



CURRICULUM IMPERATIVE THROUGH VOCATIONAL TRAINING FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

This paper explores the necessity of a curriculum imperative through vocational training for out-of-school children, emphasising its role in equipping them with practical skills for self-sufficiency and economic empowerment. Millions of children worldwide lack access to formal education, limiting their opportunities for employment and sustainable livelihoods. Integrating vocational training into non-formal education programs offers a pragmatic solution, bridging the skills gap and enhancing employability. This study highlights the importance of a structured curriculum that aligns with industry demands while fostering entrepreneurship and lifelong learning. Policy recommendations and best practices for effective implementation are also discussed to ensure inclusive and sustainable skill development for marginalised youth.

Keywords: Curriculum, Vocational Training, Out-of-School Children

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right and a cornerstone for social and economic development. Despite global efforts to ensure universal education, millions of children remain out of school due to financial constraints, conflict, and social barriers (UNESCO, 2022). The exclusion of these children from formal education systems not only hinders their personal growth but also contributes to cycles of poverty and unemployment. To address this issue, vocational training has emerged as a pragmatic solution, equipping out-of-school children with practical skills that enhance employability and self-reliance (ILO, 2021).

Vocational training offers skill-based learning integrated with hands-on experience, providing an alternative pathway for economic participation. Unlike conventional academic curricula, vocational education is tailored to industry-specific competencies, enabling learners to transition into the workforce more efficiently (World Bank, 2021). Research highlights that vocational training fosters entrepreneurship, innovation, and social mobility among marginalised youth, making it a crucial component of sustainable development (Gustavsson, 2019). By embedding a structured curriculum imperative in vocational training programs, policymakers and educators can ensure that out-of-school children acquire relevant skills aligned with labour market demands.

The significance of vocational training is underscored by global initiatives such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which advocates for inclusive and equitable education for all (United Nations, 2015). Countries worldwide have implemented skill-based education models to bridge the gap between education and employment. For instance, Germany's dual education system integrates classroom learning with apprenticeships, significantly reducing youth unemployment rates (BIBB, 2019). Likewise, developing nations such as India have launched initiatives like the Skill India Mission, which has upskilled millions of young people and strengthened the workforce (Government of India, 2022).

However, vocational education faces several challenges, including insufficient funding, a shortage of trained instructors, and weak industry linkages. Overcoming these barriers necessitates a multi-stakeholder approach involving governments, private sector actors, and civil society organisations (UNICEF, 2020). This paper explores the role of vocational training in providing educational opportunities for out-of-school children,

examines best practices, and proposes strategic interventions to enhance curriculum effectiveness and workforce integration.

The Role of Vocational Training in Empowering Out-of-School Children

Vocational training serves as a crucial mechanism for integrating out-of-school children into the workforce by equipping them with job-specific skills and practical knowledge. Unlike traditional education systems that primarily focus on theoretical learning, vocational education emphasises hands-on training, making it particularly beneficial for marginalised youth with limited access to formal schooling (UNESCO, 2022). Studies show that vocational training enhances employability by providing technical expertise in fields such as carpentry, plumbing, tailoring, and information technology, ensuring that young people can secure sustainable livelihoods (World Bank, 2021). A well-structured vocational curriculum is essential in ensuring that training programs align with industry demands. Countries like Germany have successfully implemented the dual education system, wherein students split their time between classroom learning and apprenticeships in industries (BIBB, 2019). This model has significantly reduced youth unemployment by providing early exposure to professional environments, allowing young learners to develop essential competencies and establish industry connections. In contrast, developing nations face challenges in replicating this model due to inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and a lack of collaboration between educational institutions and the private sector (ILO, 2021).

The Role of Vocational Training in Empowering Out-of-School Children

Vocational training plays a transformative role in equipping out-of-school children with practical skills that enhance employability, self-sufficiency, and economic inclusion. As millions of children worldwide remain excluded from formal education due to poverty, conflict, and systemic inequalities, vocational education provides an alternative pathway for learning and career development (UNESCO, 2022). Unlike traditional academic programs, vocational training focuses on skill-based learning tailored to meet labour market demands, ensuring that young learners can secure jobs, become entrepreneurs, and break cycles of poverty (Akorede et al., 2017; World Bank, 2021).

Enhancing Employability and Economic Opportunities

One of the key benefits of vocational training is its ability to improve employability by providing industry-relevant skills. In many countries, skill-based training programs have significantly reduced youth unemployment by preparing individuals for careers in high-demand sectors such as construction, manufacturing, hospitality, and information technology (ILO, 2021). Studies indicate that vocational education is particularly effective in countries with strong apprenticeship systems, where students receive hands-on experience alongside theoretical learning. For example, Germany's dual vocational training system has been successful in reducing youth unemployment by integrating formal education with workplace training, ensuring a smooth transition into the job market (BIBB, 2019). Developing countries have also begun implementing similar models to bridge the skills gap. In India, the Skill India Mission has provided vocational training to over 50 million young people, significantly improving employment prospects in various industries (Government of India, 2022). Likewise, in sub-Saharan Africa, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs have been introduced to equip marginalised youth with skills that cater to local economic needs, including agriculture, crafts, and entrepreneurship (UNICEF, 2021). These programs not only create employment opportunities but also enhance productivity and economic growth by developing a skilled workforce.

Promoting Entrepreneurship and Self-Reliance

Vocational training fosters entrepreneurship by equipping young learners with the technical skills and business knowledge needed to start and sustain their own enterprises. Research shows that many vocational graduates, particularly those in rural areas, become self-employed due to a lack of formal job opportunities (Gustavsson, 2020). By integrating financial literacy, business management, and digital skills into vocational curricula, training programs can empower youth to create their own businesses, generate income, and contribute to local economies (World Bank, 2021). For instance, in Kenya, the Ajira Digital Program has trained thousands of young people in online freelancing, enabling them to earn a livelihood through digital platforms (UNESCO,

2022). Similarly, in Nigeria, vocational training centres provide courses in tailoring, carpentry, and electrical work, allowing young individuals to establish micro-businesses and become economically independent (ILO, 2021). By promoting entrepreneurship, vocational training not only addresses youth unemployment but also drives innovation and community development.

Addressing Social and Economic Inequalities

Vocational education is particularly beneficial for marginalised groups, including girls, children with disabilities, and those from low-income backgrounds. Traditional education systems often exclude these groups due to financial constraints, discrimination, and cultural barriers. However, vocational training programs offer a flexible and inclusive learning approach that accommodates diverse learners and provides them with equal opportunities to succeed (UNICEF, 2021). Gender-inclusive vocational training initiatives have been instrumental in empowering young women. In Bangladesh, for example, skills development programs in garment manufacturing have enabled thousands of girls to enter the workforce, gain financial independence, and challenge gender norms (World Bank, 2021). Similarly, in Latin America, initiatives promoting women's participation in technical fields such as coding and engineering have increased female employment in male-dominated industries (ILO, 2021). By fostering inclusivity, vocational training helps bridge educational gaps and promotes social mobility among disadvantaged populations.

Vocational training serves as a powerful tool for empowering out-of-school children by providing them with skills that enhance employability, entrepreneurship, and social inclusion. By aligning vocational curricula with labour market needs, governments and educational institutions can create sustainable pathways for marginalised youth to gain economic independence and contribute to national development. To maximise its impact, vocational education must be adequately funded, modernised to reflect industry advancements, and integrated with apprenticeship programs that provide real-world experience. Strengthening vocational training systems will ensure that all children, regardless of their educational background, have access to meaningful learning opportunities and a brighter future.

Vocational Training and Economic Development

Investing in vocational training has significant economic benefits, particularly in developing countries where youth unemployment is a pressing issue. The International Labour Organization (ILO) highlights that skill-based education programs have the potential to boost economic growth by creating a workforce that meets labour market needs (ILO, 2021). In India, for example, the Skill India Mission has provided training to millions of young individuals, enhancing their employability and reducing dependency on informal labour markets (Government of India, 2022). Similarly, African nations have adopted technical and vocational education training (TVET) programs to equip young people with skills that contribute to local industries, fostering economic independence and community development (UNICEF, 2020).

Moreover, vocational education promotes entrepreneurship by encouraging self-employment among young people. Studies indicate that trained individuals are more likely to start their own businesses, contributing to job creation and local economic growth (Gustavsson, 2019). By integrating financial literacy and business management skills into vocational curricula, educational institutions can empower young entrepreneurs, enabling them to navigate market challenges and sustain successful enterprises.

Challenges in implementing vocational training for out-of-school children

Despite its benefits, vocational training faces multiple obstacles, including limited access to quality training centres, outdated curricula, and social stigma associated with skill-based education (UNESCO, 2022). Many developing countries lack sufficient vocational institutions, forcing young learners to rely on informal apprenticeships that do not provide standardised certification or career progression opportunities (World Bank, 2021). Additionally, gender disparities persist in vocational education, with fewer girls enrolling in technical training programs due to societal norms and limited access to resources (UNICEF, 2020).

These challenges range from financial constraints and outdated curricula to social stigma and inadequate infrastructure. Addressing these barriers is crucial to ensuring that vocational education serves as a viable pathway for marginalised youth to enter the workforce.

Limited Funding and Infrastructure

One of the primary challenges of vocational training is the lack of adequate funding. Many developing nations struggle to allocate sufficient resources to establish and maintain vocational training centres. Unlike conventional schools, vocational education requires specialised equipment, training materials, and skilled instructors, all of which demand significant investment (UNESCO, 2022). The World Bank (2021) highlights that underfunded vocational programs often suffer from poor-quality instruction, outdated tools, and insufficient facilities, limiting students' ability to acquire practical skills relevant to modern industries. Without proper funding, these programs fail to provide students with the necessary competencies to secure meaningful employment.

Outdated and Irrelevant Curricula

Many vocational training programs operate with outdated curricula that do not align with current labour market demands. Rapid technological advancements have transformed various industries, making traditional skill sets less relevant. However, vocational education systems in many countries fail to update their curricula to reflect these changes (ILO, 2021). For instance, in many African and South Asian nations, vocational training programs still emphasise manual trades while neglecting digital skills and emerging industries such as renewable energy, artificial intelligence, and e-commerce (UNICEF, 2020). This mismatch between vocational education and industry needs results in a workforce that is ill-equipped for modern job markets, reducing employability and economic impact.

Social Stigma and Gender Disparities

Another significant barrier is the societal perception that vocational training is inferior to traditional academic education. Many families and communities view skill-based education as a last resort for children who fail in conventional schooling (Gustavsson, 2019). This negative perception discourages enrollment in vocational programs, particularly among young girls. Gender disparity is a persistent issue, as many vocational training opportunities are dominated by male-oriented trades, while fewer programs cater to fields that are considered suitable for women (UNESCO, 2022). As a result, girls often face limited options and are discouraged from pursuing technical careers, further widening gender inequalities in the workforce (UNICEF, 2020).

Lack of Qualified Instructors

The shortage of well-trained vocational instructors poses another critical challenge. Unlike traditional teachers, vocational trainers require hands-on industry experience and pedagogical expertise to effectively teach practical skills (BIBB, 2019). However, many vocational education systems lack the necessary resources to attract and retain skilled trainers, leading to subpar instruction. In many developing countries, instructors often lack exposure to modern industry practices, making it difficult for them to provide up-to-date training (ILO, 2021). Without qualified educators, vocational training programs fail to equip students with the competencies needed for real-world employment.

Weak Industry Linkages and Employment Pathways

Vocational education programs often suffer from weak connections with industries, limiting students' opportunities for hands-on training and job placements. In countries with strong vocational systems, such as Germany and Switzerland, collaboration between industries and educational institutions ensures that students receive practical training through apprenticeships (BIBB, 2019). However, in many developing nations, there is a disconnect between vocational training centres and employers, making it difficult for graduates to transition into formal employment (World Bank, 2021). Without structured apprenticeship programs and industry partnerships, many vocational graduates struggle to find jobs that match their skills. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving governments, private sector actors, and international organisations. Increased investment, curriculum modernisation, awareness campaigns to combat stigma, and

enhanced industry collaboration can significantly improve vocational training outcomes. By overcoming these barriers, vocational education can become an effective tool for empowering out-of-school children, equipping them with the skills needed for sustainable employment and economic growth.

To overcome these challenges, a multi-sectoral approach is needed. Governments should prioritise funding for vocational education, establish partnerships with private sector stakeholders, and develop policies that integrate vocational training into national education frameworks (United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, enhancing teacher training programs, updating curricula to reflect technological advancements, and promoting public awareness about the value of vocational education can help shift societal perceptions and increase enrollment rates among out-of-school children (ILO, 2021). Therefore, vocational training presents a viable solution for addressing the educational and economic challenges faced by out-of-school children. By implementing structured, industry-aligned training programs, governments and educational institutions can empower young individuals with the skills needed to secure stable employment, contribute to economic growth, and break cycles of poverty. Strengthening vocational education systems through policy reforms and investment will ensure that all children, regardless of their educational background, have access to meaningful learning opportunities and a sustainable future.

Recommendations for Strengthening Vocational Training for Out-of-School Children

To maximise the impact of vocational training for out-of-school children, governments, educational institutions, and stakeholders must adopt strategic interventions. The following recommendations focus on improving accessibility, curriculum relevance, funding, and industry linkages to enhance the effectiveness of vocational education.

1. Increase Government Investment and Policy Support

Governments should prioritise funding for vocational education by allocating resources to establish well-equipped training centres, recruit qualified instructors, and provide financial aid for disadvantaged learners. Many developing countries face challenges in expanding vocational training due to limited budgets and policy gaps (UNESCO, 2022). Strengthening national policies that integrate vocational training into mainstream education systems will ensure long-term sustainability and impact. Countries such as Germany and Switzerland have successfully incorporated vocational training into their national education policies, leading to lower youth unemployment rates (BIBB, 2019). Furthermore, offering subsidies, scholarships, and stipends for out-of-school children can encourage enrollment in vocational programs. Governments should also collaborate with international organisations, such as the ILO and UNICEF, to secure funding and technical support for expanding vocational training initiatives (ILO, 2021).

2. Modernise Curricula to Align with Industry Demands

Outdated vocational curricula are a significant barrier to employability. Training programs must be regularly updated to reflect advancements in technology and market trends. The World Bank (2021) recommends incorporating digital literacy, soft skills, and entrepreneurial training into vocational programs to equip learners with the competencies needed for today's workforce. For example, emerging fields such as renewable energy, e-commerce, and information technology offer significant employment opportunities. Countries like India and Singapore have restructured their vocational curricula to include STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) skills, ensuring that students remain competitive in the evolving job market (Government of India, 2022). Developing nations should follow suit by integrating relevant technical skills into their training programs.

3. Strengthen Industry Partnerships for Apprenticeships and Job Placement

Vocational training should be closely linked with industry requirements to facilitate smooth transitions into employment. Establishing strong public-private partnerships (PPPs) between training centres and businesses can create opportunities for apprenticeships, internships, and direct job placements (ILO, 2021).

Countries with successful vocational systems, such as Germany and Austria, have dual apprenticeship programs where students divide their time between classroom learning and workplace training (BIBB, 2019). Developing

countries should adopt similar models by incentivising companies to participate in training programs and provide hands-on experience to students. Additionally, certification systems that are recognised globally can improve employability prospects for vocational graduates.

4. Promote Gender-Inclusive and Accessible Vocational Training

Vocational education must be made more accessible to marginalised groups, including young girls, children with disabilities, and rural populations. Gender stereotypes often discourage female participation in technical fields such as mechanics and engineering (UNESCO, 2022). To bridge this gap, governments should introduce targeted initiatives that encourage girls to enrol in vocational training programs.

For example, in Bangladesh, specialised skills development programs in garment manufacturing have increased female workforce participation (World Bank, 2021). Similarly, African nations have introduced mobile training units that reach rural communities, providing flexible learning opportunities for children who cannot access formal training centres (UNICEF, 2021). Expanding such initiatives will ensure that vocational training reaches the most vulnerable populations.

5. Improve Teacher Training and Capacity Building

The shortage of well-trained instructors is a major obstacle to vocational training effectiveness. Teachers and trainers must receive continuous professional development to stay updated with industry trends and best practices. Investing in train-the-trainer programs, where experienced professionals mentor vocational instructors, can enhance teaching quality (ILO, 2021).

Governments should also partner with universities, technical institutions, and private enterprises to offer certification courses for vocational trainers. In Singapore, for example, vocational educators undergo regular industry placements to keep their skills relevant (Government of Singapore, 2022). Other countries should adopt similar approaches to improve training delivery.

6. Leverage Technology for Digital and Remote Learning

Technology can significantly expand the reach of vocational training programs, particularly in remote and underserved areas. E-learning platforms, virtual simulations, and mobile training applications can make skill-based education more accessible (UNICEF, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital learning adoption, highlighting the need for blended training models that combine online instruction with hands-on practice (World Bank, 2021).

Countries such as Kenya and India have launched digital skills training initiatives, equipping young people with online freelancing and remote work capabilities (UNESCO, 2022). Governments should invest in affordable internet access, digital literacy programs, and open-source vocational training content to ensure that learners in rural areas benefit from these opportunities.

Conclusion

Vocational training plays a crucial role in empowering out-of-school children by providing them with industry-relevant skills, improving employability, and fostering entrepreneurship. As millions of young people worldwide remain excluded from formal education, vocational training offers a practical and inclusive pathway to economic participation. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, outdated curricula, weak industry linkages, and social stigma must be addressed to maximise its impact.

To ensure vocational education reaches its full potential, governments and stakeholders must invest in modernising curricula, strengthening industry partnerships, and expanding access to marginalised groups. Implementing gender-inclusive policies, training skilled instructors, and leveraging digital learning technologies can further enhance vocational training programs. Countries that have successfully integrated vocational education with workforce development, such as Germany and India, serve as models for global best practices.

By prioritising vocational training as a key component of education and workforce development strategies, policymakers can create sustainable solutions for youth employment and economic growth. Strengthening

vocational education systems will not only equip out-of-school children with essential skills but also contribute to reducing poverty, fostering innovation, and driving long-term socio-economic progress.

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