

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT EMERGES AS THE PRECURSOR TO EFFULGENT WORLD

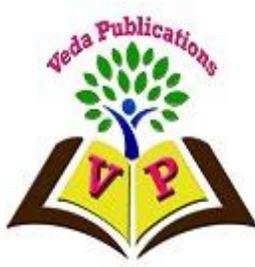
Ch. Srinivasara Rao¹, B.Suresh²

¹(Assistant Professor of English, Sri Vasavi Engineering college, Tadepalligudem.)

²(Assistant Professor of English, Sri Vasavi Engineering college, Tadepalligudem.)

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ABSTRACT



This paper reviews the current state of education, skills development, and employment for Indian youth, and considers the challenges facing India's skills development system. Drawing from the experience of Andhra Pradesh, one of India's most industrially developing states, the paper discusses recent initiatives to facilitate young people's transition to the world of work. In India, young people who will soon be entering the labor market constitute the largest segment of the demographic structure. The majority of young people have limited access to education and training, and most find work in the informal sector. In recent years India has rapidly expanded the capacity of educational institutions and enrollments, but dropout rates remain high, and educational attainment remains low. While India has a well-institutionalized system of vocational training, it has not sufficiently prepared its youth with the skills that today's industries require. Thus, to speed its economic growth and take advantage of its "demographic dividend," the country has recently embarked on drastic policy reforms to accelerate skills development. These reforms have led to important changes, both in the national institutional framework and at the institutional level.

Keywords: *Skills Development, Employment, Youth.*

INTRODUCTION

This paper reviews the current state of education, skills development, and employment for Indian youth, and considers the challenges facing India's skills development system developed states young people's transition to work. Today, youth across the world face serious challenges regarding skills and jobs, challenges fundamentally different from those their parents faced. In the globalized economy, competition has become intensified among firms and industries in developing and developed countries alike, requiring their workers to have higher levels of skills to enable them to engage in innovation, improve the quality of products/services, and increase efficiency in their production processes or even to the point of improving the whole value process.

Challenges: Facing Skills Development Training

Today, youth in developing countries who are seeking work face great difficulty. First, in the globalized era, competition has intensified among firms and industries, requiring them to improve the efficiency and quality of their products and services. This forces them to hire fewer, but more skilled, workers.

At the same time, the skills development systems in most developing countries are poorly equipped to meet these challenges and prepare youth with the work skills they need. Skills development is the most difficult sub-sector to organize and manage in the education sector, because it cuts across organizational boundaries, caters to diverse clients, and involves multiple delivery mechanisms, and its market characteristics keep changing. Moreover, efforts at skills development must often meet multiple objectives: help reduce poverty, provide a second chance for dropouts, and serve as a reservoir to keep youth with little academic interest out of the streets and away from social problems. These multiple objectives make it difficult for governments to shape coherent and focused strategies and actions.

The school-age population includes over 100 million young people from socially-disadvantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). As they have long experienced poorer access to education and decent employment, the government has extended affirmative action for them by setting special quotas for their entry to schools and public sector employment.

Reframing the National System of Skills Development

Recently, India has finally become serious about skills development, introducing a series of education and training reforms. Its 11th 5-year Development Plan (2007—2012) focused on skills development as a priority issue for the first time (GOI 2008b). The prime minister's Independence Day speech of 2006 emphasized the need for a vocational education mission. In his Independence Day speech of 2007 he announced that 1,600 new ITIs and polytechnics, 10,000 new vocational schools and 50,000 new skill development centers would be established to provide access to vocational training for over 10 million students (GOI 2011a).

In 2009, India's government announced its first skills development policy and set up a new institutional framework involving close coordination among government, industry, and training institutions to facilitate skills development efforts at the central level. First, it set up

the Prime Minister's National Skills Development Council (NSDC) to coordinate various schemes provided by various ministries. Recently, the government, in consultation with education ministers from 12 states, introduced a National Vocational Education Qualifications Framework (NVEQF) providing guidelines for a nationally-recognized qualification system, to standardize training contents, set national standards, and recognize the skills learned at schools, vocational training institutes, and higher education institutions. The development of NVEQF has led to a closer partnership and collaboration of government with industry to develop courses, curriculum, assessment, certification, and placement. Also, to improve the quality of training, the government introduced the concepts of competency-based training and training modules. These have changed the basis for certifying vocational training from duration to competence. Now individuals can have their skills recognized regardless of their educational and employment paths.

Innovative Reforms at Training Institutes

Reflecting the changing policy environment for skills development, training institutions have recently introduced several new initiatives. Supported by the World Bank, the government selected 500 ITIs as Centers of Excellence (COE) to offer "advanced module" training, and upgrade their facilities, equipment, and machinery to the same standard used in industry. Under the COE scheme, each ITI must establish an institute management committee (IMC) of 8 to 10 members. The IMC chair is selected from the private sector, often from a leading local private firm, and has power to approve major decisions about the ITI's management. Operating as a public-private partnership, the IMC is expected to forge partnerships between ITIs and the private sector to: share labor market information, especially on the types of skills in demand; develop curriculum; and seek donations of equipment and tools from the private sector to upgrade ITI facilities and equipment. Also, the creation of IMCs has increased industry participation in decision-making around the ITIs, to greater autonomy for ITIs, more channels to send trainees for internships, and improved facilities through more donations from industry. These closer linkages with employers and increased autonomy may help ITIs meet industry demands.

COE courses achieved close to 100% job placements of their trainees at many ITIs. courses to cater to the firm. For example, four ITIs in Karnataka offer a Motor Mechanic Tool and Maintenance (MMTM) course jointly with Toyota located in Bangalore. The curriculum follows NCVT norms, but Toyota decides on the topics to cover in the syllabus so it can teach firm-specific skills. Toyota takes all the students in their second year as apprentices and places them at its dealers. The courses enjoy 100% placement rates as all the trainees who pass all the requirements are placed as regular employees at Toyota dealerships on the completion of training. This tailor-made arrangement in close collaboration with particular firms has helped make training more relevant, better able to respond to industry needs, and has significantly improved placement rates. Many ITIs are keen to work with leading firms to create such firm-specific courses and to increase opportunities for both apprenticeships and instructors' training with these firms.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the opportunities for Indian young people to develop their skills, and the constraints that challenge them. Today, India faces complex and enormous challenges in fostering skills development for youths, for several reasons: the size of the youth population, and the hierarchical and segmented nature of both the labor market and society as a whole. Indeed, Indian young people fall into two main groups. A tiny fraction from economically well-off middle classes get good education and training and well-paid jobs in the organized sector. Meanwhile, the great majority of youth from economically and socially disadvantaged groups get very limited education and little access to vocational training. They work in the unorganized sector. The majority of Indian youth enter the labor market without adequate vocational skills, leading to unstable, informal, low-wage employment, such as casual labor and various forms of self-employment.

In India, the bulk of employment is in rural areas and in the unorganized sector, and almost all manufacturing firms are in the informal sector. Given the highly-stratified and segmented nature of the labor market, Indian youths must acquire education, training, and skills if they are to find decent jobs and experience any social mobility. Thus, with rapid economic growth, demand for education is likely to grow further at all levels in coming years. However, access to education, training, and employment opportunities is still largely determined by youth's socioeconomic backgrounds, gender, and geographic locations. Despite its projected "demographic dividend" and its recent expansion of formal education at all levels, India suffers from a serious shortage of skilled workers: limited access to education and skills training, high rates of school dropout, and large mismatches in the labor market. Indeed, despite the well-known success story of the Indian software engineers, educational attainment among Indian young people remains very low on average, only 7.1 years. Though enrollment rates have increased, dropout rates remain very high in primary and secondary education. Obviously, this lack of skills creates serious constraints on the production and innovation capabilities of Indian industries. or the overall levels of education of most young people. Thus, the government must ensure that most young people at least finish lower secondary school (i.e., 10th grade). Third, to open training opportunities for youths who have not completed secondary education, it would be helpful to create more courses at ITIs with lower levels of educational requirements. Fourth, training for the informal sector needs to be strengthened. Generally, it is difficult to reorient formal training institutions toward the informal sector (Johansson & Adams 2004). Given the vast size of the informal sector, however, it is critically important to institutionalize some training for work in the informal sector. Rather than the current somewhat ad-hoc delivery of training such as the MES, more institutionalized and structured settings may help offer more effective and streamlined training for the informal sector.

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