

Vocationalisation of Higher Education: Need and Constraints

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Abstract

Education is the key to unlock the main gate to civilization and modernization. It is the most important means to develop individuals and nations, and to bring about the desired social reforms in this fast changing world of ours. The late Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi, in one of his addresses to the National Development Council, mentioned the broad objectives of Education as being basically, " the freedom of the individual, a fulfillment in his life, equality amongst all our people, excellence of each individual and collective self- reliance and perhaps most of all national cohesion which will break down walls and barriers. It must build the inner strength of our people and bring our ancient heritage to the new generation and make available our aesthetic treasures to them."

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Education has always been important, but perhaps never so than today recent studies in the Economics of Education have clearly established that Education plays an important role in socio-economic development of the country. Education has, of course much loftier ideals than those of preparation for employment. At its best, it is concerned with the development of the individuals full range of abilities and aptitudes, with the cultivation of spiritual and moral values, with the nurturing of imagination and sensibility, with the transmission and reinterpretation of culture. Indeed, there is a strong with in education which derides the instrumental of utilitarian, and which regards vocational matters as being improper educational concerns.

Nonetheless Education has a close relationship with the world of work. Societies expect educational institutions to develop in young people and their parents, too expect educational institution to help them enter a worthwhile job.

Meaning and Scope

Vocationalisation means learning of a skill or some related skills by studying technologies, applied science and other practical activities. The UNESCO (1974) defined vocational education as a “comprehensiveterm embracing those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education of practical skills, attitudes, understandings and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life, such and education would be an integral part of preparing for an occupational field and an aspect of continuing education.”

Vocationalisation of education aims at increasing the employment potential of the people through education for selecting vocations or for self-employment in agriculture, industry and related occupations including art and craft, agro-industries, machanisation, ect. It helps individuals to be more productive through preparation for specific competencies in different vocations. It cannot, however, be equated with mere technician training. It is essentially education in the broader sense of the term. It prepares the individual for understanding the social needs and conditions, and to realise his own potentiality, so that both can be correlated for bringing about economic development of the country in particular and creating an atmosphere of self-realization of individuals and prosperity of the nation in general.

Need for Infusion of Vocationalisation in Education at Higher Level

India operates one of the largest system of higher education. There has been a spectacular expansion of higher education during the last 40 years According to figures available in the documents of National Policy of education (NPE) 1986

and programme of action (POA) 1992 (Government of India , 1986), at present there are about 200 universities and over 700 colleges offering traditional academic programmes both at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels. The students enrolment is likely to touch the figures of 5 million in the near future. Although India is considered to be one of the biggest producers of educated manpower in the world, yet the situation is far from satisfactory because of some deep rooted maladies.

Generally, higher education programmes are designed to provide academic knowledge of humanities, sciences and social sciences for advanced studies and research pursuits. These programmes mostly develop traits essential for a bureaucratic and elitist culture. This approach is not entirely in tune with the needs of the present society. In fact, it is generating a large number of educated unemployed without any vocational skill such an approach has created a gulf between education and work to bridge this gulf educational institutions will have to be the centres for generating working skills and employment avenues. Today, most of graduates come out with a dubious piece of paper which says he is qualified. How do we fit such people into a changing work situation unless we go to the root of our educational system and integrate, at each level, theory with practice, knowledge with wisdom, intellectual sharpness with emotional maturity. Work based education is therefore, essential to fulfill the socio- economic aspirations of the society. The main emphasis in the educational programmes will have to be on vocational programmes and vocational training. Professional competence to solve practical problems, capacity to learn by doing and awareness of the need of the society, Education will have to be linked with productivity and national development. The conventional programmes will have to be drastically modified or redesigned and even replaced so that the courses have direct relevance to socio-economic development. One other aspect is a general reluctance, on the part of students to go in for vocational education as it is terminal in character without providing opportunities for further professional growth and career improvement. Hence there is a need to integrate vocational education with higher centres of learning provided by the universities so that lateral entry is possible.

Major Constraints

There are several obstacles in the vocationalisation of education at each level. In case of higher secondary education, these schools are unable to obtain adequate financial resources for providing the minimum physical facilities and the necessary

infrastructure needed for running the select vocational courses. Apart from that, urban students are not interested in joining vocational courses involving manual skills, for these are regarded as socially inferior while promising fewer opportunities for highly paid jobs in the case of schools in the semi-urban and rural sectors neither competent teachers nor the physical facilities are available for starting vocational courses.

In the context of higher education the condition is quite different. At higher level inspite of the substantial support given by the University Grants Commission, universities and colleges have shown little enthusiasm and less motivation to introduce restructured courses which emphasized partial training and would provide knowledge and skills more relevant to the needs of job market.

Since independence there has been giving a lot of emphasis to the expansion of facilities in our country. This expansion has taken place partly to meet the demands of equity and social justice and in the case of some courses to meet the manpower requirement of a diversifying economy. It is also felt that expansion has been more pronounced at the first degree level and generally in arts, science and commerce courses very little consideration was given to the employability of university graduates and/or the absorptive capacity of the job market. Without commensurate increase in employment opportunities and the failure of make secondary education terminal, the products of second level of education have tended to flock to colleges and universities. In such a way the pursuit of university education by students has generally been without any well defined purpose.

Another major obstacle responsible for presentsituation is our failure to build a nexus between industry and our technical and professional institution. Our industries, especially in the private sector do not find our science and engineering graduates fit to take the jobs demanded by them. Our courses are totally devoid of practical life situations and our graduates and postgraduates are unaware of the techniques of production and management in industry. University- industry linkage is essential not only for raising the research but also for making our teaching and research relevant to the industry. In the Soviet union close links between education and work are maintained also in the higher sector of Education. Factory institutes of higher technical education are attached to industrial enterprises to qualify workers for jobs in engineering. Student's alternate between work and study is integrated facilities, such an approach is an urgent need in our country at present.

Conclusion

At the footsteps of 21st century a fresh and more meaningful exercise is needed to restructure Education at the first degree level. This restructuring has to be in such a way that, the proposed courses should aim not only at providing knowledge and attitudes required for creative and productive functioning, but also at imparting among students skills which are in demand and which a student can use to lead a dignified life as a productive citizen of a democracy. Apart from that considering the limited absorptive capacity of the organised sector a lot of emphasis has to be given in the proposed courses on the development of capabilities required for self-employment and diversifying the informal sector and for upgrading the productivity of household occupations.

The expansion of facilities should aim at increasing employability of university graduates and/or absorptive capacity of the job market.

Close links between education and work has to be emphasized in the tertiary sector of education to make our trained people fit into a changing work situation.

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