



## Skillful futures: Examining challenges and prospects of vocational education in Jammu and Kashmir

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### Abstract

The economic foundation of a nation heavily relies on its youth, and their ability to secure promising employment is largely contingent on the caliber of education and training received before entering the workforce. Recognizing skilled labor as a pivotal component for societal and economic progress, research and policy literature consistently underscore its significance. The accessibility and quality of vocational education gain heightened importance during periods of elevated youth unemployment rates. While experts and policymakers acknowledge the importance of vocational education in facilitating the transition from school to the workforce, divergent perspectives on its meanings and goals persist. Achieving a harmonious balance between national growth and youth employment necessitates the development of a robust vocational education system. Government endeavors to augment the quality of human resources, particularly in cultivating skilled labor, have been significantly bolstered by the integration of vocational education.

This paper aims to explore the initiatives and alternative approaches adopted by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir for successful vocational education implementation at the school level. It also seeks to understand the challenges faced in the implantation of these initiatives.

**Keywords:** Vocational education, government initiatives, skilled labor, economic, human resources

### Introduction

India's economic landscape is under intense scrutiny, frequently earning the label of "jobless growth". Despite the commendable average annual GDP growth rate of 6% from 2000 to 2019, the parallel indicators of employment rate and job growth rate saw only marginal increases of 0.8% and 2%, respectively. Within the diverse array of states and union territories, Jammu & Kashmir stands out with the second-highest unemployment rate, signaling a pressing need for targeted interventions (Wagey & Bhat, 2021) [17].

In response to this economic conundrum, there is a growing acknowledgment among government bodies and policymakers of the imperative to overhaul the entire educational framework, with a particular focus on nurturing vocational education and training (VET) initiatives. This strategic pivot aims not only to tackle the severe unemployment predicament but also to harness the full potential of India's demographic dividend in the current scenario (Ganie, 2021) [7].

The urgency in addressing the unemployment crisis is underscored by the significant disparities in economic growth and employment trends. While the GDP shows resilience with its consistent upward trajectory, the translation of this growth into meaningful job opportunities has been lackluster. Jammu & Kashmir's plight, with its noteworthy unemployment rates, serves as a microcosm of the larger macroeconomic challenge.

### Vocational education in India

Vocational education emerges as a beacon of hope in this narrative, demonstrating its transformative impact on the lives of young individuals across the country. Through specialized programs, students are empowered to leverage

their unique talents and gifts, fostering not only skill development but also nurturing traits of leadership and self-confidence. Vocational education in India is a critical component of the nation's educational framework, designed to address the growing demand for skilled professionals across various industries. This form of education diverges from the conventional academic model, placing a strong emphasis on practical skills, hands-on training, and industry-specific knowledge. Its primary objective is to equip individuals with the expertise necessary to seamlessly integrate into the workforce, fostering a direct connection between education and employability.

In India, vocational education encompasses a wide array of fields, including but not limited to healthcare, information technology, agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, and service sectors. The curriculum is crafted to meet the specific skill requirements of these industries, ensuring that students graduate with a practical skill set that is directly applicable to real-world scenarios.

One of the key strengths of vocational education lies in its ability to cater to the diverse talents and aspirations of the student population. It provides an alternative pathway for individuals who may not find a traditional academic approach suitable for their career goals. By offering specialized courses and training programs, vocational education opens up avenues for those inclined towards practical learning and hands-on experiences.

The Government of India has recognized the transformative potential of vocational education and has implemented various policies and initiatives to enhance its reach and impact. The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the National Council on Skill Development (NCS) were established to promote skill development and

vocational training across the country. Additionally, the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) was introduced to standardize skill levels and provide a seamless transition between vocational education and mainstream education.

In recent years, there has been a concerted effort to integrate vocational education into the mainstream education system. The National Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 advocates for the incorporation of vocational courses at all levels of education, from schools to higher education institutions. This integration aims to create a more holistic and inclusive educational ecosystem that addresses the diverse needs of the student community.

### History of Vocational Education in India

In the annals of educational evolution, the year 1988 witnessed a pivotal moment with the introduction of the Secondary Vocationalization Scheme under the aegis of Central Sponsored Education, specifically targeting grades XI and XII. The seamless execution of this scheme traversed both formal and non-formal sectors, with State/UTs, NGOs, and VAs playing instrumental roles in its implementation. The contours of this initiative were outlined in the National Policy on Education of 1986, casting a visionary net over the educational landscape with the primary goals of diversifying opportunities, enhancing employability, bridging the gap in skilled labor supply and demand, and providing a higher education alternative for those opting for vocational pursuits over conventional studies.

A watershed moment in vocational education unfolded in 2008 with the establishment of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the National Council on Skill Development (NCSDE). These entities were envisioned to be catalysts in the provisioning of vocational and skill training, with a particular focus on the vast demographic of freelancers, casual workers, and NEETs (not in education, employment, and training).

Cognizant of the need for cohesive frameworks to guide vocational education, the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) was greenlit in 2013, with its overarching objective being the creation of progressive pathways for VET students. The year 2014 witnessed the establishment of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), a pivotal step geared towards expediting the nationwide expansion of skill training.

Addressing the persistent issue of skill mismatch, the year 2015 ushered in the National Policy of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (NPSDE). Operating under the expansive umbrella of this policy are several programs collectively contributing to the training of over 10 million individuals annually (Gaine, 2022). As we navigate the dynamic landscape of vocational education, these initiatives stand as testaments to the nation's commitment to equipping its populace with skills aligned with the demands of the contemporary job market.

The year 2020 marked a significant juncture with the proposal of the National Education Policy (NEP), which advocated for the integration of Vocational Education and Training (VET) into the mainstream education system across all educational institutions, spanning from the school level to higher education. This progressive stride is poised to reshape the educational paradigm, fostering a more holistic and inclusive approach that recognizes and values

the diverse talents and aspirations of the burgeoning student population.

### Vocational Education in Jammu & Kashmir

Vocational education in Jammu and Kashmir represents a vital aspect of the region's educational landscape, addressing the unique socio-economic challenges and opportunities prevalent in the area. The erstwhile state has recognized the transformative potential of vocational education in empowering its youth and contributing to both individual and regional development. Vocational education in Jammu and Kashmir can serve as a catalyst for socio-economic development, offering students a pathway to not only academic success but also meaningful and fulfilling careers. The region's commitment to expanding and enhancing vocational education underscores its recognition of the pivotal role such programs play in shaping a skilled and empowered workforce for the future.

In recent years, Jammu and Kashmir has tried to work harder in implementing vocational education initiatives. The introduction of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Vocationalisation of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education (CSS-VSHE) in 2016-17 marked a significant milestone. This scheme aimed to bridge the gap between traditional education and real-world skills by incorporating vocational training into the curriculum of select schools. Sectors such as healthcare, tourism, retail, IT/ITeS, agriculture, telecom, media & entertainment, beauty & wellness, physical education & sports, security, automobile, apparel made-ups and home furnishings, electronics & communications, multiskilling, and plumbing have been included, offering students a diverse range of vocational options.

Building on the success and momentum gained in the inaugural year, the scheme underwent a significant expansion in 2017-18. An additional 220 schools were integrated into the framework, accompanied by the introduction of six new trades. These included Agriculture, Telecom, Media & Entertainment, Beauty & Wellness, Physical Education & Sports, and Security. This strategic augmentation broadened the spectrum of vocational education, offering students a diverse array of specialized fields to explore and excel in. The subsequent academic year of 2018-19 witnessed yet another milestone as the CSS-VSHE expanded its footprint to an additional 220 schools. Five new trades were incorporated into the curriculum, namely Automobile, Apparel Made Ups and Home Furnishings, Electronics & Communications, Multi-skilling, and Plumbing. This deliberate diversification aimed to cater to the evolving demands of the job market, ensuring that students were equipped with skills that were not only relevant but also aligned with emerging industry trends. With each passing year, additional schools and trades have been integrated, broadening the spectrum of vocational education opportunities available to students in Jammu and Kashmir. A network of Vocational Training Partners and Vocational Trainers supports the implementation of vocational education schemes in the region. These individuals play a crucial role in imparting practical skills, fostering hands-on experience, and ensuring that students are well-prepared for the challenges and opportunities in their chosen fields.

At the heart of this initiative lies the commitment to providing students with meaningful choices. Each

participating school offers two trade options, fostering a personalized learning experience for the enrolled 40 students at each level. To facilitate the seamless implementation of CSS-VSHE in these 553 schools, a network of 12 Vocational Training Partners was strategically selected by a committee constituted by the School Education Department. Moreover, the on-ground execution of the vocational education scheme is bolstered by the presence of 1106 Vocational Trainers actively engaged in imparting essential skills and knowledge across the 553 schools. This dedicated cadre of educators plays a pivotal role in shaping the vocational education landscape, ensuring that students not only receive theoretical insights but also gain hands-on experience in their chosen fields.

**Objectives of the Study**

1. To study the status of vocational education in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. To explore the various initiatives taken by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir for the proper implementation of vocational education.
3. To study the major issues and challenges in the field of vocational education in J&K schools.

**Methodology**

The present study is qualitative in nature. Primary data was collected from the Department of School Education, J&K government and secondary data was collected from various sources that included research papers, articles, official websites and reports.

**Results and Discussions**

**J&K government’s initiatives for vocational education**

As part of its vocational education initiative, the Jammu and Kashmir has established 803 Vocational Labs in the approved Government Schools. Vocational labs are specialized spaces within educational institutions that are equipped with facilities and resources to provide hands-on

training and practical experience in various vocational trades. These labs are an integral part of the vocational education system, aiming to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world skills. Out of these, 626 Labs were established in J&K during 2020-21. These vocational labs in the Union Territory provide training in the area of agriculture, automotives, beauty and wellness, IT sector, plumbing, retail, tourism and hospitality, made ups and home, electronics & hardware and telecommunication. These labs were established for providing training among young students so that they are able to prepare themselves for a better future. Such vocational labs are providing a better job opportunity especially for girls and work in the field of empowerment of the women. Vocational education is promoted at the secondary level of the school. At this level, students are able to choose the specific field where they can prepare themselves for particular occupation. In J&K, there are about 141 vocational labs of healthcare occupation, 122 vocational labs of tourism and hospitality, 115 vocational labs of IT sector, 104 vocational labs of retail job, 70 vocational labs of agricultural sector, 50 vocational labs of beauty & wellness and electronics & hardware, 46 vocational labs of automotive, 44 vocational labs of made ups & home, 41 vocational labs of plumbing job and 20 vocational labs of telecommunicator sector. All these labs are work for promoting vocational education in different sectors and prepare youth for varieties of job.

At higher education level, Jammu and Kashmir is home to 32 polytechnics with a student enrollment of over 7,000 and 59 technical, industrial, art, and craft schools with an intake capacity of approximately 15,763. (Kotwal, 2022) <sup>[9]</sup>. Although J&K’s educational system isn’t very good, but still there has been significant progress in raising educational standards as evidenced by the growth of schools and higher education institutions. In Jammu and Kashmir, there are more than 200 private universities, more than 140 government degree programs, and 12 universities.

**Table 1:** List of Vocational Labs in the different Districts of Jammu and Kashmir

S No	District	Trades											Grand Total	
		Agriculture	Apparels, Made ups & Home Furnishing	Automotive	Beauty & Wellness	Electronics & Hardware	Healthcare	IT/ITeS	Plumbing	Retail	Telecommunication	Tourism and Hospitality		
1	Anantnag	4	4	4	3	2	8	6		1		5	18	55
2	Bandipora	1			9	6	10	5	1	2		2	8	44
3	Baramula	4	8		3		5	6	7	6			18	57
4	Budgam	3	3	1		4	2	5	5	5		7	9	44
5	Doda	2	4	1	1	2	9	6	1	5			3	34
6	Ganderbal	2	2			1	5	5		1			7	23
7	Jammu		3	4	2	1	3	6		11				30
9	Kathua		3	2	10	1	8	6	2	5			5	42
10	Kishtwar		1	4	1	4	11	5	2	2			1	31
11	Kulgam	1	1	2	3	4	6	6	1	1		2	7	34
12	Kupwara	19	2	11	2	1	6	6	9	12		2	14	84
14	Poonch	10	1	10	1	12	10	6	6				13	69
15	Pulwama	3	1		1	3	2	6	1	4		2	6	29
16	Rajouri	15	4	1	2	1	18	6	3	11			2	63
17	Ramban	4	2	2	2	4	6	6		5			4	35
18	Reasi	1	2	1	3	3	10	6	2	8				36
19	Samba			1			11	6		2				20
20	Shopian			1		1	1	5		2			7	17
21	Srinagar			1				6		14				21
22	Udhampur	1	3		7		10	6	1	7				35
	Grand Total	70	44	46	50	50	141	115	41	104		20	122	803

The above mentioned table provides a comprehensive overview of trade distribution across different districts and sectors in the region. Anantnag exhibits a diverse trade portfolio, with notable contributions in Healthcare (8) and Tourism and Hospitality (18). Bandipora is characterized by a strong presence in Automotive (9) and Electronics & Hardware (10). Baramula stands out with significant trades in Healthcare (5) and Tourism and Hospitality (18). Budgam displays a balanced distribution across various sectors. Doda emphasizes Healthcare (9) among its trades. Ganderbal is notable for trades in IT/ITeS (5) and Tourism and Hospitality (7). Jammu showcases diversity, with a focus on IT/ITeS (6) and Tourism and Hospitality (11). Kathua has a major presence in Automotive (10) and Electronics & Hardware (8). Kishtwar stands out in Automotive (11) and Healthcare (5). Kupwara dominates in Agriculture (19) and has a substantial presence in various sectors. Poonch excels in Healthcare (10) and Tourism and Hospitality (13). Pulwama focuses on IT/ITeS (6) and Tourism and Hospitality (4). Rajouri displays strength in Agriculture (15) and Healthcare (18). Ramban exhibits a balanced distribution, with notable trades in Healthcare (6) and Tourism and Hospitality (4). Reasi demonstrates diversity, with a significant focus on Healthcare (10). Samba is primarily involved in IT/ITeS (11). Shopian has a notable presence in Apparels, Made ups & Home Furnishing (5) and Tourism and Hospitality (7). Srinagar is prominently involved in Tourism and Hospitality (14). Udhampur displays balanced trades, with a focus on Agriculture (7) and IT/ITeS (10). Overall, the highest total trades are in IT/ITeS (141), followed by Tourism and Hospitality (122) and Agriculture (70), contributing to a grand total of 803 trades across all districts and sectors.

**J&K Skill Development Mission**

J&K Skill Development Mission was started by the Department of Skill Development, J&K. This initiative, which was specifically created for J&K, not only address the significant skills gap among young people but also result in profitable jobs. The Department started out with 7 ITIs and 2 Polytechnics. Over time, those numbers increased to 60 ITIs (54 in the public sector and 6 in the private sector) and 32 Polytechnics (24 in the public sector and 8 in the private sector). Out of 24 Government Polytechnics, one is operated by Baba Gulam Shah Badshah University (GBSBU) Rajouri and one is operated by the Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) Awantipora, Pulwama.

**Vocational educational at the level of Teachers**

Full-time contractual teachers/trainers and the guest faculty has been employed for the successful implementation of the vocational education at the school level. The main stakeholders in vocational education system are Vocational Coordinator/Principal in consultation along with the school management committee, regular and contractual teachers, industry to which the school is linked and the guest faculty who fall within the specified norms and guidelines. The Trainers are appointed through the Vocational Training Partners (VTP) through a proper selection process. About 1106 trainers are deputed in various high and higher Secondary schools of Jammu and Kashmir to impart vocational skills among students. Out of which, 566 trainers

are deputed in Jammu division and 540 trainers are deputed in Kashmir division.

**Table 2:** List of Number of Trainers Appointed in the Different Trades in J&K.

Trade	Jammu	Kashmir	Total
Agriculture	33	37	70
Apparels, Madeups & Home Furnishing	23	21	44
Automotives	26	20	46
Beauty and Wellness	29	21	51
Electronic and Hardware	28	22	50
Healthcare	96	45	144
IT/ITeS	189	159	366
Media &Entertainment	13	3	16
Multi skilling	4	5	9
Physical Education and Sports	7	8	15
Plumbing	17	24	41
Retail	56	48	106
Security	17	13	30
Telecommunication	0	20	20
Tourism and hospitality	28	94	136
Grand total	566	540	1106

The table mentioned above provides an overview of the number of trainers appointed in various trades in Jammu and Kashmir. In terms of total trainers appointed, IT/ITeS has the highest count with 366, followed by Healthcare with 144, and Tourism and Hospitality with 136. Agriculture has 70 trainers, Apparels, Madeups & Home Furnishing has 44, and Automotives has 46. Notably, the IT/ITeS sector has a substantial presence in both Jammu and Kashmir, with 189 and 159 trainers, respectively. Healthcare has a higher number of trainers in Jammu (96) compared to Kashmir (45). Similarly, Tourism and Hospitality has more trainers in Kashmir (94) than in Jammu (28). Telecommunication has 20 trainers in Kashmir, while there are none in Jammu. The grand total of trainers appointed across all trades is 1106, reflecting the significant emphasis on skill development and training programs in the region.

**Covid Response & vocational education**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the J&K govt. focused on maintaining current trends and establishing new benchmarks for the general advancement of remote learning, collectively strengthening the workforce's ability to provide the highest quality of vocational education outputs. New strategies were devised based on data and results helped in enhancing the key competencies to overcome obstacles that parents, instructors, and students faced. Virtual platforms were used for providing the comprehensive presentation among students with major focus on the engagement of the parents of the students. Whatsapp groups of all the trainers were created. During pandemic, such groups were very helpful for creating a knowledge pool as all the VTs were sharing their ideas and innovations related to vocational education. Online classes through different digital platforms like Google meet, zoom app etc were taken during lockdown. Trainers were circulating hand written easy notes and class assignments among their students through these Whatsapp groups. Videos and Audios related to the topics were also circulated. Trainers also made conference calls with the students to clear their doubts.

### Knowledge and skill updation for trainers

There are regular workshops and training programs conducted for all Vocational Trainers. Expert Resource Persons from Training Partners, Industry and Educational Institutions are invited for conducting the technical sessions. Seminars and workshops are very helpful for upgrading the knowledge of the trainers. Continuous professional development is very necessary for improving the standards of the vocational education.

### Good practices with the aid of technology

The trainers follow a uniform model for curriculum delivery. The interactions between the instructor and the students take place primarily in the context of practical learning, not theoretical knowledge. With the support of JK Samgra Shiksha, smart classrooms have been implemented in 85% of government institutions, transforming educational pedagogy and assisting instructors in imparting to students the practical components of vocational education. The audio-visual format of Learning has improved students' capacity for learning, and as a result, the percentage of J&K students passing vocational courses has increased. There is a regular interaction between trainers and community members. Sarpanches are also involved for increasing the enrolment of the students in the vocational courses. PTMs are also arranged by the schools for briefing the benefits of the scheme.

### Vocational education coverage

In Jammu and Kashmir, Vocational education covers only 50% of schools. To boost the number of students enrolled in class 11<sup>th</sup> at these institutions, high schools are selected within the boundaries of the same block where higher secondary schools currently offer vocational education.

### Placement and job opportunities for students

After completing the vocational course by the students in the specific trade, Govt. of J&K offers various jobs for the youth that suits their skills. There is a regularly conduct of mega job fair UDAAN organized by the Labour and Employment Department where skilled person gets a job opportunity.

### Issues and challenges in vocational education in J&K Schools.

The efficiency and widespread adoption of vocational education in schools in Jammu and Kashmir are confronted by several pressing challenges. The efficiency and broad adoption of vocational education in J&K schools are hampered by a number of issues. Some of them are:

- **Lack of awareness:** The primary challenge impeding the efficient adoption of vocational education in J&K schools revolves around the widespread lack of awareness. This significant obstacle stems from a general lack of knowledge and an unfavorable attitude toward vocational education among parents, students, and the broader public. In contrast to traditional academic education, vocational education is often viewed as a secondary alternative, hindering its acceptance and integration into mainstream educational discourse.
- **Lack of Quality and Standardization of vocational education:** Another critical issue hindering the progress

of vocational education in J&K schools is the significant disparity in the quality and standardization of vocational programs across different states and schools. This disparity arises from the absence of a well-defined curriculum, standardized training materials, and a shortage of qualified instructors. As a result, the educational experience varies widely, impacting the overall effectiveness of vocational training programs.

- **Lack of Infrastructure:** The inadequate provision of resources and infrastructure poses a substantial challenge to vocational training in many J&K schools. Insufficient workshops, laboratories, and equipment hinder the efficient delivery of practical skills training. This lack of infrastructure creates a barrier to providing students with hands-on experiences crucial for their skill development.
- **Shortage of Trained Instructors:** Addressing the shortage of qualified vocational instructors and trainers is a major challenge in the field. The demand for skilled specialists to instruct in specific trades and provide practical training outstrips the available supply. This scarcity poses a significant bottleneck in the effective implementation of vocational education programs.
- **No increase in remuneration of Vocational Trainers:** There has been no increase in the remuneration of vocational trainers in J&K since 2016. This indicates a shortage of professionals in the field of vocational training. This scarcity is a significant challenge, as an insufficient number of trainers can limit the capacity to deliver effective vocational education programs. Adequate trainer-to-student ratios are crucial for providing personalized attention and ensuring the quality of skill development. The remuneration of vocational trainers has not seen an increase since 2016. This stagnation in remuneration raises concerns about the financial incentives and job satisfaction for vocational trainers. If remuneration remains stagnant over an extended period, it can adversely affect the motivation, morale, and overall job commitment of trainers. This, in turn, may contribute to high turnover rates and further exacerbate the shortage of skilled trainers. The shortage of vocational trainers, coupled with stagnant remuneration, can have a direct impact on the quality of vocational education imparted to students. Skilled and motivated trainers are essential for delivering up-to-date content, incorporating industry best practices, and providing hands-on experiences. When trainers are demotivated due to stagnant remuneration, the overall quality of education may suffer, affecting the preparedness of students for the workforce.
- **Relevance of Courses:** Vocational training curricula occasionally fall short in reflecting the dynamic needs of local labour markets and industry demands. The result is that graduates may not be adequately prepared for real-world employment opportunities, highlighting the necessity for a more responsive and industry-aligned approach in curriculum development. There is an unavailability of books and curriculum for various job roles in the schools of J&K.

- **Stigma and Norms of Society:** Societal standards and persistent stigma, particularly towards certain career sectors, pose a significant barrier to students, especially girls, pursuing vocational education. Biases and entrenched gender norms can discourage individuals from exploring specific job pathways, limiting their potential and perpetuating societal stereotypes.
- **Limited Career Guidance:** The absence of comprehensive career guidance and counseling services in many schools of J&K contributes to uninformed decision-making among students. Without adequate direction, students may lack awareness of the diverse professional opportunities available to them, potentially leading to suboptimal career choices.
- **Disparities Between Rural and Urban Areas:** About 72.62% population of J&K live in the rural areas. There is a large educational gap experienced by the rural students. Such educational disparities between rural and urban areas exacerbate the challenges in delivering vocational education. Limited resources and opportunities for vocational training in rural schools widen the gap, creating inequalities in access and hindering the overall development of vocational skills.
- **Integration with Mainstream Education:** Effectively integrating vocational education with traditional academic education remains a formidable challenge. Striking a balance between the two forms of schooling requires careful planning, coordination, and systemic changes to ensure a seamless and complementary educational experience for students.
- **Industry Linkages:** Establishing strong connections with local companies and industries is crucial for vocational education programs. These linkages facilitate internships, apprenticeships, and job placements, providing students with invaluable real-world experience essential for their future careers.
- **Lack of Funding:** Inadequate financing and budget allocation for vocational education programs contribute to a shortage of resources, hindering the expansion and diversification of career options. A lack of funding limits the scope and effectiveness of vocational training initiatives.
- **Certification of various courses:** The absence of well-specified standardized assessment and certification procedures for vocational courses poses challenges in how employers perceive occupational qualifications. Clear and recognized certification processes are essential for validating the skills acquired through vocational education and enhancing employability in the job market.
- **Evaluation system:** The absence of a provision for conducting practical assessments poses a notable challenge to the assessment and evaluation system in Jammu and Kashmir's bi-annual examinations. This limitation inhibits a comprehensive evaluation of students' practical skills, which are often a fundamental

component of vocational education. The unavailability of practical assessments hampers the holistic measurement of students' capabilities, potentially overlooking crucial aspects of their vocational proficiency. Addressing this issue calls for a reevaluation of the assessment framework, introducing mechanisms that accommodate practical evaluations alongside theoretical examinations. This adjustment would contribute to a more thorough and meaningful evaluation of students enrolled in vocational education programs in Jammu and Kashmir.

- **Delay in the issuance of certificate:** The delay in the issuance of course completion certificates, jointly issued by the Staff Selection Commission (SSC) and the Jammu and Kashmir State Board of School Education (JKBOSE), presents a significant administrative challenge. This delay has practical implications for students who have successfully completed vocational courses, as timely certification is crucial for employment opportunities and further educational pursuits.
- **Less number of schools equipped:** The limited provision of vocational courses in Jammu and Kashmir is a critical challenge, with only 50% of schools in the region offering such programs. This points to a significant gap in the accessibility of vocational education, potentially depriving a substantial portion of students of the opportunity to pursue skill-centric pathways. The unequal distribution of these courses highlights the need for a more widespread and inclusive implementation of vocational education across schools in Jammu and Kashmir.

### Conclusions and Recommendation

Vocational education, as opposed to professions, is the training for a particular trade or career. The practical application of acquired abilities is the main focus. More practical, career-focused instruction is given to pupils. It prepares the students for the future and provide opportunity to explore and develop potential career goals. Academic studies are the best way to recognize the usefulness of the vocational education such education is helpful in developing work ethics, communication skills, earning power, status in the society as well as feelings of the self-worth. J&K's youth have a lot of potential to utilize their talent in a channelised way. Vocational education along with traditional and indigenous knowledge should be promoted in the institutes so that there will be an availability of better job opportunity among aspiring youth at national as well as international level.

A coordinated effort by the government, academic institutions, and industry players is needed to strengthen vocational education in Jammu and Kashmir. There is need to conduct comprehensive awareness campaigns targeting parents, students, and the broader public to dispel misconceptions about vocational education and highlight the value and significance of vocational pathways in fostering diverse career opportunities. Implementation of initiatives to challenge societal norms and stigmas associated with specific career sectors, particularly those affecting the choices of female students are needed besides promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities in vocational education.

A well developed, well-defined and standardized vocational education curriculum that aligns with industry is needed. This should include clear learning outcomes, training materials, and guidelines to ensure uniformity and quality across different states and schools. We also need to ensure that vocational training curricula are regularly updated to align with the dynamic needs of local labor markets and industry demands. Industry partnerships can provide valuable input into curriculum development. Strengthen connections with local companies and industries to facilitate internships, apprenticeships, and job placements for vocational students. Industry linkages provide real-world exposure and enhance employability.

As J&K lacks in related infrastructure for vocational education, invest in improving infrastructure, including workshops, laboratories, and equipment, to facilitate hands-on training is required. Adequate resources are essential for providing practical skills training efficiently.

The J&K government needs to address the shortage of trained vocational instructors by implementing programs to train and develop skilled professionals. Additionally, revisit the remuneration structure to attract and retain qualified trainers. Integration of comprehensive career guidance and counseling services into school programs to inform students about diverse professional opportunities is also need of the hour. This will empower students to make informed career decisions.

To sum up, to fortify vocational education, the J&K government should focus on strategically integrating vocational education with academic streams, necessitating policy changes for a seamless educational experience, ensuring adequate funds to overcome shortages, vital for the growth and effectiveness of vocational training programs, implementing clear and recognized assessment procedures for vocational courses, enhancing the value of occupational qualifications in the job market, enhancing access to vocational education materials, ensuring availability on the PSSCIVE website for diverse job roles, streamlining Certification Processes and expediting certification by improving coordination between SSC and JKBOSE, crucial for students' career progression. Also, the number of schools offering vocational courses should be increased, ensuring a more inclusive implementation for enhanced accessibility and skill development opportunities.

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