



The Vocational Education Experience in Guwahati City-An Empirical Study

KEYWORDS

Mitali Das

N A Barua

Associate Professor of Economics, Cotton College, Guwahati

Associate Professor of Economics, Gauhati University

ABSTRACT Guwahati is the largest city of Assam and the north-eastern region of India. Regarded as the "Gateway of North Eastern Region", it is a city of great socio-economic importance for the entire north-east India. It is also an educational hub, being home to a variety of educational institutes offering different kinds of education. This includes a number of vocational education institutes too as is evident from a field survey on vocational education institutes undertaken for the purpose of this study. UNESCO (2011) defines vocational education as an educational programme that is designed for learners to acquire knowledge, skills and competitiveness specific for a particular occupation, trade or class of occupations or trades. It states that successful completion of such programmes lead to labour market relevant vocational qualifications which are acknowledged as occupationally oriented by the relevant national authority and the labour market. As an education hub it caters not only to Assam but also to other states in the region. Given this backdrop, the present study attempted an insight into the practicality of the vocational education being provided in the city. This paper, therefore, is an attempt to look into the different facets of vocational education in Guwahati city. It seeks to trace the evolution of the vocational education system and also its present state. The study also explores economic background of the students in vocational education, their entry-level qualification and also the credentials awarded by the institute. Moreover, an appraisal is made of the absorption level, which is determined by the effort to enhance the intensity of institute-industry linkage and campus placement.

II CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Vocational education is conceptualised here to mean an education that prepares the students for work by lending them practical or "hands-on" skills demanded by a contemporary employment market. There are many institutes associated with the deliverance of such type of vocational skills education. These are referred to as vocational education providers.

III METHODOLOGY

Coverage and Data Source

The field survey data constitutes vocational education providers that have been selected from the lists of Directorate of Employment and Craftsmen Training. Besides, institutes offering vocational education under Assam Higher Secondary Education Council are also incorporated. Again, data on vocational education providers as part of the national level initiatives are accessed. There are also a few institutes that have made an impact in the state as well as national vocational education scenario in recent times in terms of subject diversity, curriculum and placement benefits; their presence is also captured in this study.

Data collection and Sample Design

The study is based mainly on primary data collected with the help of a structured questionnaire provided to the vocational education providers selected at random. The data was accessed during the period 2012-2013. Moreover, the study has also relied on secondary information gathered from the prospectus, brochures and unpublished materials provided by the vocational education institutions. The sample design consists of 13 government, 21 private and 4 vocational education providers.

IV GROWTH OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION INSTITUTES

A look into the years of establishment of the institutes covered in the study show that private vocational education institutes have registered greater growth in the city during the past two decades. The four government and government-aided higher secondary schools, though made an early foray into the state education sector, yet the vocational education in these schools started only during 1988-89 after the intro-

duction of vocational education scheme in the state in 1988.

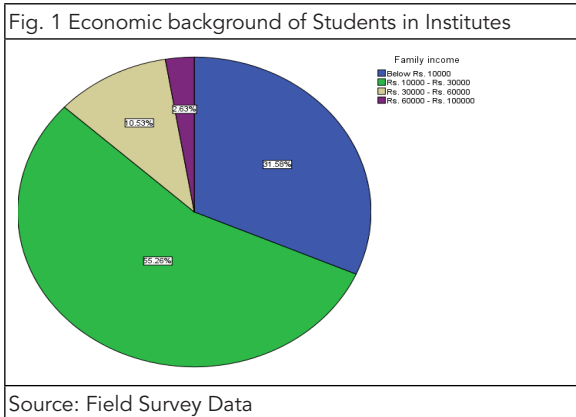
The proliferation of the government vocational institutes mostly took place during the 1990s. But, the study reveals that the government schools under AHSEC do not have significant student representation in their vocational education section. This may be a factor that has influenced government decision in implementing vocational subjects in more government and government-aided higher secondary schools in the city. The core players in the government sector are the ITIs and polytechnics. In case of all categories of vocational education institutes in Guwahati city, it is observed that they have registered greater growth in the pre-2000 period. On a positive note, it reflects that majority of the vocational education institutes in the city have been actively contributing to the state vocational education scenario since the past two decades and speaks of a sustainable vocational education system in the city.

The picture of growth of vocational education institutes as presented by the field study upholds the predominance of the growth of private sector vocational education institute in Guwahati. According to informed sources in the vocational education sector, the inability of government vocational education institutes to meet student demand and the long drawn-out process involved in establishing government vocational educational institutes as well as the successes of existing private vocational education players may be regarded as prominent factors that have encouraged the growth of private vocational education institutes in the city.

V ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF STUDENTS

An enquiry was made into the economic background of the students who pursue a vocational education in Guwahati city. In this regard, the family income of students pursuing a vocational education has been categorised into four broad groups, based on the monthly income of the families to which they belonged. The vocational education institutes were asked to specify the number of students enrolled with them under different categories. The query did not elicit response from all the institutes but those that did have shown

that mostly, their students belong to the lower income groups as categorised in the research study. However, there are no students in the category of Rs 10000 and above in any of the institutes. The following pie diagram (Fig1) reflects the economic background of students:



It is evident from **fig 1** above that in the vocational education sector in the city, students belonging to the family income group of Rs 10000 to Rs 30000 constitute the largest majority, followed by those who belong to the family income group of below Rs 10000. Only a small percentage of students belong to the family income group of Rs 60000-Rs 100000.

When a comparison is made about the economic background of students in different institutes, it is seen that even students belonging to Rs 10000-Rs30000 family income group are more in private than in government institutes. The secondary information gathered on course price shows that most courses of private institutes entail a higher cost than that of government institutes. Yet, the government institutes see a lesser inflow of even students belonging to the lower income groups categorised for the purpose of this study. On the other hand, in spite of higher cost implications, private institutes mostly comprise of students belonging to the two middle-income groups. The purveyors of private vocational education attribute it to the fact that the students get support in the form of scholarships and loans and due to the fact that their courses have industry relevance and culminate into employment positions commanding high remuneration. This also brings into focus the issue of relevance of courses provided by the government providers of vocational education in the employment market.

Thus, the economic background of students pursuing a vocational education in Guwahati city reflects that it is mostly students from the lower income groups who have come forward to equip themselves with vocational skills. One glaring fact observed is that the highest income group categorised in the field study is found to be totally absent in the government institutes. In Guwahati city, as would be the case of Assam at large, vocational education still is not a popular career choice amongst the higher income categories. It is further seen that, mostly, institutes offering courses like aviation and hospitality and psychological counselling have managed to attract students from the higher income categories. This may be attributed to the fact that these courses lead to socially acceptable employment positions that also command attractive remuneration packages. Thus, the stigma associated with vocational education remains as yet largely unbroken. This perception has been consolidated by the picture of economic background of students who have entered into the vocational education scenario.

VI CREDENTIALS AWARDED AND ENTRY-LEVEL QUALIFICATION

Yet, the vocational education institutes surveyed have exhibited professionalism in their manner of skills provision to the students. They authenticate their courses with the

provision of certificates, diplomas, advanced diplomas and degrees. Therefore, the prospective entrants into the vocational system in Assam can be given the opportunity of being equipped with the proper credentials as demanded in a dynamic employment market.

This brings into discussion the eligibility criteria required for pursuing such kind of a vocational education. It has been observed that different educational qualifications constitute the eligibility criteria for different courses. In fact, opportunities exist even for those without a matriculation. This is observed with respect to certain courses associated with hospitality and beauty sectors. For the certificate programmes, though 16.8% of the institutes have specified below-matric to be the entry-level qualification, yet most institutes call for a matriculation. The ITIs are prominent among institutes that call for matriculates for a number of their courses. The government higher secondary schools also fall in this category. For the diploma/advanced diploma and degree programmes, mostly, intermediate education is the eligibility criteria in most institutes.

VII CAMPUS PLACEMENT

In order that vocational education out-turns find a niche in the employment market, it is necessary that institutes have a placement cell. Some of the education providers visited does not offer placement benefits at all. But the majority of the institutes surveyed are observed to have a placement cell in their institute.

The private vocational education providers in the city have been more active in making arrangements for placing their students in the employment market. Moreover, some private institutes have mentioned that they do not have a proper placement cell. But they placed their students in the employment terminals through contacts and acquaintances in the various employment terminals. They have equated this with having a placement cell since most of their students get employment as a result of this kind of an association with employing organisations. The government higher secondary schools, have not exhibited the presence of any campus placement activity. It is the competitive edge noticed in the private institutes that sparked their zeal to have a placement cell. Most of the PPPs also do not have a formal placement cell but their students find placement in employments through contacts with relevant employment terminals.

This highlights the fact that the placement strength of all institutes is not equal. To find out the placement strength of the various institutes in the study group, a six-level stratification of the placement offered was done. The representation of the different type of vocational education providers in the six identified categories is shown in **fig 2** below:

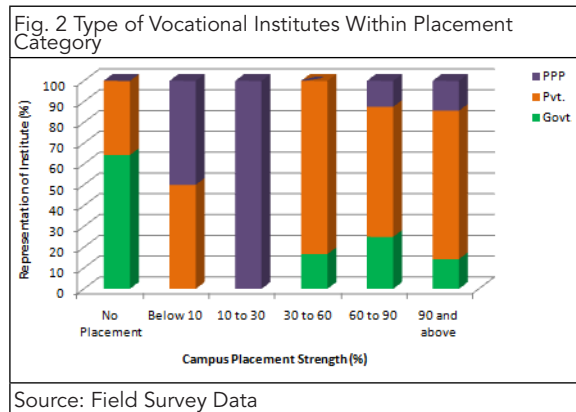


Figure 2 reflects the existence of differences in placement activity of the vocational education providers of Guwahati covered in this research study. The diagram reflects that the "No Placement" category is mostly represented by the gov-

ernment institutes, followed by a small percentage of private institutes. The PPPs do not find representation under "No Placement". The above diagram also indicates strong placement activity within the private sector vocational education providers. In almost every category of campus placement, the private sector institutes have shown greater representation than the other types of institutes. However, no private vocational education provider is observed in the placement strength of 10%-30%. Only institutes categorised as PPP represent the 10%-30% level of campus placement category. The above diagrammatic presentation of placement strengths present a picture of variability in placement levels amongst the different vocational education providers in the city.

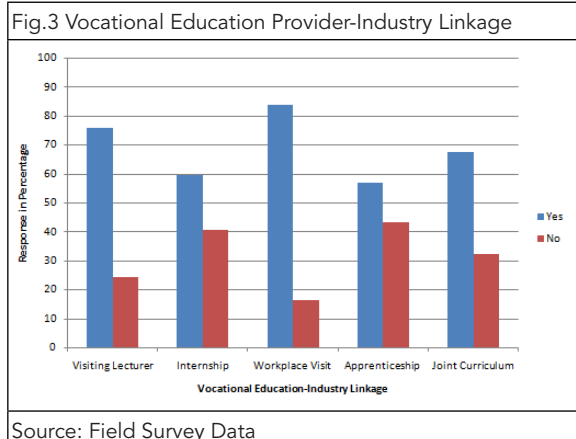
VIII VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROVIDER-INDUSTRY LINKAGE

The following six indicators were used to assess the vocational education provider-industry linkage:

- Visiting lectures
- Summer Internship
- Workplace/Industry visit
- Apprenticeship
- Joint Curriculum development
- Scholarship

It was observed that majority of the vocational education providers have the existence of concept of visiting lectures in their institutes. The visiting lecturers comprise of professionals from related employment terminals as well as from education hub and those associated with the relevant subject. However, workplace visits feature the highest amongst the institutes-industry linkages. The vocational education institutes of the city are also not lagging behind with respect to joint curriculum development. A significant number of institutes, as revealed by the percentage of affirmative responses, promote joint curriculum development. This is attributed to the fact that these institutes conduct courses developed in consultation with organisations with which they were registered or in consultation with relevant sectors in the economy that make use of these courses. On a comparative note, a fewer percentage of institutes have the presence of the system of scholarship. However, the interaction with the education providers revealed that the presence of scholarship does not always indicate a strong institute-industry linkage. In the absence of scholarships from industry, many education providers have included their own scholarships and fee relaxation, within the ambit of scholarship extended to students. Therefore, overall, the field survey data points to the existence of education- industry linkage amongst the providers of vocational education institutes in case of at least five of the above six indicators

The picture of linkage as reflected by the affirmative responses of vocational education providers regarding the presence of the five indicators is shown in fig 3 below:



Therefore, as seen from above, the vocational education providers, during the field survey, have depicted positive industry linkage with visiting lectures, internship, workplace visit, apprenticeship and joint curriculum development. But, there is difference in forging of this linkage among different institutes. From the field study, it has emerged that in case of all six indicators, the private institutes have presented a picture of greater linkage with industry. However, workplace visit, important to familiarise out-turns of education systems with the employment situation, is found to be a laggard. Though private vocational education providers fare better over government institutes in the context of workplace visit also, yet, it is observed that it has been neglected by 83.3% of the private vocational education providers too. All the PPPs comprising the study group have totally neglected the issue of arranging guest lectures and scholarship with none of them having the presence of these two facilities in their institutes. Most of them also do not have apprenticeship programmes. But they have scored better in the case of facilitating internships, workplace visits and joint curriculum development, with a greater percentage of them responding affirmatively to these issues. Most of those institutes identifying themselves as PPP are seen to follow a curriculum designed by Directorate General of Employment and Training or Directorate of Employment and Craftsman Training..

Therefore, given this backdrop of education and industry linkage, it is apparent that different types of vocational education institutes have given different weightage to the different indicators identified for this research study. Some amongst them have of course neglected certain key factors necessary to forge an education -industry coordination. The neglect of these areas can be done away with through proper steps taken by the institutes in forging coordination with industry and employment. However, on the whole, the picture of linkages with employing organisations as reflected by the vocational education institutes in the city is indeed positive.

IX CONCLUSION

This paper is an attempt to put forward the vocational education scenario in Guwahati city. In recent times, there has been a greater proliferation of private vocational institutes, which are helping to carry forward the vocational education in the state with a judicious blend of their own courses as well those of the Department of Labour and Employment. The successes of existing private vocational education providers and the ability of private vocational education providers to attract students through aggressive advertising have contributed greatly to the expansion of this sector.

The study reveals that the government institutes have the maximum percentage of students in the lowest family income category. The interaction with people associated with the vocational stream of the government higher secondary schools has specially highlighted the fact that their students comprise only those that belong to the two lower income groups. Therefore, even with lower cost implications, these government vocational education institutes have not been able to attract greater number of students who belong to the higher family income groups. One drawback of the government higher secondary schools, as is perceived from this study, is the lack of dynamism of courses imparted by them.

On the other hand, several factors can be attributed to the success of private vocational education institutes in attracting students from all categories of family income. One, of course, is that the aggressive advertisement resorted to by them have helped to make them and their courses visible to prospective entrants to vocational education system. The private institutes in Guwahati city also have the advantage of choice of courses that are more relevant to the employment market. Moreover, the placement advantages are more in the private vocational education institutes which gives prospective student participants the confidence of being absorbed in employment. The government collaboration with certain

private institutes in Guwahati through subsidised courses has also given a boost to student enrolment in private vocational education institutes. The facility of loans and fee relaxations has further helped the cause of enrolment in the private institutes of even people who belong to the lower family income groups. This awakens the realisation that the government vocational education providers in Guwahati city as well as in other areas in Assam need to initiate corrective measures that would make their courses attractive to students across diverse economic background.

In Guwahati city, it is observed from the field survey that there are a lot of opportunities of acquiring a vocational education for the matriculates and intermediates as most of the certificate and diploma programmes as well as a few degree programme have the entry level criteria of matric and intermediate. Two important purveyors of vocational education, ITIs and Polytechnics, require a matric for most courses. This is commendable as the Planning Commission of India has also regarded the matric and higher secondary to be terminal stages which can influence student decision to work or move towards higher education (Planning Commission, 2002).

It is also observed that the vocational education system in the city is not ingrained within itself. It is a dynamic education system that is carried forward with the support from education hub as well as industry. That there is vocational education-industry linkage with respect to five of the six indicators identified for the purpose of this study indicates the presence of some institute –industry linkage.

Thus, this study on vocational education experience of Guwahati reflects that the city can serve as an education hub of Assam and the North-east with respect to vocational education too. The vocational education providers exude a professionalism that would help to carry forward this system of education. The vocational education available in the city shows that it is accessible to students belonging to diverse economic groups. Therefore, the vocational education environment in the state can be strengthened if the type of vocational education available in the city is replicated in other areas too. It can assist in diverting a huge section of those matriculates and intermediates that are not so academically inclined to skills education that would enrich them with greater ability to be absorbed in a modern dynamic employment market.

REFERENCE

1 Planning Commission (2010): Vocational Education. The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-2007). (Online) Available [http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/fiveyear/10th/Volume 2 V2-Ch2-4.pdf](http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/planrel/fiveyear/10th/Volume%20V2-Ch2-4.pdf). (Accessed on 16-1-10) | 2 UNESCO (2011): "Revision of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). (Online). UNESCO INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS. General Conference. 36th Session Paris. Available: http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/UNESCO_GC_36C-19_ISED_EN.pdf (Accessed on 25-9-2012)