

Technical and Vocational Education and Training: Issues, Concerns and Prospects

Volume 24

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Matthias Pilz
Editor

Vocational Education and Training in Times of Economic Crisis

Lessons from Around the World

 Springer

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This book is dedicated to Professor David Raffe, former professor of sociology of education and member of the Centre for Educational Sociology at the University of Edinburgh (Scotland). He had been hoping to give a keynote speech at the G.R.E.A.T. conference in Cologne in 2014 but was prevented from attending by ill health. He died unexpectedly in February 2015, shortly after he retired.

David was a researcher with an international reputation but also a fantastic writer and impressive lecturer. Many committees, international organisations and boards benefitted from his advice.

I first met David in the early 1990s, when I was a young student. His deep knowledge, rigorous thinking and incisive writing left a lasting impression on me. He offered me some advice on my own work and, later, invaluable guidance on my Ph.D. thesis about developments in modular VET in Scotland and Germany. Many other researchers, too, have been influenced by David's contributions, and he will be remembered for his generosity and his legacy.

Matthias Pilz

Foreword: Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Skills at the Centre Stage

Introduction

Our time is an era of transitions. This is also a time of turbulence as well as a time of challenges. The challenges which threaten the economy, society and the environment are numerous, complex and interconnected. In spite of significant economic and social progress till date, high youth unemployment, social disparities and environmental degradations create challenges for all countries. These challenges threaten human security, dignity, social cohesion and peace.

Youth unemployment is a major source of concern all over the world. For instance, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2015), 73.3 million youth (i.e. one in eight young people in between 15 and 24 years old) were unemployed in 2014. As per recent estimates, at least 475 million new jobs need to be created over the next decade to absorb the 73 million currently unemployed youth and the 40 million new entrants in the labour market annually (ILO 2015).

A continuing surge in the global labour force and a disparately slower rise in employment opportunities have challenged youth employment. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) (2013) estimated that 123 million young people worldwide in 2011 lacked basic literacy skills, weakening their opportunities to enter further education and training and subsequently the labour market. And according to *Youth not in employment, education or training* (NEET) – OECD Data (2014), nearly one in five young people in OECD countries is neither employed nor attending education nor training.

These trends are grim realities that need to be addressed. They not only portray a sorry state in which the young people in both developed and developing countries are in. These trends point us to look at more serious problems with the education and training systems that fail to equip these young people and adults alike, with the knowledge, skills and competencies they need to navigate through the labour market and through life.

There are two reasons that exacerbate this situation. First, young people are faced with high economic difficulties in countries that pursue a jobless growth. A

jobless growth is where economies have insufficient abilities to provide jobs and is aggravated by other variables. Youth are said to be three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. This is because, for instance, that young people have to compete with those who are already in the labour market, mostly adults, since a while ago. In such situation, knowledge, skills and competencies are critically assessed, especially in economies that face structural changes in employment. With jobless growth, there are definitely not enough jobs for all. And those who possess the right mix of skills are the ones who get absorbed easily in the market. The global financial and economic crisis has led to accelerate this trend, resulting in significant impacts.

The second reason is closely linked to the first one. According to CEDEFOP (2014), endemic skills mismatches in Europe cause high unemployment rates. Forty per cent of European firms reported difficulties in hiring adequately skilled staff. A surge of graduate unemployment and skills shortages are also common in many emerging economies including India, Singapore and China. The skills-related bottlenecks are also highlighted especially in economies that currently go through low-carbon transition plans.

Challenges of Skills Barriers

One can argue that high youth unemployment is resulted from our economic, social and related TVET policies. Such policies have led to the aggravation of skills shortages, skills mismatches, unsatisfactory qualifications and inadequate skills. Skills shortages and mismatches in many countries are sometimes the result of the economic restructuring when these countries shift into advance skills. TVET systems lack the agility to depart from traditional methods to adapt training provisions to modern technologies that fully correspond to both context-specific and context-relevant to such technologies including the implementation of the low-carbon economy. A high percentage of youth unemployment is yielded from the inability of education and training systems to adopt provision of skills according to anticipated changes in the labour market simply because labour intelligence is weak or does not exist. The inadequate skills, which are below industry standards, are a result of the supply-driven mentality and lack of synergies with the industries and vice versa.

Therefore, skills development and TVET are in the top of countries' policy agendas and at the centre stage of the international policy discourse. In fact, TVET and skills development have never been as important and timely as it is now. We need to view this debate from a holistic, integrated and balanced way. Skills policy does not have merely economic dimension; it also has a social, technological and environmental dimensions contributing towards sustainability and lifelong learning. That's why UNESCO-UNEVOC advocates for skills accessibility and also highlights its transformation through sustainable and lifelong perspectives.

The educational, social, technological and economic imperatives have progressively raised TVET as a priority in all the regions of the globe. For instance,

the OECD (2013) describes skills as the new currency of the twenty-first century. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) (2012) called for investment in TVET as a solution to unemployment. So did the European Commission (2012) with its communication on 'Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes'. Other regional organisations have developed related regional strategies and qualifications framework, such as, in the Caribbean (CARICOM 2013), Asia (ASEAN 2009) and Southern Africa (SADC 2011).

Recognising the importance of TVET, UNESCO has developed a TVET strategy (2010–2015) to strengthen TVET in its Member States by focusing its actions on the strategy's three core areas: (i) provision of upstream policy advice and related capacity development, (ii) conceptual clarification of skills development and improvement of monitoring and (iii) acting as a clearinghouse and informing the global TVET debate. The promotion of the holistic development is at the core of the TVET strategy. The UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre plays a vital role in putting the strategy into actions. These actions are built around the established functions of UNESCO-UNEVOC in which UNESCO-UNEVOC serves as a laboratory of ideas, standard setter, clearinghouse, capacity builder and platform for international cooperation.

There is a need to develop TVET policies that foster youth employment and entrepreneurship, sustainable development and lifelong learning. It will place a high priority on ensuring that its initiatives in this regard reflect an integrated focus on social equity and economic and environmental sustainability. TVET policies and programmes should be more responsive to learners' diverse needs – particularly those who are unemployed youth, excluded and vulnerable segments. It will support the development of innovative solutions to address youth unemployment and promote cross-sectoral approaches that transverse important policy areas including education, employment, industrial and economic development, agriculture, health and social policy, amongst others.

TVET and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The global goals require global solidarity, international dialogue and an inter-sectoral, interdisciplinary approach as expressed in the commitment made at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit (2015), 'Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. The 2030 Agenda has 17 SDGs, including SDG 4, which reads, 'To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. Three targets are of special significance for TVET as follows:

- By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, education and training and tertiary education, including university.

- By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
- By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

Meeting these targets requires the transformation and expansion of TVET through articulations within education and between education and the world of work. TVET has a central role in helping youth and adults to develop the skills they need for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship, to support the effectiveness of their organisations and the development of their communities. TVET also contributes to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth and social equity and environmental sustainability. TVET contributes to gender equality, global citizenship education (GCE) and education for sustainable development (ESD). It is of high relevance to transform TVET in a way to maximise its potential to contribute to the achievement of global goals.

One way forward to tackle these challenges lies in ensuring decent jobs for the young, particularly for those who are engaged in vulnerable jobs and underemployed. Another important avenue is fostering entrepreneurship, both as an instrument for job creation and an alternative path to labour-force participation, especially in the context of green and e-economy. However, the inadequacy of requisite skills and the social and financial capital in addition to aforementioned constraints make it imperative for UNESCO Member States to pursue inter-sectoral policies, reforms and innovative solutions.

Research Is High on TVET Agenda

It is now, more than ever, that research in TVET must be scaled up. Given the scope of work that TVET tries to cover, defining research priorities plays a crucial role to make TVET not only relevant but also appropriate for its broader purpose and make the reliable information available to a greater number of stakeholders in order to support in defining TVET's future.

There are two observed tendencies related to research undertakings in TVET. First is the tendency of existing TVET systems to confine research priorities to the immediate needs of the labour market that result in traditional supply-demand orientation of TVET. Second is the tendency of ignoring the broader socio-economic needs that TVET can more effectively address. This results in drawing a narrowed view of research priorities in TVET that further dilutes the potential of TVET to effectively assess social dimensions in the skill formation and forecast the needs of the society and the economy in the context of a holistic development, independent of what the labour market dictates.

The lack of research culture particularly in public TVET contributes to the negative impact of these tendencies in the overall design and implementation of TVET programmes and the restriction in asserting TVET's unique role in the context of a balanced social, economic, ecological and cultural development. Solid *evidence-based policy and practices are needed* in order to figure out what works and what does not work and where the line between foundation, specialised and transversal skill actually is. Such research should be collaborative, i.e. crossing national borders and looking for comparisons. They will be the keystone of sound evidence-based policies as well as of sound concepts for the field of TVET for the years to come.

The origin of this volume lies in the second international conference of the German Research Center for Comparative Vocational Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.). The conference like G.R.E.A.T. is a valuable platform for researchers and professionals for sharing research findings and case studies. It has significant relevance in raising the bar of TVET research. I hope this volume will provide good resources in understanding holistic integrated and sustainable TVET with diverse settings and different contexts.

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Preface

The origins of this book lie in the second international conference of the German Research Center for Comparative Vocational Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) held in autumn 2014 at the University of Cologne.

The Significance of the Title

Over recent years, young people's transition from vocational education and training to employment has been extremely problematic in many countries. Since the start of the financial and economic crisis in 2008, many young people embarking on their working lives have found that there are few, if any, appropriate jobs available to them. This precarious situation is particularly vividly illustrated by the rising rates of youth unemployment across many countries, and many governments acknowledge that high youth unemployment is a major social problem. Vocational education and training is considered to have a particularly important part to play in solving this problem – EU initiatives in this area are just one example. However, it is important to avoid a fundamental misunderstanding. Good vocational training can have an impact only at the qualitative level, where needs-oriented skills development satisfies the requirements of the labour market and prevents a mismatch between the skills that young people acquire and the demands of the world of work. VET policy cannot have such impact at the quantitative level: If the employment system is unable to provide enough jobs during times of crisis, not even the best vocational training will change that.

As well as this central aspect, we should explore four further areas in which the crisis is having an impact.

First, in many countries, the economic crisis has also influenced state funding for vocational education and training. In some countries, the need to make spending cuts or to balance the budget has resulted in reduced expenditure on the vocational training system. It should be evident that, for example, cutting instructors' and trainers' salaries, deferring investment in premises and equipment or scrapping the

teaching materials budget will, in the long term, produce deficits in young people's vocational training. In other countries, by contrast, spending on vocational training has been increased despite tight budgets, with the aim of giving young people in a difficult situation some prospects for the future. Nevertheless, some observers are doubtful about how sustainable such ad hoc measures really are: they tend not to be coordinated, and there is usually no consultation with employers. In such cases, VET often ends up being a kind of holding pen for young people during difficult economic times rather than offering real prospects for future employment.

Second, however, the role of companies has also shifted in many countries as a result of the economic crisis. As demand has contracted and competition has become more intense, the pressure to manage costs has increased. Investment in skills development, including initial training for new entrants to the labour market, is long term, and the return in terms of cost savings and productivity cannot always be quantified, so different kinds of companies have withdrawn from initial training or reduced their involvement in it. While this drives down costs in the short term, it creates a long-term risk of a shortage of skilled workers.

Third, young people's reaction to the crisis should be a further focus. It is clear that, as a result of the crisis, young people in a range of countries have turned increasingly towards academic training. In the short and medium term, 'academic drift' of this kind is entirely rational: Young people see going to university as offering better prospects of escaping unemployment than entering the labour market, since – unlike jobs – they can almost always obtain university places. Higher education is, therefore, often a kind of 'holding pattern' for young people. However, whether academic training is a worthwhile long-term investment depends on the labour market situation at a future date, once young people have completed their studies at university, and that will differ from country to country. Nevertheless, international research consistently shows that despite large numbers of graduates and a shortage of workers with intermediate-level skills, the average graduate still earns more over his or her working life than a counterpart who has completed a course of vocational training.

Finally, one further consequence of the economic crisis and of the reactions of young people and young adults to it has been mobility amongst skilled workers. There has been an increase in labour migration, both within the EU – where it is relatively easy for individuals to move to and work in another country – and in many other countries around the world. The VET system not only develops but also certifies competencies, and recognition of vocational qualifications in another country depends largely on having an appropriate system for certifying the skills and knowledge that trainees have acquired. Transparency and mutual trust are particularly important here. National qualifications frameworks and special recognition processes (where appropriate, underpinned by academic and on-the-job testing) also play a major part.

These few examples demonstrate clearly that the economic crisis has had many different and, in some cases, interdependent impacts on young people's transition

from training to employment as well as on the vocational education and training system itself. This book sets out to shed light on this complex picture of cross-cutting influences.

Structure of the Book

This book brings together a wide spectrum of approaches and methodologies relevant to international comparative vocational education and training. Country case studies, pure research, approaches to comparison and policy papers demonstrate the sheer diversity of VET systems across the world. Some of the papers are covering the topic of the book directly by focussing on special aspects of VET in times of economic crisis. Other authors discuss challenges and developments of VET in a more general way or by concentrating on country domain-specific approaches.

Yet this diversity has a distinct origin. It is clear that, compared to general education – which is generally well structured – VET encompasses diverse institutions, actors, vocational education programmes, forms of learning and certification and qualifications. This can be attributed to two factors. First, different countries have differing traditions of vocational education, which may, for example, be school-based or labour market-oriented. Second, the very mission itself of VET differs from country to country. For example, it may take the form of vocational basic education or vocational orientation, or it may span the spectrum from broad vocational initial training to practical training for specialists. And the target group also differs widely: in one country, VET may focus on disadvantaged young people, while in another, it will appeal mainly to the young population in rural areas or may specifically cater for those with good secondary qualifications. It all goes to show that there is no such thing as one single best VET policy; the debate is always about the country-specific characteristics of a VET system and what its main priorities are. Yet it is exactly this diversity that gives rise to many different examples of best practice.

This book is an attempt to make this diversity accessible to the reader by imposing a structure on it. The structure we have opted has primarily a focus on different continents. The clusters of papers from similar continents make it easy for readers to get the full picture in one region and support the comparison of country-related papers. But the book starts with a variety of papers focussing in a comparative way on a bundle of different countries. The next cluster is about papers focussing on Asia including India. The next one is related to China exclusively, followed by a cluster on the European perspective. The final papers in the book are highlighting theoretical and conceptual approaches in VET research.

Series Editor's Introduction

Work is a major feature of most people's lives. Not only does it provide them with the means to meet basic needs, such as food, clothing and shelter, but the type of work undertaken by individuals and groups also has a major impact on their self-identity, social status and standard of living. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET), which is sometimes interchangeably referred to as vocational education and training (VET), is essentially mainly concerned with 'applied learning', that is, with the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and ethics appropriate for the world of work to increase opportunities for productive work, sustainable livelihoods, personal empowerment and socio-economic development.

This Springer book series on skills development for employability (TVET) seeks to provide research-based information about many key cutting-edge aspects of TVET. The series showcases best and innovative approaches to TVET and education for the world of work. In so doing it also seeks to create an effective bridge between research, policy and practice. It is a long-standing publication programme which commenced in 2005, the various volumes in this major Springer book series providing a comprehensive, in-depth picture of current issues, concerns and prospects in TVET, as they relate to both individual countries and worldwide.

This book, which has been prepared by Matthias Pilz, examines how technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has responded and adjusted in countries worldwide during times of economic crisis. The contributors to the volume argue that although for many decades TVET has been a relatively low priority within the education for development agenda, this situation has recently and dramatically changed. In fact TVET is now centre stage for both countries and the education for development community, as nations seek to improve the relevance, effectiveness and quality of their education systems and strengthen education for the world of work and skills development for employability. The book provides an international comparative analysis of countries in Asia, including the tiger economies of India and China, the United States of America and countries in Europe. Based upon an identification and analysis of lessons learnt from countries around the world, regarding how TVET has adapted and evolved during times of economic

crisis, a well-developed theoretical conceptual framework is presented which helps make sense of how TVET has evolved during times of economic crisis.

This is an important, cutting-edge volume on a topic that is of great importance to researchers, policymakers and practitioners throughout the world. I have no doubt that this book will be widely read and that it will have an important impact on policy and practice in this area.

QAPCO Professional Chair in Vocational Studies
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Rupert Maclean

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