

The Role Open and Distance Learning in Vocational Education and Training in India

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Abstract

In this paper we have reviewed the present status of vocational education and training programmes in India. We have examined the role of open and distance learning (ODL) system in providing effective and dynamic vocational education and training in the country. We also included IGNOU's experience in launching and effectively delivering of a vocational training programme developed for the work force working for footwear sector to improve their skills. Such ODL based model of vocational education and training programme has great importance and relevance in countries like India where there is an urgent need of providing training to a large number of untrained work force at different levels for improve overall their skills and enable them to be part of the productive force in fast growing Indian economy.

Introduction

Over the past decades, there has been a noticeable growth in distance education around the world. This is very much evident from the increasing enrolment in Open Distance Learning (ODL) institutions (Cavanaugh, 2005 and Fozdar & Kumar, 2006). ODL institutions are not only imparting education as an alternative to the formal system i.e. education in conventional courses/programmes, but also in areas such as vocational and technical, and continuing education, teacher education and even in high technology based education (UNESCO, 2002 and Bourne *et al*, 2005). Open distance learning has also made some contributions in vocational and technical education (Mehrotra & Sacheti, 2005 and). The vocational and technical education is one of the important issues of Human Rights. This is the area where distance education can be used extensively to provide education that can prepare skilled workforce for the world to do productive work. The distance education also has potential to reach to un-reached and even marginalised and excluded groups. It can provide vocational and technical education and engage them in income-generating livelihood. In this globalize world, it well known fact that skill training enhance productivity sustains competitiveness in the global economy (Mishra, 1994 and World Bank, 2008). Keeping this in mind Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is offering many programmes which are in the category of vocational and technical education and continuing education for the improving skills capacity building of adult learners. One such programme is for the preparing work force for the footwear sector. This programme provides effective and efficient services in the footwear sector. This is highly skill oriented programme and involves intensive practical work. This programme would

have a bearing on national development via employment generation and by production of world class products. Beside IGNOU Institute like Footwear Design and Development Institute (FDDI), Indian Institute of Leather Products (IILP), Central Footwear Training Institute (CFTI) and many other governments run institutes and some private institutes supporting this programme.

In this paper we have reviewed the present status of vocational education and training programmes in India. We have also examined the role of open and distance learning (ODL) system in providing effective and dynamic vocational education and training. Paper is ended with the IGNOU's experience in launching and delivery of a vocational training programme developed for the work force working for footwear sector to improve their skills.

Status of Vocational Education in India

There are two commonly used terms in India for the vocational education system one is vocational education and other vocational training. Vocational education is referred specifically to vocational courses offered in school at the level of class 11 and 12 under a centrally sponsored scheme termed 'Vocationalization of Secondary Education'. Vocational training on the other hand broadly refers to certificate level craft training and is open to students who leave school after completing anywhere from class 8-12. Programmes offered under the Craftsmen Training Scheme (CTS) and operated by Industrial Training Institute (ITIs), Polytechnics and Industrial Training Centres (ITCs). This scheme falls within the purview of the Director General of Employment and Training (DGET), under the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE)

The Vocational Education Program (VEP) was started in 1976-77 under the programme of Vocationalisation of Higher Secondary Education in general education institutions. The National Working Group on Vocationalisation of Education (Kulandaiswamy Committee, 1985) reviewed the Vocational Education Programme in the country and developed guidelines for the expansion of the programme. Its recommendations led to the development of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) on Vocationalisation of Secondary Education, which started being implemented from 1988. Its purpose is to "enhance individual employability, reduce the mismatch between demand and supply of skilled manpower and provide an alternative for those pursuing higher education without particular interest or purpose (Mehrotra and Sacheti, 2005)". Vocational education falls under the purview of the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD). The All-India Council for Vocational Education (AICVE), under MHRD, is responsible for planning, guiding and coordinating the program at the national level. State Councils for Vocational Education (SCVE) perform similar functions at the state level. Through this scheme many courses were offered in six major disciplines:

- Agriculture (for example: veterinary pharmacist/technician; watershed management)
- Business and commerce (for example: taxation practices; stenography)
- Humanities (for example: classical dance; entrepreneurship)
- Engineering and technology (for example: lineman; cost effective building technology)
- Home science (for example: textile design; gerontology)
- Health and para-medical skills (for example: x-ray technician; health/sanitary inspector)

National Policy on Education 1986 (NEP, 1986) and its Programme of Action (1992) aimed at diverting 10 per cent of the students at higher secondary level to the vocational stream by 1995 and 25 per cent by the year 2000. But at present 5 per cent of student choose this option. This figure far below when it is compared with other countries (Table 1). This is because mainly of the conceptual problems, managerial problems and resource constraints for more than 25 years. As per the report of the Working Group for the Revision of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Vocationalisation of Secondary Education, NCERT, 1998, vocational education also viewed as an inferior option, it suffers from poor infrastructure, obsolete equipments, untrained or under-qualified teachers (often on part-time basis), outdated and inflexible courses, lack of vertical or lateral mobility, absence of linkage with the 'world of work', lack of a credible evaluation, accreditation and apprenticeship system, and finally employability. For building an effective and dynamic programme of vocational education, National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCERT, 2005) has suggested that vocational education programme should be implemented in mission mode, involving

establishment of separate Vocational Education Institutions and Centres from the level of village cluster and blocks to sub-divisional/districts, towns and metropolitan area. This also talked about providing better infrastructure at VEP centres, there should be the provision of training of teachers and VEP curriculum should be reviewed and updated from time to time to meet the challenges of a globalised economy.

Table 1: International Comparisons on the Size of Vocational Secondary Education

Country	Secondary enrollment ratio	Number of students (thousands)	Vocational Education share
Russia	88	6,277	60
China	52	15,300	55
Indonesia	43	4,109	33
Malaysia	59	533	11
Korea	93	2,060	31
Chile	70	652	40
Mexico	58	-	12
South Africa	77	-	1

Source: Various Sources

The Prime Minister of India in his Independence Day address on 2006 indicated of setting up Vocational Education Mission and a Task Force to improve vocational education system in India so that high economic growth through increased productivity can be maintained. For implementing this special provision has been made in both present 10th plan and coming 11th plan of the country.

Unlike vocational education, vocational training programs in India fall outside the formal schooling cycle. As discussed earlier vocational training is imparted through ITIs and polytechnics. Vocational training courses are generally institution-based with varying entry requirements as well as course durations (based on the course). The proportion of practical to theoretical instruction in vocational training programs is also higher than in vocational education. Under the Constitution of India, the Central Government and the state governments share responsibility for vocational training. At the national level vocational training is managed by the National Council for Vocational Training advises the central government on vocational training. Two tripartite bodies, the Central Apprenticeship Council, a statutory body and the National Council of Vocational Training, a non-statutory body, operate as advisory tripartite institutions. The NCVT is chaired by the Minister of Labor & Employment (MoLE). Members represent central and state government departments, employers' and workers' organizations, professional bodies, the All India Council for Technical Education, representatives from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the All India Women's Organization, etc. Its functions include:

- establishing and awarding National Trade Certificates;
- prescribing training standards;
- arranging trade tests and developing standards for National Trade Certificates; and
- recognizing training institutions for the purpose of issuing National Trade Certificates and laying down conditions for such recognition.

Administrative responsibility is held by the Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGET), located within the MoLE. ITIs and ITCs operate under the guidance of DGET, which formulates policies and lays down standards and technical requirements such developing curricula, instructor training, and skills testing. It governs a number of specialized training-related institutions. At the state level vocational training is managed by State Councils for Vocational Training (SCVTs), as well as Trade Committees, have been established to assist the NCVT. They advise state governments on training policy and coordinate vocational training in each state. State government departments deliver vocational training

through: (a) the ITIs that operationally report to and are funded by them, and (b) the ITCs that are privately funded and managed (some of these get financial support from the state governments).

Although vocational training students may do relatively better in the labor market than their counterpart vocational education students, but their labor market outcomes are still poor (World Bank, 2002). But still there is a miss match between required training and acquired training students are getting from ITIs and Polytechnic. A Karnataka study found that employers were dissatisfied with graduates from ITIs. Employers felt that ITIs produce graduates who are not needed by industry and who lack basic scientific/technical understanding of their trades (World Bank, 2002). Major findings of the study are:

- Rapid developments in technology have made many occupations and trades - such as turners, machinists and grinders, and draftsmen - obsolete, while others need to be modified.
- Many trades have lost their relevance in the face of automation. Engineering trades (fitting, electronics, electrical and mechanical, welding, tool and die-making, and turning) are in high demand from students but syllabi are out-dated and trainers are out of touch with changes in technology and work organization.
- Courses should not be based on narrow specializations. Technicians need to be trained through integrated courses dealing with two or more skills and be capable of managing three or four operations at a time.

In brief those institutions which are providing vocational trainings are not yet geared up to meet the challenges of the fast growing global economy and they are also not aligned to the needs of industry. The poor outcomes arise owing to this vocational training system facing many constraints. These include a lack of accountability and responsiveness to the needs of the labor market, limited involvement of the private sector in managing training, poor coordination among those managing the sector, and limited flexibility for institutions. Many of these problems have been outlined in the Government's own assessment of the system.

To improve vocational training programme there is an immediate need of reforms. Working Group on Secondary and Vocational Education for 11th plan has suggested some plans along with higher budget allocations like competency based curricula should be reviewed and updated as per the present need of the industry, professional training of all teachers and trainers, a labour market information system should be established to collect necessary information on the skill requirements and skilled manpower needs for different sector of economy.

Role of Open and Distance Learning in Vocational Education

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is increasingly becoming popular because of its flexibility and learner friendly approach, particularly to those who could not get access to the formal education system. Distance education is more cost effective and can take place while continuing full-time employment (Moran and Rumble, 2004). People who live in remote areas find that ODL permits them to enroll in programmes, which otherwise would not be available to them. At present beside Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) there are 13 Open Universities, 150 Distance Mode Institutes under conventional system. Only IGNOU is imparting higher education to 15 per cent of total population who is joining higher education in the country (Profile, 2008). Workplace learning is also expanding rapidly in organizations, boosted by online learning opportunities. Web-based training or E-training, an innovative approach to distance learning, can be effectively utilized for delivering knowledge to individuals any where in the country. If the developing countries want to enhance their international competitiveness for the well being of their people, they must address the concerns for vocational education and training. The path for economic development and prosperity through the skills training and ODL as the modality for vocational education and training allows vast number of people, hitherto unreached to take advantage of education and training opportunities (Mishra, 2002). The changing skills demands due to competition and rapid market changes, especially in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), calls for provision of continuous learning and training opportunities through Government, Non-government and Private Institutions. There is a need for a paradigm shift in the training approaches in the formal and informal

sector for developing skills attuned to the needs of the society. All this can be not achieved by formal system.

Over 90 percent of employment in India is in the 'informal' sector, with employees working in relatively low productivity jobs. Provision of appropriate skills may thus be an important intervention to increasing the productivity of this workforce. This sector can not approach the formal system. Here open and distance learning mode institution can play important role by providing flexible and cost effective vocational education. For example, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) (offering 85 courses through over 700 providers recognised by the NIOS). Similarly IGNOU along with some other Open Universities also offering successfully many programmes of vocational in nature. Presently IGNOU lays much emphasis on skill, capacity building, training, employability, life-long education and continuing education. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system now is recognised and accepted as an important mode for achieving many of these targets. In addition to contributing to social and economic development, ODL plays a decisive role in the creation of a knowledge-based society.

About the Programme

Leather, and Leather products as a sector has been given considerable alteration by the Government of India at various levels due to the inherent strength and features which are popular to India is not merely an industrial sector as compared to other industries but the implications of what happens in this industry that have very far reaching social and economic ramifications in view of a significant section of deprived segment of population working in the sector due to historical reasons.

There exists a large raw materials base. India ranks first among the major livestock holding countries in the world. Leather industry is the fourth largest foreign exchange earner in the country. Apart from this, leather industry has tremendous potential for employment generation. Its potential for employment generation among weaker sections of the society and women is immense.

However, despite being a traditional industry in India and reasonably good performance on the export front, the Indian leather industry accounts for very small global market, the need for a larger share of the global market exists.

The Indian Leather Industry which for centuries has developed as traditional crafts is at present under the process of transformation into a technology based vibrant export oriented industry. Besides its eminent position in the country's economy as a foreign exchange earner, the leather industries significant contribution is a provider of employment to a larger No. of people, majority of who are from rural base and weaker sections of the society.

- The Footwear Industry is a significant segment of the Leather Industry in India.
- India ranks second among the footwear producing countries next to China.
- The industry is labour intensive and is concentrated in the small and cottage industry sectors. While leather shoes and uppers are concentrated in large-scale units, the sandals and chappals are produced in the household and cottage sector.
- The major production centres India are Chennai, Ranipet, Ambur in Tamil Nadu, Mumbai in Maharashtra, Kanpur in UP., Jalandhar in Punjab, Agra and Delhi.
- India in itself has a huge domestic market, which is largely untapped.
- The Indian footwear industry is provided with institutional infrastructure support through premier institutions like Central Leather Research Institute, Chennai, Footwear Design and Development Institute, Noida, National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi, etc. in the areas of technological development, design and product development and human resource development.
- The availability of abundant raw material base, large domestic market and the opportunity to cater to world markets makes India an attractive destination for technology and investments.
- Following leading institutes in India are engaged in imparting training to personnel in the footwear manufacturing as per the requirement of the trade and industry.

These certificate programmes have been designed to provide the know-how and skills needed to work as a worker/operator, supervisor and engineer in Footwear Industry. It will train you to provide effective and efficient services in the footwear sectors. It is a highly skill oriented programme and involves intensive practical work.

Programme Objectives

- Upgradation Educational Qualification of Learners.
- Opportunities for in-house training in industries for continuing education.
- Promoting the educational well-being of the community.
- Offering need based academic programmes.
- Employment related continuing education programmes arriving at increases sole potential and economic advantages to the learners.

This programme can be taken by those who are already employed (directly or indirectly in the Footwear Industry and State and Central Footwear Organisations) or intend to make a career in Footwear Industry.

Programme Delivery

Like other programmes of IGNOU, the programme under investigation also follows a multimedia approach in instruction. It comprises: self-learning material, supporting audio/video programmes, teleconferencing, counselling sessions, seminar-based and workshop-based activities and added feature of Personal Contact Programme (PCP) to meet specific learner needs. PCPs are conducted at five Training Centres of partner Institutions and Programme Study Centres of IGNOU. Participation of learners in the personal contact programme is compulsory. Teleconferencing is also used to provide greater clarity and understanding to the learners.

Summary

It is very clear that for the growing economy like India we need skilled and trained work force. Our formal education system can not provide desired number of skilled workers. In such situation alternative open and distance learning model has the tremendous scope to tackle such problems. ODL effective vocational education and training system can provide The quality learning outcomes at teaching institution cannot be achieved system is now well recognised for effective teaching learning process. Specialty in Developing countries where there is a need of providing training to large number of workers and with limited recourses. In such situation similar ODL models could play important and viable role in improving over all skills of workers.

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