

Bridging Skills and Schooling: A case study on Vocational Education Practices

Abstract

Vocational education has become an integral component of modern schooling, aiming to bridge the gap between academic learning and the practical skills required in the workforce. This study aims to explore these crucial questions by studying the availability and nature of vocational education in schools, examining how well the courses align with students' interests, evaluating the practical components of these programs, and identifying any barriers faced by learners. It also seeks to assess how closely current vocational education practices adhere to the principles outlined in the NEP 2020, and to recommend actionable measures to improve the delivery and impact of these courses. The study uses a descriptive case study method with a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative data from students and qualitative insights from teacher interviews. The analysis revealed several recurring themes related to curriculum delivery, resource availability, student engagement, teacher training, and career readiness. There was a strong demand for refresher courses, especially those that covered emerging technologies and modern teaching strategies. Students expressed a desire for a wider variety of vocational courses that align with evolving career opportunities and personal interests. While traditional streams were available, there was significant demand for courses like graphic design, digital marketing, mobile repair, and fashion design.

Key Words: Vocational Education, practical skills, vocational resources, students' interest.

INTRODUCTION

Vocational education has become an integral component of modern schooling, aiming to bridge the gap between academic learning and the practical skills required in the workforce. It emphasizes skill-based training that prepares students for specific careers, trades, or industries, and promotes self-reliance, employability, and economic productivity. Vocational education consists basically of practical courses through which one gains skills and experience directly linked to a career in future. It helps students to be skilled and in turn, offers better employment opportunities (Kaushik Kusum (2014) pp-35). With increasing awareness of the need for skill development at an early stage, vocational education is now being introduced and promoted in schools across the country.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places strong emphasis on integrating vocational education into the mainstream curriculum from Grade 6 onwards. It aims to ensure that students are exposed to different types of vocations and develop basic skills through hands-on learning, internships, and exposure to real-life work environments. This vision is meant to make education more holistic, flexible, and aligned with the needs of the 21st century, thereby reducing the gap between education and employment. "The New Education Policy 2020 realizes the value of inculcating some life skills through vocational education too. Thus, NEP 2020 has laid emphasis on development of some important skills as a part of vocational skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, IT literacy, flexibility, problem solving,

leadership skills etc. so that students can get employment opportunities as well as adapt well to the current world of work" (Dr. Saharia Gitika & Mazumdar Supriya (2024) Volume 12)

Despite policy reforms and the inclusion of vocational subjects in schools, there remain questions regarding their accessibility, relevance, and actual implementation. Do students have access to vocational courses? Are these courses aligned with their interests and aspirations? Do they provide enough practical exposure? What challenges do students face in pursuing vocational subjects? Most importantly, do these offerings truly reflect the objectives of NEP 2020?

This survey aims to explore these crucial questions by studying the availability and nature of vocational education in schools, examining how well the courses align with students interests, evaluating the practical components of these programs, and identifying any barriers faced by learners. It also seeks to assess how closely current vocational education practices adhere to the principles outlined in the NEP 2020, and to recommend actionable measures to improve the delivery and impact of these courses.

By gathering insights from students through questionnaires, and direct observation, this study intends to contribute valuable information that can inform educators, school administrators, and policymakers. Ultimately, the goal is to support the development of an effective vocational education framework that is student-centered, inclusive, and future-ready

In keeping with the goal of the NEP 2020 to reach out to at least 50% of learners to have exposure to Vocational Education by 2025, the Nagaland Board of School Education has introduced the Vocational Education from Classes IX to XII from 2022 academic session in a phased manner to begin with Class IX vide Notification No. 18/2021 dated Kohima the 25th February 2021 (NBSE. Notification No 83/2022 2022)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

This case study holds significance on multiple levels educational, social, and policy-related in a rapidly digitizing world, Information Technology (IT) skills have become essential for employability and lifelong learning By examining how vocational IT education is received and implemented in a rural school setting, this study provides valuable insights into the ground realities of vocational education in less-urbanized areas.

First, it highlights the role of vocational education in empowering students with practical and marketable skills at an early stage, enabling them to make informed career choices. For many students in rural regions, vocational training may serve as the most accessible route to gain technical knowledge and potential employment especially in the absence of immediate access to higher education or private training institutions.

Second, the study sheds light on the effectiveness of existing infrastructure, pedagogy, and curriculum design under the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF). It brings attention to the challenges faced by students and educators-such as limited digital exposure, lack of hands-on equipment, and language or conceptual barriers-which are often overlooked in broader education policies

Third, this research is significant for stakeholders like school administrators, vocational trainers, curriculum planners, and policy-makers. It encourages them to re-evaluate and strengthen the integration of vocational courses in mainstream education, ensuring that such programs are not just formal additions but meaningful and empowering learning experiences

Finally, the study contributes to the broader discourse on equity in education. By focusing on a small, underrepresented group of learners, it advocates for inclusive and context-sensitive vocational education models that cater to the unique needs and aspirations of students in diverse socio-economic and geographic settings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Choi, S., Li, H., Ogawa, K., & Tanaka, Y. (2023). "Secondary Vocational Education and Decent Work in Indonesia: Differences between Urban and Rural Areas." This study compared labor market outcomes of vocational and general secondary education graduates in Indonesia, finding that vocational graduates did not earn higher wages or have better employment conditions than their general education counterparts, with urban graduates faring better than rural ones.

Mathur, A., Sharan, M., Chakraborty, S., & Mullick, S. (2022). "Technical and Vocational Education and Training: Examining Changing Conditions in India." This research explored evolving conditions in India's technical and vocational education landscape, focusing on policy changes, implementation challenges, and the need for industry collaboration to enhance training effectiveness.

Bhattacharyya, Sinha and Das (2021) discussed vocational training programs under state board secondary level schools in Kolkata. Researchers used descriptive research in this study. The questionnaire was used to collect data from students, guardians and head master of this institution. Results of the study reveal that there is a need to strengthen vocational education implementation. Most of the students strongly agree with the view that library and textbooks facilities should be provided for the quality of vocational training programmed. Most of the guardians of vocational students strongly agree with the views that there is an urgent need to make vocational education more objective based.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

i) Analyse National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provisions on vocational education in schools

ii) Assess Student awareness and perceptions.

iii) Identify existing vocational courses in the selected schools.

iv) To assess the interests, hobbies, and preferred skills of the learners related to vocational education

v) To find out whether the interests of the learners align with the vocational courses offered by the school

vi) To evaluate whether the vocational courses provided align with the recommendations of NEP 2020

vii) To propose practical suggestions for enhancing vocational education in line with student needs and policy directives.

METHODOLOGY:

The study uses a descriptive case study method with a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative data from students with qualitative insights from teacher interviews.

- Setting; Four government and three government schools (urban and rural).
- Participants: 31 students (Grade 8-10). 2 vocational subject teachers.
- Data Collection: Student questionnaire (closed/open ended) assessing motivations, satisfaction, challenges. Teachers interview exploring curriculum design, resource use, and training needs.
- Analysis: Quantitative data via descriptive statistics; qualitative data via thematic analysis.

Findings:

The school offers vocational courses such as

- Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
- Beauty and wellness.
- Computer applications.
- Creative Arts.
- Hospitality and tourism.
- Music.
- Employability skills and Automotive.
- Electronics.

AVAILABILITY OF VOCATIONAL RESOURCES

While majority of the students noticed availability of tools and equipment for practical learning and qualified teachers, some were of the opinion that opportunities for field work is minimal.

Students in hospitality & tourism and computer maintenance often had to rely on theoretical instruction due to lack of hands-on materials. Many students expressed a desire for field visits, better-equipped labs, and updated tools.

ROLE OF TEACHERS AND CHALLENGES

Students highly appreciated the efforts of their vocational teachers despite limited support.

They observed that some teachers lacked specific skill training but compensated with creativity and dedication. Students acknowledged that teachers often went beyond classroom teaching to guide them in projects and skill demonstrations. Some more challenges students observed was the lack of interest from students maybe a factor for less exposure to vocational education.

ALIGNMENT WITH STUDENT INTERESTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Most students chose their vocational stream based on their personal interest, hobbies. A few wished there were more course options like mobile repairing, cooking, photography, or fashion design. Some students felt that vocational classes made learning more meaningful and enjoyable compared to traditional theory-based subjects

TEACHER PERSPECTIVES

In this study, interviews were conducted with two vocational education teachers from disciplines including Music and Hospitality & Tourism. The purpose was to gain in-depth insights into their experiences with the implementation of vocational education in schools. The analysis revealed several recurring themes related to curriculum delivery, resource availability, student engagement, teacher training, and career readiness

All interviewed teachers possessed at least 2-3 years of experience and had previously worked in their respective trades before transitioning to teaching. While their practical expertise was evident, many lacked formal pedagogical training, especially in managing the theoretical portions of the curriculum. This sometimes impacted their ability to deliver lessons in a structured academic format

Teachers generally appreciated the foundational framework provided by the vocational curriculum. However, they felt that the content was outdated and not well-aligned with current industry practices. Teachers often adapted the curriculum by integrating external resources such as online videos or self-designed modules to keep their teaching relevant and engaging

A major concern raised by all participants was the lack of adequate infrastructure and teaching materials. Many reported working with lack of resources, and often had to

borrow tools or bring their own supplies to facilitate practical sessions. This scarcity significantly hindered effective vocational training, which relies heavily on hands-on experience

Despite these limitations, teachers noted that students were highly enthusiastic during practical lessons. They described their students as more attentive and motivated when involved in hands-on tasks. However, the same level of engagement was not observed during theoretical lessons, suggesting a disconnect between classroom instruction and real-world applications. To address this, teachers employed creative methods such as peer teaching, competitions, and role-play activities to maintain interest and improve comprehension. When asked about professional development, most teachers reported having received very little training after their initial induction. There was a strong demand for refresher courses, especially those that covered emerging technologies and modern teaching strategies. Teachers expressed frustration at the pace of industrial change compared to the lack of training opportunities in the education sector

Industry collaboration was another area highlighted during the interviews. Teachers acknowledged that formal linkages between schools and local industries were minimal. The lack of structured internships or exposure to real work environments was seen as a major barrier to preparing students for the job market. Teachers emphasized the importance of establishing formal partnerships with industries to facilitate intern and skill certification.

The most frequently mentioned challenges included outdated syllabi, insufficient classroom materials, lack of administrative support, and limited time for practical assessment due to the pressure of examinations. Despite these difficulties, teachers remained dedicated to their roles.

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

Limited Practical Exposure:

Students frequently reported that their vocational education was heavily theoretical due to the lack of tools, machines, and workshop facilities. For instance, students enrolled in streams like computer hardware and agriculture mentioned that their hands-on learning was minimal. This lack of practical training limited their ability to understand and apply the skills being taught. As vocational education is meant to be skill-based and experiential, insufficient exposure to practical components made students feel underprepared and less confident in their abilities.

Lack of Updated Infrastructure:

Many vocational labs were found to be under-equipped, and several relied on outdated tools that no longer matched industry standards. Students shared concerns about practicing on obsolete machinery or using materials that no longer reflect current trends. This made it difficult for them to connect their classroom experiences with real-world applications. The absence of modern infrastructure restricted skill development and hindered their competitiveness in the job market.

Limited Course Options:

Students expressed a desire for a wider variety of vocational courses that align with evolving career opportunities and personal interests. While traditional streams were available, there was significant demand for courses like graphic design, digital marketing, mobile repair, and fashion design. The limited choices felt restrictive, especially for students who wanted to explore modern and creative career paths. They believed that expanding the vocational curriculum would better cater to diverse student aspirations and job market needs.

Inadequate Career Guidance:

Several students revealed that they selected their vocational streams without adequate understanding of potential career paths or job prospects. This was largely due to the absence of structured career counselling or guidance sessions in school. As a result, some students felt unsure about the relevance of their chosen course and uncertain about future opportunities. They emphasized the need for early,

informed counselling and exposure to vocational careers, which would help them make better educational decisions.

Stigma and Peer Perception:

A recurring issue was the social stigma attached to vocational education. Some students reported being discouraged by peers or family members who viewed vocational courses as inferior to academic streams. There was a prevailing perception that vocational education was only for students who were weak in academics. This stereotype affected student morale and confidence, even when they were genuinely interested in vocational subjects. Overcoming this stigma remains a significant challenge for students and schools alike.

Lack of Industry Exposure:

Many students indicated that they had few or no opportunities to visit workplaces, participate in internships, or interact with professionals in their field of study. This lack of real-world exposure made it difficult for them to understand how their skills would be used on the job. Without industry visits, guest lectures, or field-based projects, students felt disconnected from the professional world and unprepared for employment. They recommended greater collaboration with industry to make vocational education more meaningful and career-oriented.

RECOMMENDATIONS/SUGGESTIONS

- PROVIDE MORE PRACTICAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Ensure all vocational courses have fully equipped labs and updated tools. Include regular practical sessions, fieldwork, and project-based assessments.

319 • INTRODUCE MORE COURSE OPTIONS

320
321 Offer diverse vocational streams that reflect current industry demands and student
322 interests, such as Beauty and wellness, Digital marketing, Fashion design, Culinary
323 arts, Photography & videography etc
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325 • IMPROVE CAREER COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE

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327 Organize career counseling sessions, guest lectures, and alumni talks to help students
328 make informed choices. Share information about career pathways, college options, and
329 entrepreneurship opportunities related to vocational streams.
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331 • TRAIN AND SUPPORT VOCATIONAL TEACHERS.

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333 Provide specialized training and refresher workshops for vocational teachers.
334 Reduce their academic workload so they can focus more on skill-based instruction.
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336 • STRENGTHEN INDUSTRY LINKAGES

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338 Collaborate with local businesses, ITIs, and industries to arrange internships, field visits,
339 and real-world experiences. Establish student-industry mentorship programs.
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341 • REDUCE STIGMA AROUND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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343 Conduct awareness campaigns to highlight the value and dignity of vocational skills.
344 Share success stories of students who have succeeded through vocational routes.
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346 • PROVIDE CERTIFICATION AND JOB PLACEMENT SUPPORT

347 Ensure students receive recognized certifications after course completion.
348 Set up a placement cell or link students with local job opportunities or skill-based starts
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350 CONCLUSION

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352 The present study explored the implementation of vocational education in schools, with
353 particular attention to student experiences, teacher perspectives, infrastructural support,
354 and curriculum relevance. The findings, drawn from student questionnaires and teacher
355 interviews, indicate that vocational education is gaining importance as a viable
356 educational pathway that equips students with practical, job-oriented skills. It was
357 observed that awareness among students has improved due to school-based initiatives,
358 and many have shown keen interest in pursuing vocational subjects that align with their
359 personal aspirations and emerging job markets.

360 However, several challenges continue to hinder the effective delivery of vocational
361 education. These include limited practical exposure, outdated infrastructure, insufficient
362 industry linkage, restricted course options, and a lack of structured career guidance.
363 Furthermore, vocational teachers face challenges such as inadequate training and
364 limited resources, which affect the quality of instruction. Students also reported facing

social stigma, which influences their self-perception and the wider acceptance of vocational education. Despite these barriers, the study highlights strong student engagement and teacher dedication as key strengths of the vocational system. The potential of vocational education to contribute to youth employability and national skill development is significant, provided that the identified gaps are addressed systematically. Strengthening infrastructure, expanding course offerings, integrating career counselling, and building industry partnerships will be essential steps toward enhancing the effectiveness and perception of vocational education in schools.

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The International Journal of Indian Psychology ISSN 2348-5396 (Online) Vol12, Issue4, Oct-Dec 2024