

Human resource management: the role of vocational education and training in skill...

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



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Introduction

This study is aimed at exploring the role of vocational education and training (VET) in developing a skilled workforce and meeting the requirements of an efficient and well-functioning modern economy. The discussion will focus on vocational education and training being one of the crucial responsibilities of employers and employees and on the part to be played by the state in facilitating such occupational programs with reference to the implications of different VET systems on skill development. The analysis will also include a comprehensive account of arguments that demonstrate significant connections between VET systems and various models of labor market and evaluation of how such links may affect skill development. These arguments will be validated by particular examples of various VET systems used in different countries along with highlighting the key aspects of different vocational education and training systems in terms of workplace learning.

The Meaning and Importance of VET

In order to establish and sustain a prosperous economy and ensure its steady growth, having a skilled workforce is highly essential (Directorate for Education 2009). While some of the vital skills are a result of development of general education and training at all levels, many advanced nations such as UK, USA and European countries are in constant need of specific occupational skills to respond to the rapidly growing fields driven by technological advancements (Organization for Economic Cooperation 2010, p. 3). Vocational education and training systems play a critical part in supplying the occupational skills that are in demand and hence facilitate the organizations and the economy in general to adapt to the swiftly changing needs. Professional programs and qualifications greatly assist in prevarication of economic activities through the formation of occupational identity (Nijhof et al 2003, p. 40).

Vocational education has been taken as one of the most critical tools for addressing social, economic and political crises that threatens the social stability and economic productivity of nations. Lack of competent and skilled labor, growing unemployment, high rate of high school and college drop-outs and the transforming demographic nature of personnel have placed the matter of vocational training and workplace learning on top of the educational reform programs of many developing countries (Greenan & Mustapha 2002). Thus due to its dynamic nature, VET systems are unceasingly subject to various forces that lead to changes in educational institutions, job industry and society in general. According to the findings of a

research conducted by Greenan & Mustapha (2002) to investigate the employability of students who are vocationally certified as compared to those who are not, both employers and educators believe that vocational graduates have better employment opportunities than those students who have simply completed their academic education.

Employer organizations and trade unions are working to define, design and implement vocational programs, for instance, establishing national vocational qualification standards in Britain. VET not only serves to supply and maintain the needed labor skills but also develops and delivers occupational standards in collaboration with the professional sectors (Nijhof et al 2003). Besides providing the required labor force, an efficient VET system works to; educate and train new workers and employers to support the knowledge base in organizations, provision of up dated information and training facilities to align the talents and skills of trainees with the current labor demands, enabling the adaptation of latest technologies and innovation work methods and facilitating innovation and interactive learning process (Nijhof et al 2003, p. 40). In addition to this, as argued by Preston & Green (2008), significantly contributes towards institutional integrity, value formation as well as in reducing inequality and sense of discrimination in the social and organizational context.

VET as a Crucial Responsibility of Employers

It is of common knowledge that progress in the employee management can play a massive role in enhancing the competitive advantage of firms. Human

Resource Management indeed maintains that the success of a company's business strategy largely depends on the development of a more refined, extensive and strategic approach to labor management. As the nature of personnel management and function changes, HR managers are getting increasingly inclined towards including training function in their human resource strategies for using labor more effectively (Rainbird 1994). Since VET not only enriches employees for dealing professionally with the upcoming challenges posed by the current revolution in scientific, information and communication technology but also provides the competences which are essential to tackle such wide-scale changes, it has become a major responsibility of employers to devise personnel strategies that encompass VET systems in order to prepare the workforce for meeting the requirements of innovative techniques for doing diverse jobs.

There are several internal as well as external drivers that compel companies to invest in learning and training programs. For instance, companies may need to retrain employees for undertaking any innovative project, in preparation for succession, for improving individual and collective performance or aiding organizational change (Wilton 2011, p. 251). On the other hand, certain external elements such as market, technological or legislative changes may lead to skills deficiency and firms might require providing relevant coaching to fulfill those deficiencies. Each state has crafted its own VET system which governs the functioning of training programs executed within institutes. For example, the VET system in Germany is perhaps the most advanced and effective mainly due to the fact

that it places a lot of stress on the organizational as well as the social role of vocational programs (Preston & Green 2008, p. 20) and there exist a strong cooperation among the state, trade unions and organizations.

Germany has a dual system of apprenticeship where specialization centers are accessible after initial training and some relevant work experience, however, this VET system also referred to as 'societal model of training' is predominantly governed by labor-market situation whereas focus is also given to promoting civic values by means of professional socialization (Preston & Green 2008, p. 20). Thus the German VET system is characterized by immensely effective dual apprenticeship system based on a combination of schooling and workplace, sound employer organizations, healthy collaboration among the state, employers and trade unions and high-level interaction between training and education systems. There is an equal distribution of responsibilities and steering functions between the state and social partners (employers, trade unions) on local, regional and national level. The German VET system is a remarkable model for other countries to follow because both government and social partners mutually share the responsibility to ensure that its workforce has the right skills development framework for dealing with occupational and professional challenges in the future. The following paragraphs will review the diverse VET systems that are being employed in different countries with special emphasis on the role of employers and state in ensuring the provision of effective vocational training.

Overview of Different VET Systems

This section is intended to provide an extensive analysis of the various mainstream vocational education and training systems with special reference to the provision of training programs and ensuring workplace learning as a key responsibility of the organization's Human Resource department and the role of government in encouraging the development and spread of VET through forming policies and cooperating with employers' organizations and trade unions especially in terms of financing and controlling VET operations.

Regulated VET System

In a regulated Vocational training system, organizations that are registered and authorized by the state provide industry based qualifications to the learners. These organizations include both public and private institutions and the VET courses are designed to deliver nationally acknowledged competencies which employers identify as crucial to meet their needs. In a regulated VET system, majority of the vocational programs directed at competency-based and career-oriented training are publicly funded. The VET system in Australia, Denmark and Netherlands is regulated by several acts, legal guidelines and regulations which are established in collaboration with employer committees and unions (Rauner & MacLean 2009, p. 422). For instance, Australia's VET system is centrally controlled by the government and is highly advanced, owing to a decade of continuous restructurings and it works well to offer practical training to individuals and providing skills which are pre-requisite of a modern economy. On the other, France's VET

system is based on ILM (Integrated Learning Model) which is underpinned by national levy system. Similarly, as noted above, the Vet system of Germany is also state regulated where legislations has an element of coercion for HR managers to train their employees and so it has noticeable implications for the pattern in which skill development programs are formed and executed at organizational level (Coffield 1998, p. 32). Despite the fact that regulated approach motivates employers and employee cooperation in terms of vocational educational, the dual apprenticeship model of VET that is operative in Germany have few weaknesses too. For instance, it is less flexible and adoptive to the skill needs of certain kinds of occupations and is to a significant extent, reliant on employers' supply of internships and training and on labor market conditions (Green 2011).

Voluntarist VET System

Voluntarist VET system is the one which has little or no state interference and vocational education is left to the choice of organizations or the individuals. The VET system that is operative in UK is a striking example of Voluntarist system of vocational training where the state does not take responsibility of offering skill development courses or promoting workplace learning (Coffield 1998, p. 32). Where such as system is flexible enough to allow swift response to changing employer/individual demands, it also results in overproduction of graduates, penurious aptitude based learning that is low on professional socialization, inadequate supply of transitional skills which ultimately leads to polarization of income and skills (Green 2011). This Voluntarist practice in the UK is considered as one of the core reasons for the

relatively low level of VET provided by the companies (Coffield 1998, p. 33). The structure of British Vet system majorly relies upon NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) which are basically related to competence and occupation and such a certification is obtained through assessment and teaching. The bodies responsible for providing such qualifications include Sector Skill Councils, Qualification and Curriculum authority, Colleges and Employers, however, there is no governing body that can check the functioning of these authorities and thus there is no accountability on part of the VET providers, particularly employers for the fulfillment of VET responsibility. In this kind of government orientation where the role of state is restricted to mere appreciation and encouragement, the consequences are often low investment in skills and narrowly focused and poor quality apprenticeship system.

Developmental VET System

This approach to VET is being implemented by a growing number of firms. It encompasses goal-setting and regular evaluation, however, its primary focus is on motivating trainees to learn and improve their performance. The principal strength of this sort of system is that it minimizes the tendency to scooping-out particular skills and thus reduces skill polarization.

Furthermore, it raises skill and pay levels of less-skilled occupations and serves as a useful agent of professional socialization. Today, almost all European countries and several other states are making attempts to modernize their regulated or Voluntarist VET systems that were either built on low-skill equilibrium (such as in UK) or on labor market institutions and

steady economies. Immensely powerful economic forces such as rapid technological advancements, globalization of markets and dramatic changes in the ICT field have led to an increasing concern for upgrading of VET systems. Attempts to develop GNVQ in Britain, the improvements in the dual system in Germany, new VET legislations in Netherlands are some of the clear examples of revisions of VET systems worldwide.

Since VET system is generally considered as one of the social system in which government, educational institutions and social partners work together to build a national VET set-up, it is deeply rooted in the economic, social and cultural patterns. Because of these strong connections, it is complicated to introduce innovations in the VET system as it requires changes in private-public arrangements, labor and education laws, funding, labor agreements, training traditions, occupational identity etc. However, since business organizations, training providers/ institutions and state are the principal steering elements of VET systems, their joint collaborations and correct approach to developing and executing VET strategies can prove to be a powerful resistance towards the above listed barriers. The contribution of government is critical to guarantee the smooth and effective functioning of VET systems because state has the authority to regulate the evaluation and recognition of vocational certifications and also to control the cost-effectiveness and quality of VET institutions (Silberman 1982, p. 205). Therefore, it is vital for states as well as private partners to invest in Vet and to monitor, regulate and supervise the functioning of VET system in order to

ensure the availability of required skills and competencies and to align the systems with the current economic demands.

The Correlation between Labor Models and their Effects

To what extent a VET system is effective largely depends upon recognition of the labor markets, productivity of learning process, efficiency of delivered qualifications, motivation for further training etc. VET is also extremely vital for societal development because it provides access to required skills and pathway to the labor market, which depicts the nature of its association with fundamental labor market models; Occupational labor market model and Internal Labor Market Model. The former relates to individuals holding specific qualification certified either by a their peer group judgment or a diploma, whereas the latter exists when a company frequently fills particular vacancies by transferring or promoting existing staff and thus restricting outside recruitment to a limited number of positions (Eyraud et al 1990, p. 502). The key difference between the two models lies in their implications on skills development; OLM concentrates more on providing training in the beginning stages of an individual's career, just as in case with apprenticeship, while ILM mainly emphasize on continuous workplace training. The VET system that prevails in UK and Germany is based on OLM where training is standardized to occupational norm and no significant attention is given to skill formation but on its maintenance. On the other hand, the Vet system in Japan is ILM based where the nature of in-house training is firm-specific. The national education-work setting in Japan as well as in USA, Canada and Australia is a loose bonding between labor market

and VET system, with a flexible corresponding between qualifications and jobs, allowing for prevailing school-based extensive coaching and on-job training (Baethge 2006, p. 72). Alternatively, the National Vocational Qualifications in UK, which even though has a lot of room for improvement, depicts a labor market driven model of VET where the state approves qualification standards provided by the job industry for enhancing transparency of workplace training programs.

Conclusion

From the above mentioned literature, the importance of a sound VET system for the progress of the economy has been established. While employers continue to adopt VET as a part of their HR strategy, realizing the need to equip employees with skills essential for coping with the current transformations in the job industry, state should also play an equal role to enforce and facilitate vocational training at all organizational as well as higher educational levels. It has also come to light that regular upgrading of VET systems is inevitable if the state and, employers to be specific, wish to have a skilled workforce that is well prepared to handle newer work challenges.

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