

Vocational Education: A Mean to Educate and Empower the Socio-economic Status of Marginalised Communities

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Abstract

From the days of the Wood's Despatch there has been loud cry for the introduction of vocational education as the solution to the educational problems of the country, endorsed subsequently by several Commissions and Committees of both British and Independent India. The national leaders of India such as Mahatma Gandhi had supported it to be introduced in school education. Through diversification and by tracking the students in higher secondary vocational stream, it was believed that many educational problems could be solved. Vocational education is concerned with providing facilities for a sizeable section of students for whom bread-winning is far more important than the pursuit of higher education: And to prevent an unhealthy influx into higher education, it is essential to evolve a system of education and training quite apart from general education, which aims to prepare the students for prospective vocations. Treating and offering vocational education through a separated vocational stream of education as offered at higher secondary stage would best do this preparation. Hence, it is the felt need to evaluate that to whom the vocational education has been benefitted as conceptualised and proposed. The present paper discusses the generalisations derived through the study.

Introduction

Existing traditional occupations require adopting of modern ideas and quantity of production. The demands for the new skills arising out of various developmental programmes, especially in the rural areas, have to be identified carefully to assess the manpower requirement. Hence, vocational education is viewed as the solution to the educational problems in the developing countries. It is believed

that many education problems such as unbridled demand for higher education, the financial crisis in education and unemployment among college and secondary school graduates could be solved by diversifying the secondary education curriculum. Therefore, such a kind of education would be helpful in developing what can be formed as 'skill-culture' and attitude towards manual work in contrast to pure academic

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culture and preference for white collar jobs; and to serve simultaneously the “hand” and the “mind”, the practical and abstract, the vocational and academic. Students getting job linked courses can be encouraged for self-employment.

As an antidote to urban biased elite education vocational education will promote equity with a rural bias and serve the needs of relatively poor people. Also as Grubb states vocational education has been seen as the answer to enrolment problem; the tendency of some students especially lower class/caste students to drop out of schools without occupational skills — a problem that vocational education promise to resolve by providing a more interesting and job-relevant curriculum. More specifically, it is believed to be an effective answer to rural problems, to alleviate unemployment; to reorient student attitude towards rural society; to hold urban migration; to transmit skills and attitudes useful in employment and as an important measure of development for disadvantaged youth in rural and urban areas.

Need for the Study

The role of education in facilitating social and economic progress is well recognised. It opens up opportunities leading to both individual and group entitlements. Education in its broadest sense of development of youth is the most crucial input for empowering people with skills and knowledge and giving them access to productive employment in future. Improvements in education are not only expected to enhance efficiency but also augment the quality of life. Educational institutions at different level are required

to serve as agents of socio-economic change for the betterment of the society. Education should necessarily serve as a developmental input to meet the needs and challenges of a changing society. The need of the hour is to ensure that education at all levels help either self-employment or assured paid employment. The need for changes in the existing education system so as to make it job-oriented, purposeful and meaningful has been well-recognised.

Historically, education in India was designed to offer academic knowledge in humanities, social sciences and sciences for advanced studies and research. Though there is a need for this kind of education, it has not produced the necessary manpower required for many economically productive activities in business, industry and trade. Almost all the Committees and Commissions on educational reform, appointed over a period of time, emphasised the importance and need for vocational education in India. Most of them stressed the necessity of enriching the vocational content in the curricula at the secondary school level.

General or Vocational education? This is a “tough choice” and has been a matter of concern of many developing countries for a long time. The objective of vocational stream at higher secondary stage is to prepare students for the world of work and make them employable for a broad range of occupations in various industries and economic sectors. It is expected to provide vital manpower—at middle level—needed for the economic service sectors and provide opportunities for self-employment or

profitable employability, thereby easing the problem of unemployment. Thus, the vocationalisation of education is the necessity to meet the demand of the individual and society. Education must be provided in such a way that it can produce self-reliant and self-dependent citizens. Hence, it is a felt need to evaluate that to whom the vocational education has been benefitted as advocated and conceptualised so that a study has been conducted among the schools offering vocational education at higher secondary stage in a district of Tamil Nadu.

Objectives of the Study

The present study on the vocational stream of education offered at higher secondary level was carried out with the following objectives:

- To know the socio-economic status of the students pursuing vocational stream of education at higher secondary stage in the area selected for the study;
- To assess the status of vocational courses being offered at higher secondary schools;
- To comprehend the profile of the students of vocational stream;
- To evaluate the impact of some selected variables on the students' enrolment in vocational stream;
- To elicit the previous academic performance of the students pursuing vocational stream of education;
- To know the students' perception towards vocational stream education and their future plan; and
- To suggest ways and means to improve the quality of vocational stream education at higher secondary level.

Setting of the Study

There are 152 higher secondary schools in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu of which 88 schools (57.9%) offer vocational subjects at higher secondary stage. Among those schools which offer vocational subjects, one-fourth (22) of them are selected as sample for the present study by using stratified random sampling method. For the selection of the sample schools, the schools were stratified into two broader categories viz., government and government-aided higher secondary schools.

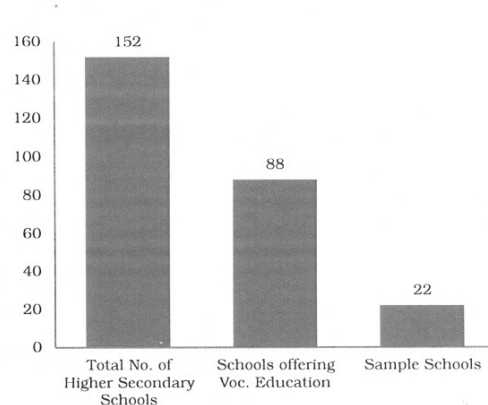


Fig. 1: Higher Secondary Schools in Tirunelveli District

The sample schools were selected proportionately from each group randomly. From the total of 1984 students enrolled from both standards (XI & XII) one-fifth (398) of them were proportionately selected as the sample for the present study. Both for convenience and to collect and systematic and

unambiguous data all the student-respondents were approached outside the school campus with the help of a structured interview schedule. To arrive at general conclusions the collected data were analysed by applying Karl Pearson's correlation and tests of significance along with descriptive methods such as percentage, proportion and ratio and presented in summary form. Besides, to through more light on the study Mean also computed for some selected variables.

Summary of the Study

Vocational Subjects Taught

While analysing the vocational subjects taught in the sample higher secondary schools, about 55 per cent of the total schools offer only Business and Commerce vocational courses, followed by another 18.5 per cent schools that offer Engineering and Technology along

with Business and Commerce courses. Another 18 per cent of the total schools offer Engineering and Technology, Health, Agriculture, and Home Science alone. Both Business and Commerce and Health are offered in only one school.

However, none of the government-aided schools offer Agriculture; and the same with Home Science by government schools. The study reveals that the other vocational subjects like Computer Science, Photography, Tourist Guide, and Music are not offered in any of the government or government-aided schools in Tirunelveli district. In other words, the district does not offer all the vocational subjects at higher secondary stage. Three-fifths of them offer only one vocational course while another 31.8 per cent schools with couple of courses. Only 9 per cent in the total higher secondary schools offer more than two courses.

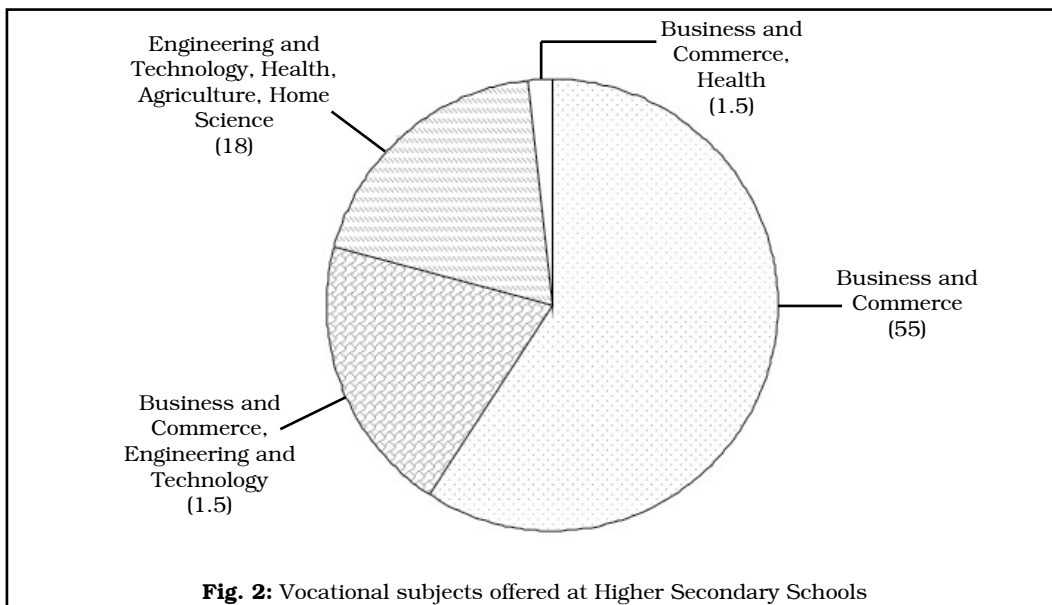


Fig. 2: Vocational subjects offered at Higher Secondary Schools

A Profile of Vocational Stream Students

The analysis of the students' subject of study reveals that a vast majority of them studying Business and Commerce (70.8%), followed by the Engineering and Technology (14.8%), Health (7.3%), Agriculture (5.1%), and Home Science (2.0%). More than half of the students (53.1%) studying in government-aided schools while the remaining 46.2 per cent in government schools. Most of the students of Engineering Technology (84.7%), and Business and Commerce (52.1%) study in government-aided while about 70 per cent students of Health in government schools. Most of the Health (93.1%) and Engineering and Technology (69.5%) students belong to urban schools while 66.3 per cent of Business and Commerce belong to rural schools. However, all the students of Agriculture and Home Science subjects are from rural schools. It is found that the students pursuing vocational education are mostly living in rural and they constituted about three-fifths (59%) in the total students. However, it is significant to note that 65.5 per cent of the total female and 52.9% of the male students are from rural areas.

Socio-Economic Determinants of Vocational Education

As far as the analysis of determinants of vocational education variables such as students' sex, religion, caste group, parental education, occupation and their monthly income, birth order, household size, distance to school from their place of residence and mode to reach the school, annual expense for vocational education, their previous academic

performance and marks secured in SSLC are concerned.

Sex

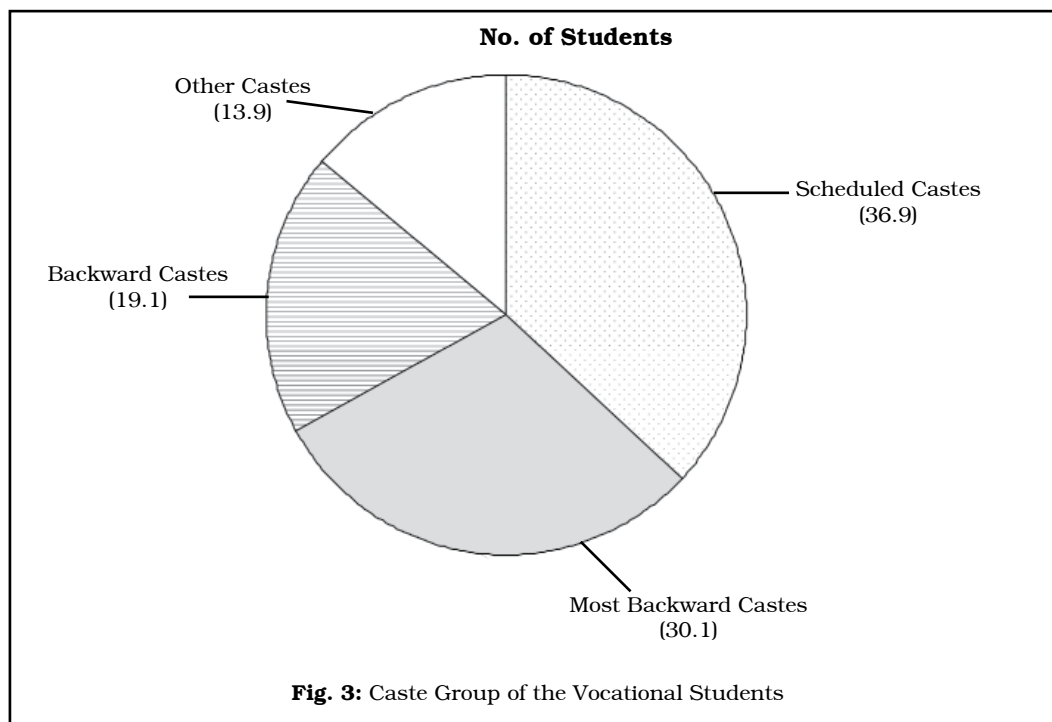
Half of the (51.2%) total students are males while the rest 48.2 per cent constituted by females. Females outnumbered males in Health (79.3%), and Business and Commerce (56.7%) while males in Agriculture (85.0%). The admission is restricted to females in Engineering and Technology while males in Home Science. While about two-thirds of the total females preferred government schools, government-aided schools by 55.2 per cent of the total males. About two-thirds of the total males belong to Most Backward Castes while 42.8 per cent of the females are Scheduled Castes. However, males constitute more than 60 per cent in all caste groups.

Religion

A vast majority of the students are Hindus (70.6%), followed by Christians (23.6%) and Muslims (5.8%). About 60 per cent out of the total Hindu respondent-students are females while 77.7 per cent of Christians and 78.3 per cent Muslims are males. Hindus predominates in all vocational subjects and they constituted nearly three-fourths in Business and Commerce (73.4%) and Health (72.4%), and three-fifths in Home Science (62.5%), Engineering and Technology (61%) and Agriculture (60%). However, no student of Health subject belongs to Islam.

Caste group

More than one-third of the total students belongs to Scheduled Castes



(36.9%), followed by Most Backward (30.1%), Backward (19.1%), and Other (13.9%) Castes. About 44.7 per cent of Scheduled Castes study Business and Commerce courses while about 34 per cent of Engineering and Technology by Backward Castes whereas Most Backward Castes dominates both Health (34.5%) and Agriculture (45.%) subjects.

Parental education

It is found that 42.2 per cent of the total students' parents are literates, followed by 30.7 per cent illiterate parents, 18.6 per cent secondary school graduates. Only 8.5 per cent of the total is obtained higher secondary (5.3%) and collegiate (3.2%) education. Hence, it is found that almost two-thirds (66.1%) of the

total students' parents pursued school education only. It is to be noted that 88.5 per cent of illiterates' children pursuing Business and Commerce courses.

Parental occupation

Of the total students 28.9 per cent of their parents are daily wagers, followed by farmers (27.6%), businessmen (20.4%) and self-employed people (8.2%). The remaining 14.9 per cent parents are employers of government and private sector. Nearly half (48%) of the total of Engineering and Technology, one-fourths of Health (27.6%) and 55 per cent of Agriculture students are the children of farmers whereas about 40 per cent of the total Business and Commerce students are children of daily wagers.

Parental income

More than half (54.5%) of the students' parents earns of ₹1000–3000/- per month, while another one-thirds (37.6%) parents earns ₹3000–5000/-. The average income for the students' parents is ₹ 3,362/- per month while ₹ 3,578/- by males' parents whereas ₹ 3,134/- stands for females' parents. However, lower income parents (₹ 3,076/-) admits their children in government schools while earners of ₹ 3,607/- in government-aided schools.

Birth order

More than half (53.3%) of the students are at third by order of birth, followed by another 23.4 per cent of fourth ordered students. While the second and sixth ordered constitutes 9.2 per cent, each respectively. The mean birth order of the students is 3.3, irrespective of sex.

Household size

Nearly half of the total students are from small families (48.2%), while another 30.9 per cent students belongs to medium size families. The remaining one-fifths (20.9%) of the total are from large families. The average household size of the students' family is 6.1. While males pursue vocational education from 5.4 members' family, females are from 4.9. It is proved that medium size families' respondents are highly subjected to study vocational education. It is found that while the small size families prefer government-aided schools, government schools by medium size families. The average household size of the students of government-aided schools is 3.9 while 6.7 stands for government school respondents.

Distance to school

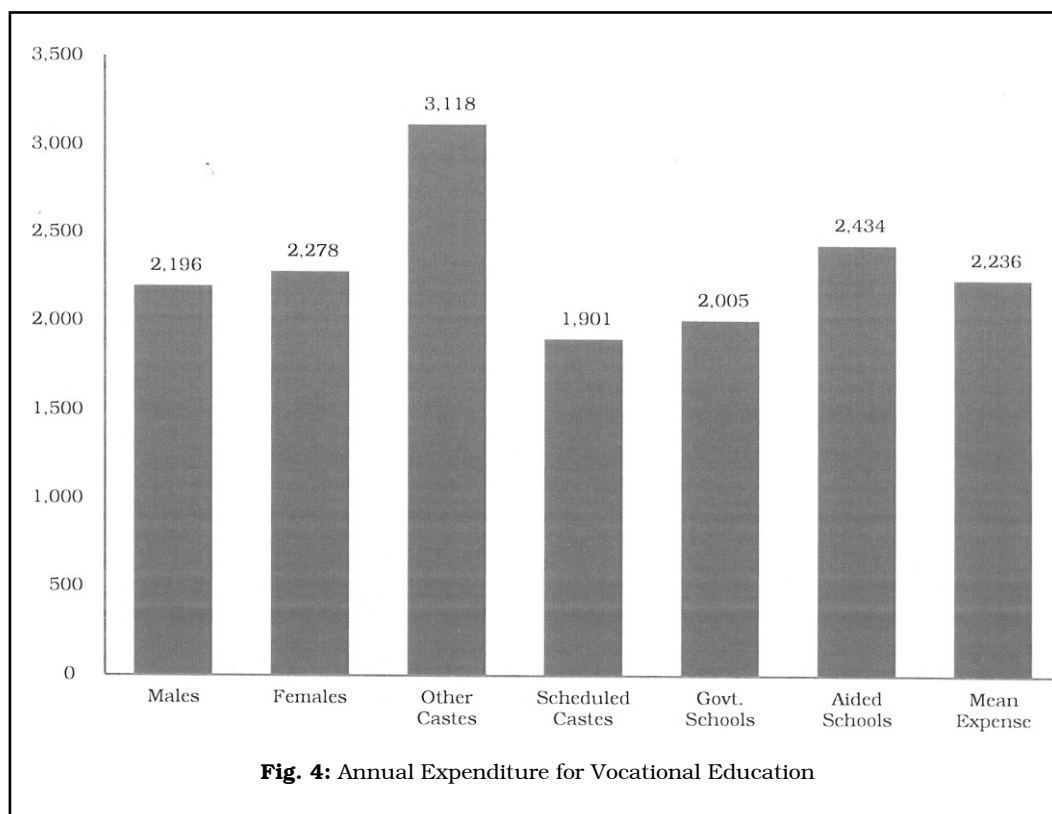
Half (51.8%) of the total students studying in the nearby schools and among them three-fifths (59.8%) constituted by females while the remaining other students are in 4 – 15 km radius. The average distance to school from the students' residence is 4.5 km, irrespective of sex. It is found that the students who reside within an average of 3.8 km circle studying in government-aided schools while 5.3 in government schools. The highest earners allow their children more than 7 km while the less earners limits within 3.3 km.

Mode to commute school

Three-fifths of the total students reach school by foot, followed by cycle (35.4%) and bus (24.5%). It is found that the females are allowed to go to school only if the school is commutable distance either by foot or cycle while the males' mode of conveyance is bus.

Annual expense

It is found that while male students spent an average of ₹ 2,196/- per year, the females ₹ 2,278/-. However, the mean expense for the total students is ₹ 2,236/-. To a greater extent the students' caste group to which they belong influences their expense for education. While an average of ₹ 3,118/- spent by the other castes, the expense made by the scheduled castes is ₹ 1,901/-, per annum. It is found that instead of average expenditure the students who studying in government schools spent ₹ 2,005/-, per year, lower than the students of government-aided schools (₹ 2,434/-).



Previous Academic Performance

More than one-fifths (21.6%) in the students had failed in any of the classes in the school and nearly three-fifths (57.0%) of them had failed in X standard. Among them there are more males than females and almost all they are from agricultural families, irrespective of sex. Poor performance in annual examinations, absent from attending the examinations, irregular attendance of the classes and sick are the causes for their failure in secondary school leaving examinations and most of them failed in Mathematics and Languages.

Marks in SSLC

About two-thirds of the students (65.3%) have secured average marks of between 40–60 per cent in secondary school leaving examinations (SSLC), while another 22.4 per cent have secured 60–70 whereas 70–80 have secured only by 12.3 per cent. Of the total males 72.1 per cent of them secured 40–60 per cent marks compared to 58.2 per cent of the girls. However, against mean marks of 280.5 of the total students girls scored 288 while boys scored only 273. While the rural students have secured an average of 266 marks (53.2%), the urban students scored 302 (60.4%) out of five hundred.

TABLE 1
Mean for some Selected Variables

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Mean to the total (N=398)</i> |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Birth Order | 3.3 |
| Distance to School (Km) | 4.5 |
| Household Size | 5.1 |
| Annual Expense (in ₹) | 2,236/- |
| Parental Monthly Income (in ₹) | 3,362/- |
| S.S.L.C. Marks (out of 500) | 284 |

Perception Towards Vocational Education

It is found that almost all the students enjoying vocational education in terms of practical as well as theoretical handle by the subject experts and preferring more classes since the medium of instruction is Tamil. All the required practicals are conducted at the schools itself and the subject teacher will evaluate them, always. Irrespective of subjects, all the students are availed of the required apparatuses for their practical and opined it would benefit them if found more. However, most of the students expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the quality of practicals and apparatuses availed for them, excluding the students of Business and Commerce which do not require more than paper and pen, since they constitute half of the total each respectively. More than half of the totals are satisfied regarding classrooms so that they are all perceived moderately. However, none of the students are provided of either laboratory or workshed or both for practicals.

A vast majority (84.9%) of the students themselves selected vocational

education while the rest because of others like friends, parents, siblings, acquaintances, and relatives. However, about 30 per cent of the themselves selected students preferred vocational education since they perceived it as better than humanities, for self-employment and guarantee for employment, and with the intention of continuing professional education. Only few in the total perceived that vocational education is easy to pass through. Therefore, a large majority of the students are not bothering about the denial of academic stream courses for study to them.

Almost all the male (90.7%) and female (88.7%) students hold the perception that the expense for vocational education is moderate, similarly between rural and urban students. While about half (49.5%) of the government schools' students opined that the expense is low, the same expressed only by 11.6 per cent students of government-aided schools. While the students of Engineering and Technology, Home Science and Business and Commerce are at moderate, Agriculture and Health students opined the expense for studying their subject is high. It is to be noted that irrespective of caste group all they are at moderate regarding expense.

It is found that however, almost all the students are in dissatisfaction regarding the infrastructure availed at school such as library, lavatory, sports and drinking water while about half of the total perceived, however moderately towards cycle shed. None of the students enjoyed retiring room facilities in their school, irrespective of government or government-aided.

Perception Toward Future Plan

It is found that except the students of Engineering and Technology, none of them are interested towards either self-employment or entrepreneurial efforts since the content of the higher secondary vocational education is not adequate so that all they wished to continue their education in academic. However, all their parents have high regard regarding the nature of education pursuing by their children, according to the students. Most of the students perceived that the vocational education could change the caste-rid social status by the way of economic mobility and achieving novel identity.

Conclusion

In concluding the present study it is to be noted that a large majority of the students pursuing vocational education came from rural areas. More than one-

thirds of them belong to Scheduled Castes. More than half of the students are children of daily wagers and farmers and their parents have a family income of around ₹ 3000/- per month. A large majority of them belongs to medium size families and third by order of birth, and do not have any traditional vocational family background. Their choice of selecting vocational education is mainly due to the marks secured in the secondary school leaving examination. They did not incur a huge expenditure for vocational education. What the findings of the study as a whole evidences that the vocational stream of education is achieving its objectives through attracting the socially economically deprived and marginalized students by imparting vocational skills to venture either self-employment or in search of employment instead of continuing their education in academic courses.

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