

Pakistan needs more vocational training

The 2018 UNDP National Human Development Report (NHDR) shows that 64 per cent of Pakistan's population is below 30 years of age, which makes it the youngest population in South Asia.

Yet Pakistan is one of the worst performers in terms of technical and vocational education and training (TVET). It should use an effective development and implementation strategy for TVET to harness its young potential.

There are a number of problems in the country's TVET. According to the Department of Education, dropout rates at primary and secondary levels are 44pc and 40pc, respectively.

There are only 3,798 TVET institutes in Pakistan. They have a limited capacity as they can accommodate only half a million trainees. The annual increase in youth unemployment is estimated at 1.5 million. TVET institutes have obsolete curricula. The youth prefer general higher education to vocational education.

Specialised and sophisticated skills are required for most jobs these days, but there is a lack of linkage between the industry and TVET institutes. Government departments and private organisations prefer to hire employees with higher education to TVET diploma holders. There is a dearth of government funding for TVET institutes. Women's participation is very limited. Another major issue is the shortage of good trainers.

At least one technical education university should be established in each province

Developed economies such as Norway, Finland and Switzerland have transformed their economies by focusing on TVET. These countries lead the world in terms of technological advancement and workforce development. Pakistan should learn a lesson from these leading economies.

Three models for TVET are used around the world: school-based TVET, dual apprenticeship system (or workplace-based approach), and informal TVET.

In the school-based model, governments provide students with TVET to create opportunities for them in the labour market.

But the dual apprenticeship system is known as the best training pattern worldwide. In this model, school-based vocational education is usually combined with occupational experience and training for a specific career or work field. This requires certain essential elements like collaboration of the employers with the government to develop an institutional framework. Similarly, training curricula should be up-to-date and in line with the industry's requirements. The participation of employers in devising training schemes based on current labour market demand and certifications is a must.

This model involves entirely work-based training that leads to better pay in the short run as opposed to school-based vocational training.

Here are some measures that should be taken in order to accelerate the performance of TVET system in Pakistan.

The government should increase funds for TVET institutes and skill development and training schemes in the federal and provincial budgets. It should enact appropriate legislation to enable large, medium and small industries to engage in the development of technical education.

The industry should play a pivotal role as a key stakeholder in order to strengthen its relationship with TVET institutes. The participation of women in technical education should also be encouraged as they constitute 52pc of the population.

In order to enhance the scope of higher education for TVET graduates, at least one technical education university should be established in each province while a national framework qualification for TVET should be implemented.

For technical diplomas, the Higher Education Commission should introduce degree equivalence so that TVET graduates can get easier access to job opportunities in government and private organisations. Otherwise, young people will consider TVET a dead-end career choice.

TVET graduates can be direct beneficiaries of industries that are being established as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Such companies should enlist TVET graduates for training, internships and jobs.

TVET curricula should be reviewed and revised periodically in accordance with rapid technological advancements to meet the requirements of the labour market. The National Vocational and Technical Training Commission, which is the country's apex regulatory body for technical education and vocational training, should initiate a school vocational training programme to ensure practical skills training at the high-school level.

The above-mentioned reforms in TVET will not only improve the vocational training system but also increase the earning capacity of our youth while decreasing unemployment and contributing to poverty reduction.

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