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Institutionalization of knowledge and skill: A study of vocational education in India

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Abstract
The paper tries to analyze and theorize sociologically the history of knowledge production over a period of time and how it has been institutionalized formally within the boundaries of education. Particularly the post-industrialization era impacts a lot in the educational domain which directly impacts the dynamism of educational attainment and its direct implication on the market. Thus vocational education is one of them which contributes directly to the production and maintenance of industrial goods and products. Thus the paper broadly tries to highlight the discourse on higher education in general and the vocational education system in particular in the context of India. It tries to articulate how the skill-based training or skill-based education program has been institutionalized in the form of vocational education and its current implications.

Keywords: vocational education, institutionalization, industrialization, and skill

Introduction

Globalization has paved the way for growing the usage of technology in everyday life. Thus the process of evolution of technology and its application in society not only shapes human behavior but also influences the other aspects of life. Technological innovation and its usages are the product and the outcome of the application of knowledge. The knowledge on the other hand can be learned formally and informally through different means and methods. However, since the time of human civilization to the present, it was realized that knowledge production and its usages can be done scientifically only through formalizing it. Thus to formalize the knowledge scientifically we introduced the formal education system. Today, it is education that shapes and reshapes knowledge. Thus today's education is nothing but a process of the institutionalization of knowledge. However, this process leads to produce and reproduce the hierarchy of professions and work as well. For example, the differences between professional and normal education, technical versus non-technical education creates a wide social gap in terms of class, status, and so on.

Over a period of time education and the process of learning and the process of knowledge, production has been shifting and directing towards a new path. The institutionalization and specialization of knowledge are being shaped by the process of globalization and industrialization. Thus, the process of economic developments has had the hegemony to specialize and institutionalize certain knowledge in the form of education as a part of our education system. Thus engineering education is one of them which is nothing but specialized knowledge for the production and maintenance of material things. It is a revolution in almost all parts of the world to meet the new challenges of the emerging knowledge society and the integration of the world economies.

However, the vocational education particularly in the Indian context has been confined to the prejudice of less social recognition. If we locate the comparison between two different schools of thought concerning vocational education then we can understand that from the functional point of view it can be argued that vocational education and employability based on the qualification will lead to access lower level of occupation mere as a craftsman whereas other professional courses will lead to higher paid jobs and having a social status in the society. From the functional school of thought, it can be argued that the amount of money, time, and talent has produced two different structures and hierarchies of occupation and status. But from the Marxist and critical school of thought, it is important to value the industrial workers and craftsman who physically control and manage all the types of machinery in the process of production in any industry. They are directly involved in the process of manufacturing the goods. Thus in any industrial society, it is the labor of the workers and the technicians and craftsman which lead to the development and nation-building but they are hardly recognized.

Knowledge production and the politics of colonialism

The establishment and growth of Indian educational institutions can be reflected in the system of learning which existed before British intervention. Syed Nurullah and J. P. Naik (1951) in the book 'A history of education in India during the British period' has discussed how education was almost always confined to a few upper social class and the mercantile classes.

The other face of discourse about the history and the processes of development of science and technology can be traced back and analyzed from the period of the nineteenth century. During that time it was Europeans who in search of raw materials, markets, and investment opportunities created a new wave of overseas colonization by transferring labor, capital, and technology to the non-capitalist parts of the world. As (Todd, 1995) explained how the impact of European expansion varied widely because although some regions were settled by people who wished to build a permanent home, others were places where Europeans were interested in settling only briefly, making a fortune by exploiting the local resources and population. Thus two

colonies were created that is “colonies of settlement” (North America, Australia, and New Zealand) and “colonies of sojourn (Latin America, Asia, and Africa). The colonies of settlement enjoyed the lasting influence of governments that were committed to local economic development, while colonies of sojourn were affected by the poverty of insecurity. At the same time, colonies of sojourn remained dependent on imported technology. Thus colonial disparity widened the economic gap between industrial Europe and colonial sojourn (Headrick 1998).

In the context of India as well, the role of colonialism played a vital role in the growth and shaping of technology and innovation. The modern agricultural industry, irrigation development projects, the development of transportation and communication system, and shaping the nature of technical education and educational institutions in India is because of the colonial ruler (Macleod & Kumar, 1995).

Moreover, the privatization also encouraged commercialization and thus it is highlighted that the majority of privately funded and managed engineering institutions are engaged in malpractices such as collecting exorbitant capitation fees and other institutional fees, manipulation of entrance results and admission processes, such as disregarding admission norms in favor of those willing to pay more. Also, these commercial institutions operating in higher education work as satellite institutions of foreign universities. Further, several national-level studies in India (Biswas, Chopra, Jha & Singh, 2010; Kumar, Sengupta & Vij, 2005; Rao, 2006) have established that the unregulated and unbalanced growth of the private sector in engineering education has resulted in the decline in the quality of teaching and learning imparted in these institutions. The studies have addressed the issues such as the lack of adequate and qualified faculty, weak industry-academia interaction, outdated curricula, and the absence of a strong quality assurance structure in the larger context of the quality of engineering and technical education in the country

Current Scenario of Vocational Education and Training in India

There is strong empirical evidence of the positive relationship between education or training and wages. Two contrasting views have emerged in recent decades. The human capital theory argues that education and training directly extend individual productivity by improving the cognitive, behavioral, and manual capacities of individuals thereby increase wages and earnings. In contrast, according to the screening hypothesis, education and training are merely indicators of ability. Training in general and skills development in particular play a vital role in individual, organizational and overall national economic growth. Skill development can be defined as a process of acquiring and sharpening capabilities to perform various functions associated with their present and future roles. Vocational Education in a much broader sense covers education and skill development at all levels from post-primary to tertiary education - both through formal and non-formal programs. Vocational Education at the +2 stage, also known as the higher secondary stage, develop competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitude) required by a specific occupation or a group of occupations, through diversified vocational courses to prepare the pupil for the world of work, especially for self -employment. Anders Nilsson in his study stated that vocational education and training are the most important factors for economic growth as well as social inclusion in the country. He concluded his study by pointing out the need of determining the period where the company-based skill development training starts to affect productivity and the long-run economic and social growth.

Technical Education is instrumental in making a remarkable contribution to the economic growth of Developing Countries by way of suitable manpower production according to the needs of the Industry, Society, and the Global World as a whole. To produce fully skilled manpower/knowledgeable technocrats in the present era of science and technology is the need of the hour. Polytechnic education has responded to the challenges of industrialization for self-reliance. While the youth population is fast shrinking with higher dependency ratios in the developed world, India is blessed with a population of about 70 percent below the age of 35 years. Youths are the most vibrant and dynamic segment as well as potentially most valuable human resource. However, despite phenomenal capabilities, India is seriously handicapped with a very weak and narrow knowledge base, with a 12.3% gross enrolment ratio, as compared to 21% in China, 54.6% in developed countries, and the world average of 23.2%. There is a need to convert the available huge human resource potential into a reality by expanding opportunities for youngsters and that took on a massive scale and in diverse fields such as science, technology, engineering, architecture, management, etc. to reap the demographic dividends. This is possible only if we seriously undertake rapid reforms in the higher and technical education sector.

The government of India has accorded high importance to vocational education and training. While elaborating on the essence and role of Education, the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 (as modified in 1992) has recognized that Education develops manpower for different levels of the economy. The NPE also envisages the introduction of systematic, well-planned, and rigorously implemented programs of vocational education, which can be rigorously implemented to enhance employability, reduce the mismatch between demand and supply of skilled manpower, and to provide an alternative to those pursuing tertiary education, without particular interest or purpose. The policy envisages that efforts will be made to provide children at the higher secondary level with generic vocational courses that cut across several occupational fields and which are not occupation-specific. The Vocational Education Program (VEP) was started in 1976-77 under the program of Vocationalisation of Higher Secondary Education in general education institutions. The National Working Group on Vocationalisation of Education (Kulandaiswa my Committee, 1985) reviewed the Vocational Education Programme in the country and developed guidelines for the expansion of the program. Its recommendations led to the development of the Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) on Vocationalisation of Secondary Education, which started being implemented in 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. Vocational students appear intent on entering higher education rather than entering the labor market. Overwhelmingly, students who get through the vocational stream want to proceed to further education. This is not surprising given the relatively weak labor market outcomes. The few rigorous evaluations of program impacts that have been undertaken point to low levels of gainful employment of these graduates. Despite the poor outcomes, policymakers remain keen to expand vocational education. The Central Government has planned to increase enrollments in the vocational education system to about 25 percent of total secondary enrollment. Even though enrolments in vocational education in India are small when judged by international comparisons, expanding the numbers or re-targeting the program would not be justified unless a model is found that would substantially improve outcomes.

Worldwide, such a comprehensive vocational education and training system is not only available as an alternative system but is also extremely popular and successful. In fact, many countries such as Germany, China, Korea, and other students prefer the VET system over the academic sector as it offers tremendous potential for gainful employment. One of the key factors for the success of the VET system in other countries has been the opportunities for vertical and lateral mobility into higher /tertiary vocational education programs. Such higher / tertiary vocational education programs are offered in other countries through dedicated Vocational Universities, It is seen that industry preferred students passing out from such Universities in Germany as compared to conventional/academic Universities. Today there are about 160 Universities of Applied Sciences in Germany. A similar situation exists in China, Korea, and Australia where students have started opting for the vocational system and are participating in large numbers in the vocational higher / tertiary education programs. India has the lowest proportion of trained youth in the world. The quantitative dimension of India's skill development challenge is that 80 percent of new entrants to the workforce have no opportunity for skill training. Against 12.8 million per annum new entrants to the workforce, the existing training capacity is only 3.1 million per annum.

Conclusion

Vocational education in the context of India has not tremendously influenced the youth as compared to other nations. At present only about 2 percent of the workforce has formal training (plus another 8 percent with informal training) as against 96 percent in Korea, 75 percent in Germany, 80 percent in Japan, and 68 percent in the United Kingdom. This clearly highlights the gaps in the skill development system and the need for adequate resources and resource funds to fill these gaps. The national education policy of India 2020 has also tried to open up the scope of vocational courses from class 8th onwards and also has tried to incorporate vocational training courses in schools, colleges, and universities as well. Another and the most important aspect should be the quality and the management. As the skill formation based on the current requirement of the market will lead the students to have a better opportunity as well as the industry. Thus the attempt has to be made to bridge the gap between the educational attainment and the market opportunities and for that, there should be a strong collaboration between the vocational educational institutions and industries to formulate the content of study, appropriate guidance, and the proper placement after the course.

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