

Vocational Education and Training: the role of ODL

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Abstract- There has been a tremendous focus on vocational education in the five year plans. It has off late caught the fancy of the academicians, policy makers, etc. The Twelfth Five Year Plan has specially laid its emphasis on skill education in its Approach paper.

However, the reality check is that, given a choice between the two options for education: general education and vocational education, the tilt has been more towards general education than vocational and compared to the western countries the participation rate of students in the vocational courses are very less. Due to globalization and the growth of knowledge economy, there is a tough competition everywhere and therefore the only mantra to success is knowledge, skill and training. The focus is more on working skills and expertise in a particular field of one's own. Hence vocational education and training can prove to be double edged weapon to be used against unemployment problem and also producing skilled technicians and workers for the global market. Vocational Education has been defined as any form of education, the purpose of which is to fit an individual to pursue effectively a recognized profitable employment, whether pursued for wages or otherwise. Earlier vocational education had no formal base and hence it was imparted in such a way that the learner acquired the skill by observation and manually handling things.

Distance and Open Learning has emerged as a most viable option in higher education sector. In Assam, we have two dual mode Universities, one State Open University and IGNOU, beside some private institutions and "foreign universities" offering off campus education through their study center in the state.

The present paper aims to view the status of the vocational education and training as provided through distance mode by the distance educational Institutes. The paper has its own limitations, as it deals with the vocational education at the tertiary level only. The paper will lay emphasis on the potentialities of such education and training for the youths of Assam and the role that distance education can play to give them a dignified life by equipping them with the required skill.

Index Terms- distance education, vocational education, Indira Gandhi National Open University, KKHSOU

I. INTRODUCTION

"Education offers the best strategy to break the cycle of poverty, misery and violence."

____ Sir John Daniel (2005)

Former VC of UK Open University

Let us have a look at this:

According to the Country's Eleventh National Development Plan, the number of poor people in India comes close to 300 million. Almost one third of its population lives below the poverty line and 30% face poverty in rural areas. Poverty is more chronic among the marginalized sections like the Scheduled castes and tribes, and geographically Assam is hit by poverty, as it is prone to floods and other natural disasters (IFAD, 2010).

Several other studies and policy documents have shown there is a serious mismatch between the workforce requirements and the availability of skilled workers to sustain the economic growth rate. One estimate indicates that there may be an urgent need for a 20 million increase in skilled worker by 2015 or training of 1.5 million people every year (CII McKinsey Report "Made in India: the next big manufacturing export story" (Oct, 2004) (NCEUS, 2007). The ASSOCHAM reports points out that the demand for skilled labor will soon increase and 10 to 15 million jobs are expected to be created in India by next year, in which 75 per cent of these new jobs will require vocational training.

Employment in manufacturing is however expected to grow at 4 per cent while construction and transport & communication are expected to grow at around 8.2 per cent and 7.6 per cent, respectively. The projected increase in total labour force during 11th Plan is 45 million. As against this, 58 million employment opportunities are targeted to be created during the Eleventh Plan. This is expected to reduce unemployment rate to below 5 per cent (Labour Bureau Report, 2009-10).

As the world becomes small and globally localized, education is the only means for a better standard of living and to build a sustainable economy in today's knowledge based society. Very often, when given a choice, people tend to move towards a general educational qualification rather than a specialized form of education. There may be varied reason for this and most importantly due to the lack of interest shown by people towards it.

Vocational education or Vocational Education and Training have also been termed called Career and Technical education. Despite the fact that the Indian educational system is the third largest in the whole world, it has yet to turn its focus on "practical aspects of education". The ASSOCHAM Report reveals the callous attitude of the government to this aspect of education. It reports that comparatively to the Western nations, the enrolment of students in India in the age group 15-25 is only 2%. The number of institutes and programmes is also inadequate. Though there is capacity for enrolling in the vocational course, yet the course have yet to be utilized. Besides the lack of encouragement from the Government, the perception of the common people towards Vocational Education and Training (VET) is not satisfactory for attracting the attention of the youths or the employers.

The present form of educational system in India includes the primary education, secondary, senior secondary and higher education. Vocational Education remains out of the purview of the formal mode of education and hence it is not blended within the curriculum framework of the mainstream education. Hence, preference in terms of education leads for attaining degree/certificates/diplomas in such formal stages only. The step motherly attitude towards vocational education has ultimately led to the “wastage of human resources” that could have been able to reap more profits for the State and the nation.

II. DEFINITION AND HISTORICAL BASE

According to the World Employment Report (1998), the term ‘skill’ refers to an acquired and practiced for performing a job in a competent manner. “It is a multidimensional concept as most jobs require a combination of skills for adequate performance, ranging from physical abilities to cognitive and interpersonal skills.” According to the Planning Commission’s Committee on India Vision 2020 “skill” can also be perceived as the ability to direct human energy efficiently to achieve desired goals (NCEUS, 2009).

Vocational education implies that aspect of education which prepares a person to enter the “world of work”. ‘Technical Education’ is defined under AICTE Act 1987, which includes programme of education, research and training, engineering, technology, architecture, town planning, management, pharmacy and applied arts & crafts.

UNESCO defines Vocational Education as education designed to prepare skilled personnel at lower level of qualifications for one or group of occupations, traders or jobs. In South Africa and UK, Vet is known as “further education and training”, whereas in Australia and Pacific it is termed as “Technical and Further Education or TAFE and “Technical and Vocational education and Training” respectively.

Vocational India in India existed long back from the time of the Aryan settlement. The literary sources, of the Vedic ages points to the presence of vocational education. The earliest form of education was mainly religious in nature; however there were certain form of education that fulfilled the non-religious aspect of the life during the Vedic Ages. The earliest subjects that were practical in nature were the course in Ayurvedic medicine, Military Science and other arts and crafts. These subjects were termed as Silpas or kalas. The Milinda Panha gives a list of 19 Silpas, while the contemporary Buddhist and Brahmanical put the total kalas at 64. The traditional learning system of “Gurukul” was prevalent and thus the pupils learnt the skill of the practical subject by observing the master’s talent, secrets and skill. The collective interests of the arts and crafts were administered by Guilds and Shrenis.

As time passed, vocational education came to be associated with a particular caste and thus formed a caste based profession. A member of a particular profession passed on his skill to his son and this continued, like the lohaars (ironsmiths), the chamaars, etc. With the coming of the British and Industrialization, the vocational form of education could not meet the challenges and hence, arts, crafts, etc all disappeared from the Indian scene.

Vocational Education and Training was first introduced in its formal shape in the year 1976-77 under the higher Secondary Programme as given by NCERT. The Kothari Commission had

emphasized on Vocational Education at lower (11-16yrs) and higher secondary stage (17-18yrs). A Centrally Sponsored scheme for Vocational Education was introduced in 1988 and was later revised by NCERT in 1992.

Women’s Vocational Training Programme is also being offered for skill training by the State governments at the state level through a network of Women ITI’s, private women ITI’s and wings in General ITI’s.

A. Attitude and Perception towards

Disturbingly, not many seem to be interested in pursuing vocational courses. The major lot of the youth population goes for higher education. The reasons vary from individual perspective to societal pressures. There is a common mindset among the people that vocational courses are specially tailor made for those who secure poor marks in their high school exams. Even though the private sector has entered the vocational education system, yet the enrolment has yet to be satisfying. As VET programme falls outside the purview of the formal schooling cycle and hence it fails to excite the learners to pursue it.

When the VE programme was launched in 1976-77, the progress was slow due to lack of trained personnel, infrastructure and equipment, etc.

Society also has a contributing factor in detracting the students for vocational course. Parents are usually seen to tell their wards to prepare for a career as a doctor, engineer, software professional, etc. Thus, vocational education finds no takers. Even the employers are not happy with the products of the ITI’s or the Polytechnics. The students coming out from the ITI’s are not properly trained and hence perform qualitatively very poorly.

B. Status of Vocational education

Vocational Education comes under the joint purview of the Ministry of Human Resource Development and the Ministry of Labour. There are also 20 Ministries and Departments which run TVET Programmes. The All India Council for Vocational Education (AICVE) is responsible for planning, guiding and coordinating the programmes. In the States, it is the responsibility of the State Council for Vocational education and Trade Communities to assist the NCVT or the National council for Vocation Education. The NCVT manages the training aspect and advises the Central government on vocational measures. Under the Constitution of India the Central and the State Government share the responsibility of Vocational training.

The State (Assam) has 9 State Government Polytechnics and 2 Junior Technical schools in Assam under the supervision and control of the Director of Technical education, Assam. The state Polytechnics of Assam are affiliated to SCTE which advises the Government on all technical educational matter to the govt. In Assam, the All India Council for Technical Education has approved of 11 institutes for providing Vocational courses. The number of total State affiliated ITI’s is 27 in Assam, of which 23 have been verified. There are 2 privately run ITI’s too. There are 3 Government ITI’s for women.

III. IMPORTANCE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The liberalizing economy which started in India from the 1990s has brought a tremendous impact on the policies regarding the welfare of the people. However, no such impact fell on

Assam. Basically an agricultural state, with no industrial stronghold and no sign of foreign investment, the state has to depend more on its small service, and micro enterprise, agricultural sectors for providing employment to its people. NABARD has recently listed certain sectors that have the capacity to generate employment like the Handloom and Textile, Veterinary, Fish Rearing and processing, etc.

The importance of Vocational Education has been never felt as it is than today. The rapid change in economic structure of the market, which lays emphasis on knowledge and professionalism, has driven people to acquire and upgrade their technical skills to improve their performance as well compete in the global world.

Vocational Education will not only help the educated sections of the society to enhance their skill for employment, improve their job mobility and efficiency of labour, but it will also enable to illiterate section of the society to train themselves for self-employment and financial independence. The scope for Vocational Education has become urgent with the opening up of several placements in the industrial, service, manufacturing, farm/ non farms sector, etc. Similarly, Micro Enterprise Development and MNCs have emerged as the highest absorbers of employees. Thus such opportunity should be surely never given amiss.

Job generating service sectors (January-November 2010)

Sectors	Growth in %age as compare to the 2009	Share in %age
IT/ Enabled	31.9	40.3
Academics	85.5	12.4
Engineering	110.4	5.6
Insurance	19.9	5.0
Hospitality	38.2	3.3
Biotechnology	46.0	2.7
HR	16.7	2.5

Source: ASSOCHAM website

IV. DISTANCE EDUCATION OR LEARNING

The emergence of DE is a phenomenon with its expansion growing rapidly. Earlier deemed as “education for the drop outs and the idiots”, today with its developing methodologies in pedagogy and use of ICT, “it has acquired a new form of legitimacy” (Perraton, 2000).

Distance Education has undergone many changes with the use of technologies and so has the definitions. Some of the most referred definitions are given by some of the best world class practitioners of Distance Education.

Holmberg has defined it as covering “the various aspects forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with the students at lecture rooms or on the same premises”. To him, Distance Education implies the separation of space and time as well between the learner and the instructor.

Desmond Keegan defined it as a quasi-permanent separation of the teacher and the learner throughout the learning process, as well as the quasi-permanent absence of the learner group throughout the learning process.

Distance Learning in its earliest form was termed as Correspondence study, Postal Course, Home Study, etc. However, with the use of Technology, Distance education is no longer a correspondence course but it has been termed as Open and Distance Learning, Distance Learning, Virtual Learning, etc. Today we are more familiar to concepts like E-learning, virtual learning, Virtual University, etc.

The success of Distance Education is very much manifested in the number of enrolments in the DE Institutes. Today India boasts itself of the largest Distance Educational system in the globe with 13 state open universities, a national Open University (IGNOU) and 140 correspondence course institutes delivering distance education through dual mode establishments.

The following table reveals the rate of enrolment in Distance Education in India

Year	Conventional system	% of enrolment	ODL System	% of enrolment	Total Enrolment in Higher Education
1975-76	24,26,109	97.42	64,210	2.58	24,90,319
1980-81	27,52,437	94.30	1,66,428	5.70	29,18,865
1985-86	36,05,029	90.40	3,82,719	9.60	39,87,288
1990-91	49,24,868	88.53	6,38,231	11.47	55,63,099
1995-96	64,25,624	88.23	857,317	11.77	73,00,941
2000-01	82,68,717	83.26	16,06,736	16.27	98,75,453
2006-07	1,05,16,639	72.00	35,78,444	28.00	1,46,06,444
2007-08	1,19,39,246	68.00	38,20,128	32.00	1,57,59,374

Sources: Various UGC Annual Reports and DEC Reports (2007-08) Sharma D.C. (2005) Management of DE, as estimated by UGC.

V. DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ASSAM

Distance Education started in Assam with the external examinations or private examinations that the students opted for due to their inability to sit for regular education. Correspondence courses started as an extension of the earlier external system. With the setting up of a Regional Centre in Guwahati in 1996,

Distance Education made its way to the soil of Assam. Prior to this IGNOU had introduced in service personnel training in Shillong, NEHU in 1986. (Patwari, Dowarah, et al, 2005).

The State has a few numbers of Distance Education Institute and Open Universities. One is the State Open University in Assam, the Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University which started functioning from 2006. Besides the National Open University (IGNOU), there are two dual mode Universities

(IDOL, G.U. and DDE, D.U.), one state Open University (Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University), there are many private institutes too, catering to the interests of the students. The role of these DE Institutions in promoting Vocational Education is described in brief.

IGNOU: It was with the establishment of an IGNOU Regional Centre at Shillong, that Distance Education took a formal shape. In Assam, IGNOU established its first Regional centre in Assam at Guwahati in 1996. Starting off with a small number of students, IGNOU has become one of the most sought after destination for the distance learners. In 1998 the number of students was 3610 and in 2009 it was 15,263. The number of study centre has also increased manifesting the popularity and the desire of the education lovers in the Region. The University is functioning from 170 study centers' in Assam, with Guwahati as the main Regional Centre. The University provides 338 programmes for its learners. Most of the students opt for traditional subjects.

The table reveals the number of students against the programmes for the year 2009-10.

Programme	Year	Admission
Ph.D	2009-10	28
PG Diploma	2009-10	103
BPP	2009-10	20379
Bachelor Degree	2009-10	14,312
Certificate	2009-10	529
TOTAL	2009-10	35351

Source: Manjulika and Srivastava, University News, 2010

VI. VOCATIONAL PROGRAMMES OF IGNOU

The Guwahati Regional Centre of IGNOU ha launched a Short term based competency Development programmes sponsored by EDNERU. So far, the programme has benifitted 800 youth. Anyone who has passed their class 8 exam can apply for it. IGNOU has also launched some need based course, particularly certificate course in Diabetes care of Community Workers, Interior Design, and Handmade Paper Items. It also organizes Vocational Training Porgrammes in Mobile Repairing, Conventional Lathe, Soft Skill, Developemnt Programmes, Motor Cycle Repairs, Screen Printing, and Fundamentals of Computer Application, Water harvesting, Integrated Farming System and Leadership Development Programmes. Most of the Programmes have been launched as a joint venture. The certtifiacte course in Motor Cycle Maintenance and Repair has been conducted by IGNOU in close collaboration with Tool Room and TrainignCentre and Hero Honda Ltd. Similarly, IGNOU Institute of Vocational education and Training has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MOc) with Central Institute of Plastic Engineering and Technology (CIPET) to organize skill development Programme of 3 weeks and a six month noncredit course. In Assam, the course is being started at the CIPET centre, Guwahati.

VII. KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

The University started to function from December 2006. It was established by an act of 2005 enacted by the State Legislature. The motto of the University itself demonstrates the purpose of the University, "Education beyond Barriers". The University aims to reach mostly the people from disadvantaged situations (whether place, race, sex, religion, ethnicity, etc).

The University offers Bachelor, BPP, PG Diploma, Certificate, and PhD programme to its learners. For the further development towards the cause of distance education, research and teaching assistantship under the KKHSOU-DEC collaborative project have been launched, whereby the scholars are required to assist in preparing and designing course materials as well as do research in the field of distance education. The number of RTA's in the University amounts to 6. The University will be soon launching Master's programme in social sciences as well as professional disciplines.

The University aims to give more emphasis on the vocational training of the students of the region. Training programmes are also held in different types of trades at separate places, at ITI's and polytechnics. The technical institutes are assigned by the University to conduct programmes. The training programmes are mostly in the areas of Weilding, Plumbing, Pump Installation, housewiring, 2/3 wheeler maintainance and repairing, computer application, beautician, AC motor rewinding, 4 wheeler servicing, repairing of domestic appliances, RCC masonry, etc. The skill and development training has been a priority for the University in order to build a sustainable economy by imparting vocational skills. There also has been some inititatives taken for introducing 1 year BPP programme as well certificate course on Scientific Piggery farming (CSPF), Commercial Goat Rearing (CCGR) and Commercial Layer farming (CCLF) and Commercial Duck Farming (CCDF). The University recently started a programme for training Security Guards. There were 25 students in the very first batch. The course will focus on basic education, law, first aid, fire fighting, IPC, etc. This programme is sure to gain more attention and more enrolments as the need for security guards has risen over the time.

The University has made a smart start with the use of Information and Communication Technology. The University has a multimedia studio with latest cameras and editing machineries. The studio is used for the production of audio and audio-video study materials. The University has created milestone with the launch of the first Community radio, Jnan Taranga in 2010. The radio broadcasts educational programmes as well as programmes for the welfare of the community, also regarding certain issues for the community awareness. Similarly, the university also provides for mobile services through which the learners can get university news and announcements. A Toll Free Interactive Voice Response System has been launched and it operates 24 * 7. The number is 1800 345 3613, which was launched on January 1, 2011 by Honourable Governor of Assam, Shri. J.B Patnaik. The University also has a multimedia studio which is used to produce audio video study materials for the distant learners of the University.

A. Suggestions

Distance Education has gained popularity and recognition throughout the world and more so in the developing country due to:

- Cost effectiveness (low fees)
- Flexibility in its approach (entry and exit)
- Student centric
- A strong network of student support services
- Wide Access and Coverage

These make Distance Education a viable mode of education for all. It suits the need of the learner, despite his/her geographical location, race, age, religion, caste etc.

Vocational Education is not attractive to the people and the attitude of the people towards it has been very negative and rather “derogatory” as they consider it to mean “manual labour” and hence it finds no takers.

B. A few suggestions being forwarded

- Vocational education and training should be made more attractive in order to capture the eyes of the learners.
- The Public Private Partnership (PPP) scheme should be enforced and encouraged in the ODL system.
- The VET programme should be made compulsory in the Secondary stage of Education, as it is the last stage of education in formal mode for most of the students.
- The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) can also serve as a starting ground for giving vocational education.
- VET through Distance Education can be more attractive by providing the students with state of the art infrastructural facilities, latest equipment's, trained personnel, etc.
- The ODL system can play a more effective role in providing vocational education, if it can provide for scholarships and also placements/internships.
- NGO's can also work together with the Distance Education Institutes for providing vocational course and programmes.
- The ODL institutes can also provide training for the trainers of the ITI's, ITC's through its courses.
- The Open Universities can make use of radio, television, internet, etc to provide vocational courses through audio and audio visual study materials. Such steps will motivate the learner and keep him engaged.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Dr. A.P.J. Kalam had announced the shifting of focus from agricultural sector to the manufacturing and service sector, as very vital, for providing employment to millions of the people in India, in his Vision 2020 document. This means that more and more people should be trained up for the new economic splurge.

The National Knowledge Commission Report (2006-09), has also acknowledged vocational education as an important element of the nation's education initiative. In its recommendation, it has also proposed for a National Institute for Vocational Education Planning and Development, linking of Vocational Education with the mainstream education and also advised the Government to spend 10-15% of its total expenditure on education, especially vocational education. It recommends for replacing the term “vocational education” and re-branding it to “skill development” as the former gives the impression of manual labour while the term “skill development” gives a more positive edge. The Eleventh Plan has focused on inclusive growth to reduce poverty

and aims to provide an opportunity to restructure policies. It has recognized the role of Distance Learning and hence in its report it has suggested for using Distance Education as a significant delivery model for imparting Vocational Education.

Looking into the scenario of the state the role of Distance Education is very significant for the socio-economic development of the region. Distance Education can no longer be considered as supplementary form of education in comparison to the traditional mode of higher education. Open Universities and DE Institutes have now a greater responsibility for producing a large number of productive human capitals. It has the power to empower the youth of the society, whether they belong to any remote areas or to any ethnic origins. Prof. Swaraj Basu in his article, “Open University – An Agent of Change”, has discussed the potentiality of the OU for offering vocational courses. He was of the opinion that there has to be an interface between the OU and the industry and involvement of professionals should be encouraged for preparing the curriculum, policy regarding vocational education. He suggested that the apprenticeship programme the conventional mode should be extended to the distance mode.

The Prime Minister, too, in his speech in 2006 announced for the setting up of a Vocational Education Mission. However, such announcements and speeches will be of no use, if steps for its implementation are not taken up. So does the Twelfth Five Year Plan which has focused on the vocational and skill educational development.

“Higher education is no longer a luxury; it is essential to national, social and economic development” ----- UNESCO

“..... A poor country cannot afford health and education, but without them it cannot even develop such economic resources as it has....” ----- W.M.Macmillan (1938)

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The preferred spelling of the word “acknowledgment” in American English is without an “e” after the “g.” Use the singular heading even if you have many acknowledgments.

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