



Vocational education in Assam: An analysis of implementation challenges

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Abstract

Education in its true sense plays a crucial role in preparing individuals to become knowledgeable, skilled, productive, and economically self-reliant members of society. It serves as a pathway for the holistic development of individuals and enables them to contribute effectively to the socio-economic progress of a nation. Although India is endowed with abundant natural resources and has significant potential for industrial development, a large proportion of educated youth continue to face difficulties in securing appropriate employment opportunities. One of the major reasons behind this situation is the gap between theoretical education and the practical skills required in the labour market. The existing education system often focuses more on academic knowledge while giving comparatively less emphasis to technical and vocational skills. In this context, vocational education has emerged as an important component of the education system that can equip students with practical knowledge, technical competencies, and employment-oriented skills. Vocational education helps in preparing trained manpower that can meet the demands of various industries and sectors of the economy. It also promotes self-employment and entrepreneurship, thereby contributing to the reduction of unemployment and the overall socio-economic development of the country. The present study aims to examine the importance and challenges of implementing vocational education within the educational system. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from relevant stakeholders, while secondary data were gathered from books, reports, policy documents, and research studies related to vocational education. The findings of the study highlight the need for strengthening vocational education in order to enhance skill development, improve employability, and promote sustainable economic growth.

Keywords: NEP 2020, vocational education, development

Introduction

Vocational education has long been recognized as an essential component of an effective education system, although its significance has often been overlooked in mainstream academic discourse. The roots of vocational learning in India can be traced back to ancient times when occupational roles and skills were closely associated with traditional social and economic structures. During that period, individuals commonly inherited occupations that were linked to their family or community traditions. In a broader sense, vocation refers to a specific occupation or profession for which an individual is trained or feels naturally inclined. Vocational education, therefore, focuses on equipping learners with practical knowledge, technical competencies, and professional skills required for particular occupations.

International organizations have also emphasized the importance of vocational education in modern educational systems. According to the UNESCO, vocational education encompasses those elements of the educational process that combine general education with the study of technology and applied sciences, along with the development of practical skills, attitudes, and knowledge relevant to different occupational sectors. In this sense, vocational education not only prepares individuals for employment but also contributes to the development of productive human resources capable of supporting economic and social progress.

The prosperity and advancement of a nation largely depend on how effectively it utilizes its human and material resources. Industrial development, technological innovation, and economic growth require a workforce that is both educated and skilled. In a country like India, which

possesses a vast population and significant human resource potential, the availability of trained and technically competent manpower is crucial for sustainable development. However, the country's education system has historically emphasized theoretical learning more than practical skill development, which has created a gap between education and employment opportunities. As a result, many educated individuals find it difficult to secure suitable jobs due to the lack of appropriate vocational and technical training.

An effective education system must therefore strike a balance between academic knowledge and skill-based training. Both general education and vocational education should complement each other in fostering the comprehensive development of individuals. From a psychological perspective, learners differ widely in terms of their abilities, interests, attitudes, and intellectual capacities. Some students may demonstrate a stronger inclination toward academic studies, while others may exhibit greater aptitude for practical or technical activities. In order to address these diverse characteristics, the school curriculum should provide a variety of vocational options that allow students to develop their individual talents and career interests.

The current structure of the Indian education system is historically influenced by colonial policies introduced during the British period, particularly under the leadership of Thomas Babington Macaulay. The primary objective of the colonial education model was to produce a workforce capable of performing clerical and administrative functions within the colonial administration. Consequently, the education system became heavily oriented toward theoretical and literary studies, with limited emphasis on technical or vocational training. Although the socio-

economic conditions of the country have changed significantly since independence, the legacy of this academically focused system continues to influence educational practices.

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the need to reform the education system by incorporating vocational and skill-oriented learning pathways. Instead of maintaining a rigid academic structure, educational institutions are gradually moving toward a more diversified framework that integrates vocational subjects alongside conventional academic disciplines.

Objectives

1. To study the challenges faced in the process of implementation of vocational education in Assam.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-method research approach integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to examine the implementation of vocational education. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires prepared for three stakeholder groups: students, parents, and teachers. The researcher visited several senior secondary schools in Sivasagar district and distributed the questionnaires to the selected respondents. A total of 30 participants were included in the study, consisting of 10 students enrolled in vocational courses, 10 parents, and 10 teachers involved in vocational education programmes. In addition, secondary data were gathered from policy documents, government reports, books, and relevant scholarly literature to support the analysis and provide contextual understanding.

Analysis and Findings

Problems in the Implementation of Vocational Education
Despite several policy initiatives and recommendations made by different educational commissions and committees since independence, vocational education in India continues to face a number of challenges. Although both the central and state governments have introduced various schemes and programmes to strengthen vocational training and skill development, the effective implementation of vocational education remains limited due to multiple structural and institutional constraints. Some of the major problems associated with vocational education are discussed below.

1. Lack of Awareness about Vocational Education

One of the major obstacles to the expansion of vocational education is the limited awareness among the general public regarding its significance and benefits. Many students and parents still perceive vocational education as inferior to conventional academic education. As a result, students often prefer general academic courses rather than skill-oriented programmes. This social perception reduces enrolment in vocational courses and restricts the growth of vocational education.

2. Issues Related to the Structure and Organization of Vocational Education

Another challenge relates to the organizational framework of vocational education. There is often ambiguity regarding the structure, administration, and management of vocational programmes. Questions arise regarding which authority or department should be responsible for designing, implementing, and monitoring vocational education. Lack

of proper coordination among different educational bodies can lead to ineffective policy implementation and administrative inefficiencies.

3. Curriculum-Related Problems

The curriculum of vocational education is another critical issue. It is often difficult to integrate vocational courses with general academic subjects in a balanced manner. In many cases, the curriculum does not adequately address the needs of local industries or regional economic conditions. Furthermore, vocational curricula often lack diversity and flexibility, which limits students' opportunities to explore different vocational fields. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate productive and skill-based courses that reflect the local employment environment and economic realities.

4. Problems in Instructional Methods

Vocational education requires a specialized instructional approach that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical training. Ideally, a particular vocation should serve as the central focus around which other related subjects are taught in a coordinated manner. However, implementing such an integrated teaching strategy can be difficult in practice because not all general education subjects can easily be linked with vocational training. This limitation sometimes affects the effectiveness of vocational teaching.

5. Difficulty in the Selection of Vocations

Selecting an appropriate vocation for students at the time of admission is another challenge. Many students may not have a clear understanding of their interests, aptitudes, or career aspirations at an early stage. Consequently, they may choose vocational courses that do not match their abilities or future goals. This mismatch can reduce students' motivation and may negatively affect their learning outcomes.

6. Inadequate Training Facilities

Vocational education largely depends on the availability of proper training facilities such as workshops, laboratories, and equipment. However, many educational institutions lack adequate infrastructure and modern technological resources required for effective vocational training. Outdated machinery and insufficient practical training opportunities limit students' ability to acquire relevant skills.

7. Limited Employment Opportunities

Another concern is the lack of adequate employment opportunities for vocationally trained individuals. In many cases, there is a mismatch between the skills provided through vocational education and the requirements of the labour market. As a result, graduates may struggle to find suitable employment despite completing vocational courses.

8. Loss of Skills Due to Lack of Practice

Vocational skills require continuous practice and application. If a trained individual remains unemployed for a long period, the practical skills acquired during training may gradually diminish. This situation reduces the effectiveness of vocational education and discourages students from pursuing such courses.

9. Lack of Coordination between Training and Employment

There is often inadequate coordination between vocational training institutions and employment sectors. The absence

of strong linkages between educational institutions and industries results in a gap between training programmes and actual job opportunities. Effective collaboration between these sectors is necessary to ensure that vocational education meets the demands of the labour market.

10. Shortage of Training Institutions

The number of vocational training institutions in many regions is insufficient to meet the growing demand for skill-based education. Limited availability of institutions restricts access to vocational training, particularly for students in rural and remote areas.

Major suggestions

1. Creation of Employment Opportunities for Trained Individuals

One of the most important measures is to ensure adequate employment opportunities for students who complete vocational training programmes. If suitable job opportunities are not available, the practical skills acquired during training may remain unused. Therefore, efforts should be made to establish strong linkages between vocational education institutions and industries so that trained individuals can be absorbed into the workforce.

2. Strengthening Coordination between Training and Employment Sectors

Effective coordination between vocational training institutions and employment sectors is essential. Industries and training institutions should collaborate in designing training programmes that correspond to the actual requirements of the labour market. Such collaboration can ensure that vocational education remains relevant and aligned with employment needs.

3. Expansion of Training Institutions

The availability of vocational training institutions should be increased, particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas. Establishing new training centres and upgrading existing institutions with modern infrastructure and equipment will help expand access to vocational education and improve the quality of training.

4. Availability of Learning Materials in Regional Languages

To make vocational education more accessible, textbooks and learning resources should be translated into regional languages. Many students face difficulties in understanding technical content presented only in English. Providing instructional materials in local languages will facilitate better comprehension and improve learning outcomes.

5. Role of Media in Creating Awareness

Mass media can play a crucial role in promoting vocational education among the general public. Awareness campaigns through newspapers, television, radio, and digital platforms can highlight the importance of vocational training and encourage students to consider skill-based education as a viable career option.

6. Promotion of Continuing Education

Vocational education should not be limited to formal schooling alone. Opportunities for continuing education and lifelong learning should be developed to allow individuals

to upgrade their skills according to changing technological and industrial requirements. This approach will help individuals remain competitive in the labour market.

7. Development of Small-Scale Industries

The growth of small-scale and cottage industries should be encouraged, as these sectors can provide employment opportunities for vocationally trained individuals. Strengthening local industries will not only support economic development but also increase the demand for skilled manpower.

8. Reform of Vocational Curriculum with Global Perspectives

The curriculum of vocational education should be periodically revised to incorporate modern technological developments and global industry trends. Integrating global perspectives into the curriculum will ensure that students acquire relevant skills and competencies that meet both national and international labour market standards.

Conclusion

The present study highlights the significant role of vocational education in promoting skill development, enhancing employability, and supporting socio-economic progress. Although vocational education has been recognized as an important component of the educational system, its effective implementation continues to face several challenges. The findings of the study reveal that issues such as lack of public awareness, inadequate training infrastructure, limited employment opportunities, shortage of vocational institutions, and weak coordination between training centres and industries hinder the successful development of vocational education programmes, particularly in regions like Assam. The study further indicates that the existing vocational curriculum and instructional practices often fail to align with the demands of the contemporary labour market. As a result, many students are unable to fully utilize the practical skills acquired during their training. Therefore, there is a strong need to reform vocational education by strengthening institutional infrastructure, improving curriculum design, and establishing closer collaboration between educational institutions and industry sectors. In addition, awareness programmes, expansion of vocational training centres, availability of learning materials in regional languages, and encouragement of small-scale industries can significantly contribute to the growth of vocational education. Overall, a well-structured and effectively implemented vocational education system can play a crucial role in bridging the gap between education and employment while contributing to sustainable economic development.

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