

Chapter 4

Choices, Courses, and Companies: Career Pathways and Student Preferences in India's VET System

Narasimham Peri
University of Bristol, UK

ABSTRACT

How do students of post-secondary vocational education make career choices, and how/how much do the institutional systems of VE/VT support them? This chapter traces the expectations, choices, and alternatives encountered by the students enrolled at vocational institutions in India. Referred to as industrial training institutes (ITIs), these institutions bridge the transition from school to employment. The research uses the “safety net” theory of vocational education to assess student choices and preferences to analyze the reasons why students pursue a course at the ITI. The study includes a survey of 212 students in two-year programs. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers in the same institutes where the survey was administered to the students. In the process, the role of such vocational institutions is assessed with respect to the correspondences with the larger VE/VT system in the country, thereby offering relevant insights into changes that are underway from recent policy measures.

1. INTRODUCTION

A newspaper article in India, commenting on the downturn for graduate engineering courses, highlights a contrary situation for enrolment to two-year courses:

While the students are turning down the engineering courses which result in over 50 thousand seats remaining vacant every year, the situation for Industrial Training Institutes (ITI) courses is completely contrary in the state. As the intake capacity in the ITIs is 98,000 and the number of applications has been received is 2.30 lakh¹.

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Choices, Courses, and Companies

*The reason behind the huge demand for ITI students as there is a great **demand from industry** for fitter, machinists, turners, and mechanics in diesel as well as in motor. All these courses are offered at ITI.*

(Kolhatkar, DNA Newspaper, 2014: Emphasis added)

There are two points to note here: the first is the shifting balance between what is seen as higher education to lower-level technical courses; and the second, is a disproportionate increase in the applicants due to an increased demand from employers. The beneficiaries of this trend seem to be the ITIs or the Industrial Training Institutes. This chapter looks at recent trends on why students seem to be making a definitive shift towards courses in the ITIs in India.

The ITIs have been an integral part of the vocational readiness in India. Despite the attention to vocational education and training, the impact for the post-school vocational streams like the ITI has had mixed results for several years (Tilak, 2002; Tognatta, 2014). With renewed thrust in the new skill policy that was announced in 2015 (National Skill Development Policy, 2015), several institutional changes were also constituted- the biggest being the consolidation of the national vocational education and training body, the Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGET) that governs the ITIs, with a nodal ministry for skill development. This is discussed in further detail in this section.

This chapter also raises important questions of continuity and change, assessing the ground level expectations from the most important constituent of large-scale policy changes: the student.

1.1. Increasing Global Attention on VET and Employment

Vocational education has come under spotlight in the recent years, primarily because of the direct correlation between vocational education and training (VET) and employability. TVET or Technical Vocational Education and Training arising out of post-compulsory education has been accorded a place for debate in research as well as given importance due to it as an economic enabler (UNESCO, 2015: ACET Kuala Lumpur Declaration). Several countries, those with established economies and others with the intention, have embraced vocational education with élan- with increased attention and financial nourishment of its several tributaries of informal, non-formal and apprentice-based education systems. Increasingly, even those nation-states that have a focus on the vocational systems, are nonetheless largely restricted to a few trades, but are now looking to expand the policy scope to a broader spectrum of skills with an increased relevance to contemporary workplaces as well as technologies- an exemplar of such a work is the Wolf Report in the United Kingdom (Wolf, 2011).

1.2. India's VE/VT System

For the purpose of interpreting the expectations of students at the ITIs, and it is useful to understand the larger context of where the vocational education sits within the overall education system. The education system in India follows the 10+2+3 system, with the 10 representing the first 12 years of schooling including the two nursery years. The +2 or post-secondary years is when the streams for vocational education are separated distinctly from the other streams of arts, sciences and commerce, leading into their respective undergraduate degree programmes (the 3). The vocational education/training (VE/VT) system comprises two main streams: the first ranging from one-two years, referred to as an ITI or learning a trade at an Industrial Training Institute (ITI). The second, meanwhile, is for three years and is

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