges in India. Some major issues may be summarized as follow.

- **Less focused pathways:** Only post-secondary students (Grades XI & XII) and drop outs in Grade VIII and upwards were involved in the recent past of vocational education which is very low in respect of participants involved. Moreover, students do not find well-defined pathways to sustain their chosen vocation in higher education after passing out from Grades XI & XII with vocational subjects. These students also confront problems in the admission criteria for general higher education as the process has not been designed to intake students smoothly from vocational background.
- **Ceased vertical mobility:** Opting for vocational stream instead of mainstream education is realized as inferior and also it seems hugely for the less scholastic learners which have imposed a social status hierarchy. After finishing senior secondary grades in vocational stream students do not have the opportunity to get admitted in higher education and become isolated as 'disadvantaged cluster' compared to mainstream learners and their vertical mobility get refrained and their acquired skills are lost.
- **Paucity of skilled instructors and master trainers:** Shortage of skilled professionals in each course is a great problem in this field as experience-oriented training is more important than knowledge-based information.
- **Lack of vocational institutes:** The number of institutes offering vocational courses in India is not sufficient. Full-fledged progress of vocational education largely depends upon the institutional infrastructure and experienced faculty which is lacking in the present situation.
- **Lack of new skill-based courses:** Recent accrual in science and technology demands more experienced personnel in diverse disciplines but vocational courses can meet the demand only for some selected disciplines. There is a huge gap between demand and supply which requires introduction of some relevant skill-based new vocational courses to meet the need.
- **Rigid regulations:** Present regulations are very rigid in respect of skill up gradation and in switching over to general stream from vocational stream. Students do not have opportunity or flexibility i.e., multiple entry and exit points to taste the flavor of skill-based course before opting a particular stream after passing out secondary or senior secondary examination.
- **Deficient career opportunity:** Students after completing vocational education do not get enormous opportunity in their career progress. All courses are not fully job secured. Especially the certificate level skilled and semi-skilled workers face great challenges to get a job.
- **Outdated centralized curriculum:** The existing vocational curriculum in the entire nation at all three-tier is not updated or not aligned according to the versatility of skill-based sectors. Various industries, government and other sectors are hiring skilled personnel as per their present need and day by day the varieties of technical assistance are increasing. In view of the practical demand an updated centralized version of vocational curriculum is truly essential to meet the demand in diverse technical fields.

NEP (2020) has also put its concerns on the challenges of vocational education and aiming at complete re-imagination of the vocational education with some novel strategic ideas to be implemented.

Action Plan Focused in NEP (2020) for Augmenting Vocational Education

NEP (2020, p.44) has aimed to integrate vocational education into mainstream education in a phased manner with an opportunity for the students to get vocational exposure at middle and secondary school. The proposed action plan is furnished below

- There will be an exposure of at least 50% of learners through school and higher education system to vocational education by 2025.
- Number of students in vocational students will be considered from Gross Enrolment Ratio targets.
- Vocational education will be integrated in all secondary schools over the next decade.
- Collaboration of secondary school will be done with it is Polytechnics and local industry.
- Skill labs will be established in schools to facilitate others.
- Higher Educational Institutes (HEI) will offer vocational education.
- Vocational courses in ODL mode will be explored.
- National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education will be constituted to oversee the effect.
- Different models of vocational education and apprenticeships will be experimented by HEIs.
- Incubation centers will be created in HEIs in partnership with industries.

Ways and means for Fostering Vocational Education among Students

In Indian scenario the vocational stream is kept aside the general stream of education in a passive outlook and a few students who are so-called loathsome in respect of general educational prospect have participated in the vocational courses but a large portion of Indian youths are not willing to opt for the same. National Skill Qualification Framework (2013, p.19), a quality assurance framework has been set up to provide multiple pathways for the progress of vocational education but still the situation is not up to the mark or delighting. Recently, NEP (2020) has bestowed a nascent initiative to make the vocational education grandiloquent. Here some ways and means have been portrayed to foster the vocational education among the students.

- **Increasing student enrollment:** The success of any academic program is ascertained through the outputs. But in vocational education students' enrollment is very low and so is the output. The first and foremost way to boost it up is to increase enrollment of students at all entry grades with a follow up schedule so that output may reach a fruitful target in a phased manner.
- **Establishing a formal structure:** Students, guardians and instructors do not have a lucid formal structure of vocational education to follow. An explicit formal structure with transparent pathways mentioning entry point, exit point, curriculum, opportunity, prospect, participation etc. may serve the purpose. All stakeholders need a clear idea about the course structure and future perspectives.
- **Equivalence of certificate and degrees:** All degrees, certificates and diplomas must be equivalent at all parts of the country. Curriculum as well as basic structure should be similar at all institutes. This will enable all the learners across the nation to compete homogeneously otherwise identical expertise will be treated with different certification and students will lose opportunity.
- **Quality training:** High standard quality training must be ensured at all institutions in the country. Especially there should not be any imparity in quality training offered from government and private institute. Technical expertise, practical knowledge and relevant

updated information must be possessed by the learners to meet all the neoteric demands of industry. Teaching Learning Materials (TLM) should be prepared maintaining national and international standards so that learners do not face any limitation in respect of acquisition of skills.

- **Centralized curriculum:** A fundamental centralized curriculum should be framed and it should be followed at all institutions across the country. However, some sorts of flexibility should be given at the institutional end so that practical experience from local industry or handicrafts may be incorporated to ameliorate skill-based programs.
- **Priority-based training:** Students' priority should be identified at all grades and depending upon their number or age or grade some clusters may be formed for their priority vocational courses. This will motivate the learners to grasp the skills and experiences at their comfort levels.
- **Recognition of prior learning:** Whatever the experiences or technical expertise gained by the learners from formal or informal settings, it must be recognized and they should be brought to the relevant vocational platforms with bridge courses. Moreover, teachers or instructors having prior learning experience from informal backgrounds should be brought to the respective vocational platforms as resource persons with valid procedures. In this recognition there will be no loss of expertise.
- **Multiple entry and exit levels:** In present situation the admission procedures in vocational and general stream of education is very rigid. A proper guideline with multiple entry and exit levels should be employed to ease learners' participation which has also been addressed in NSQF (2013). If the process become flexible then students can enter from general to vocational stream or vice-versa at different grades and this step will surely enhance students' enrollment.
- **Increasing employment opportunity:** The grand success of any course or discipline mostly relies upon the job opportunities available for the participants. Employment opportunities should be enhanced in governments and private sectors at all levels (certificate, diploma, graduate and post graduate levels) with tempt some salary so that students feel free to opt for vocational courses.
- **Assurance of vertical and horizontal mobility:** Curriculum and structure of vocational education should be framed in such a way that the students may get horizontal as well as vertical mobility and their progress should not be stagnant. Assurance of mobility will enhance students' participation.
- **Seasonal internship at local industry:** Middle and secondary school students may be brought to the nearby industry, factories or technical laboratories available in different seasons during the year to acquaint with practical experience. Internship program may be initiated with their prior permissions. This will help learners to gain long desire about the vocational courses and enrollment shall be increased.
- **Increasing experienced faculty:** Rich and experienced faculty at all institutions is the primary criterion for the better progress of vocational education. Recruitment should be done to employ experienced faculties at the institutions to ensure quality training.
- **Availability of vocational courses in ODL mode:** The entire syllabus should be prepared module wise and it should be made available in Open and Distance Learning mode so that in-service people may get the opportunity to enhance their degree or diploma. Blended approach of education may be adopted to facilitate the learners.
- **Eliminating gaps between certificate and employment:** Proper initiatives and measures should be taken for eliminating the gaps between certificates and employment as mere possession of certificate does not guarantee the adhered skills. Certification ought to be done only and only after getting skilled in a particular discipline and employment facility should be ensured at any cost after getting certified.

- **Enhancing coordination among various institutions/departments:** The present scenario of vocational education has been suffering from dissonance among the departments and the impact of this dissonance falls upon the enrolled students. Proper management should be adopted to coordinate the various institutions as an honest coordination makes the pathways more transparent to the students.
- **Enhancing industrial participation:** Participation of industries in the vocational education in direct or indirect manner help the students to get more available practical experience and this will lead to motivation for learning. Stakeholders should arrange and enhance this industrial participation to promote direct learning from the resource labs.
- **Credit transfer framework:** Credit accumulation and transfer system has also been enunciated by NSQF (2013, p.19) which enables learners to move to vocational training from formal education and vice-versa retaining their credit intact. This should be implemented at all grades of the education with a comfortable mobility between general and vocational education.
- **Creating inclusive environment:** Vocational education should be made available with inclusive strategy. Learners with any type of disability may be perfectly able to in some other training. *Dibyang* learners should also be included in the program for the development of human resources.
- **Regular follow up:** A follow up committee should be developed at all levels to guide, monitor and supervise the proposed plan and programs in a regular interval schedule. The outputs of all vocational disciplines should be assessed by the committee in respect of enrollment, performance, certification, satisfaction and employment so as to create a harmonious and sustainable development in vocational education.

Vocational Education as Real Need of the Hour

Technical skills always outweigh the academic knowledge and it can simply be understood through any life experience. If there is a sudden break down in the house hold pipe-line or in the electric circuit or in the television set or in the car engine we must have to call a mechanic/skilled person in the relevant field to get immediate repairing and a person having bookish knowledge and many academic degrees even in the relevant fields has no role to do. Practical knowledge based programs are offered through vocational education.

NEP 2020 has re-imagined vocational education and proposed various action plans which are to be implemented. Vocational education being a need based education it can convert unskilled, inexperienced and low-literate population of the nation into human resources. It can induce a long lasting impact on the socio-economic development through the below-mentioned aspects.

- Vocational education opens the doors for the learners who have dilemma in pursuing general degree education and seeking for jobs.
- This education provides opportunities to the students to master over marketable skills and techniques from the classrooms and apply into the working fields.
- The application of knowledge into hands on activities in this education attracts more and more learners through their intrinsic motivation and vocational fields are becoming more comfortable zones than the formal education sectors.
- Vocational education helps to create independent, responsible, skilled workforce required for every nation.
- The skills obtained through this education are also applicable to foreign markets and this applicability creates an employment opportunities in the foreign counties also.
- Excellence and expertise in some special technical trades brings well-paid and successful career fields even without a college degree.

The acquisition of skills, capabilities and competencies associated with vocational education helps the individual to adapt with real working world and secures the future of the individual on their own feet. They need not to ponder about their career if they are skilled and competent. So, vocational education should be fostered among the students to make them self-reliant. This education indeed a real need of the hour as the learners possess self-efficacy about their intrinsic abilities which eventually guides for the roadmap to success.

Conclusion

Impetuous advancement in science and technology and an extensive impact of industrialization has created an environment which demands myriads of technically skilled personnel nationally and internationally. Vocational curriculum in the entire nation should be re-designed accordingly for bridging the demand and supply gaps with highly skilled workers. NEP (2020) has proposed for reimagining the vocational education through implementation of NSQF(2013). Stakeholders at all levels should come forward to implement the aforementioned ways and means to mould Indian youths with ample skills and dexterities in modern genres so as to enrich employment opportunities and worthier use of human resources.

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