

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS
OF CHINA'S TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL
EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

UNESCO-UNEVOC Book Series
Technical and Vocational Education and Training:
Issues, Concerns and Prospects

Volume 12

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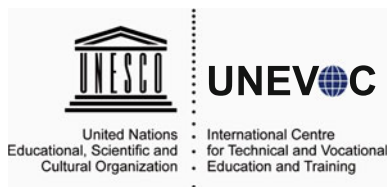
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ISBN 978-90-481-8742-3 e-ISBN 978-90-481-8743-0
DOI 10.1007/978-90-481-8743-0
Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg London New York

Library of Congress Control Number: 2010926740

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Printed on acid-free paper

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Introduction by the Series Editor

China is an enormous and diverse country, hosting the world's largest population (some 1.4 billion inhabitants), as well as one of the world's fastest-growing economies when compared to other (even developed) countries. It is a country of great contrasts, with many pressing development-related challenges needing to be addressed in the decades ahead. While China includes many prosperous, rapidly growing mega cities, there are at the same time many low-income rural areas from which, increasingly, large numbers of people seek to escape by moving to the cities (particularly those in the prosperous economic zones near the coastline) in search of employment and better standards of living.

Despite the world-wide economic devastation caused by the recent global economic downturn, China has maintained an enviable economic growth rate estimated at an annualized rate of 14.9%, which is higher than the rates of growth experienced by many developed countries, even before the economic crisis.¹

To help fuel its rapid economic growth and development, China has an insatiable appetite for mineral resources such as oil, iron ore and coal and also for vast human resources, needing increasing numbers of people with the skills and knowledge necessary to contribute to the rapid and (hopefully) sustainable economic development of the country. It is estimated by the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre in Bonn, Germany, that approximately 80% of China's labour force utilizes (and needs further development of) mainly technical and vocational skills. The pressing need to train and educate sufficient members of the population to possess high-quality, relevant vocational skills has resulted in an enormous increase in the demand for technical and vocational education training (TVET) over the past decade.

Particularly over the last decade, China has sought to strengthen and upgrade its systems of TVET with particular reference to improving the quality and relevance of programmes and by focusing on best practices and innovative approaches. In response to this demand, UNESCO developed with Chinese education authorities

¹Keith Bradsher: 'Recovery Picks Up in China as U.S. Still Ails'. In: *International Herald Tribune*, 17 September 2009. 'The Chinese central bank said the country's economy surged at an annualized rate of 14.9% in the second quarter. The US economy shrank at an annual rate of 1% in that period.'

in Beijing the Joint Innovative Project (JIP) on TVET in order to improve education and training programmes particularly at the secondary school level and with particular reference to the vocationalization of secondary education. Major efforts have also been made by the authorities to map the content of higher education programmes, and undertake a gap analysis, with a view to ensuring that the content is relevant to preparing individuals for the world of work. There has also been major investment to improve the infrastructure of TVET schools, colleges and universities of technology.

In addition to improving the relevance of the curriculum, the authorities in China have placed special emphasis on improving the quality of TVET programmes, mainly through improving the quality of training programmes for TVET teachers and trainers. One way is by offering professional master's and doctoral programmes aimed at better training the trainers. All of these initiatives also have the overall 'umbrella' goal of improving the status of TVET within Chinese society, so that parents and learners alike increasingly see the value of undertaking TVET qualifications and do not necessarily view TVET as being inferior to an academic education. Although some progress has been made regarding improving the status of TVET, much more remains to be done before TVET and academic studies have equivalent status.

One of the problems faced by researchers, policy makers and practitioners outside China who want to better understand current developments in TVET in China is the lack of comprehensive, up-to-date and reliable information about TVET in the country: its characteristics, strengths, weaknesses and the challenges faced. It is therefore very useful and timely to now have available this important and authoritative book by Guo and Lamb, which provides a portrait of China's system of technical and vocational education and training. The book provides a well-argued and level-headed evaluation of the performance of the TVET system in China and indicates what more needs to be done to maximize the contribution of TVET to economic and social development in China at a time of extraordinary growth and change. The study also examines how well the Chinese TVET system is performing in comparison to other countries and provides suggestions and recommendations regarding what needs to be done to take full advantage of the success and effectiveness of the Chinese system. Much of value can be learnt from the Chinese experience, and this volume helps identify the lessons learnt.

Given the size and diversity of China it is not possible to cover in one volume all aspects of TVET developments in all parts of the country. The authors have therefore chosen to provide a detailed case study of Yunnan Province, which serves to illustrate 'the main challenges confronting China in building a responsive education and training system to meet the demands of a rapidly changing occupational and industrial structure'.

This book deserves to be read, and will no doubt be appreciated, by all who want to gain a deep and reliable understanding of developments in TVET in China during a period of unprecedented expansion and change.

Contents

1 Introduction	1
Undertaking a Comparative Evaluation	2
Some Terms and Definitions	5
Outline of the Book	7
2 Education and Training in China	11
Overview of the Education System	12
Primary Schooling	12
Junior Secondary Schooling	13
Senior Secondary Schooling	15
Higher Education	17
Technical and Vocational Education and Training	18
Development of School-Level TVET	20
Tertiary-Level TVET	23
Apprenticeship Training	24
Other Dedicated Centres of Training	25
Administrative Structure of TVET in China	25
Developments in TVET in a Broader Context	26
Continuing TVET in China	28
Conclusion	29
3 International Comparisons of TVET	31
Aims of International Comparisons	32
Strategies for Making International Comparisons	33
Brief History of International Indicators	33
Indicator Approaches to International Comparisons	34
Models and Frameworks of Education Indicators	36
Main International Comparisons Using Indicator Systems	37
TVET-Specific Comparisons	39
Key Data on Vocational Training in the European Union	39
TVET in Central and Eastern Europe—Key Indicators	40
TVET Indicator Study in Korea	41

Occasional or Periodic Comparisons with Other Countries	41
Comparisons Involving China	43
Conclusion	53
4 A Review of Current Practice in China	55
Types of Research	55
Types of Comparisons	57
Indicator-Related Comparisons	57
Case-Study Comparisons	58
Key Studies Relevant to Educational Indicators	59
Published Articles on Indicators	65
Examples of Case-Study Comparisons with Other Countries	67
How Has Continuing Education and Training Been Studied in China?	69
Conclusion	72
5 Framework for Comparing China's TVET System	75
Requirements for Making International Comparisons	75
The International Standard Classification for Education	76
The Application of ISCED to Chinese Education	78
TVET Policy Priorities in China	80
Selection of Indicators	83
Context Indicators	83
Input Indicators	83
Process Indicators	84
Outputs/Outcomes Indicators	84
Outcomes	85
Data Sources	85
The Educational Statistics Yearbook of China	86
The Educational Finance Statistical Yearbook of China	86
The Labor and Social Security Yearbook of China	86
Labor Statistical Yearbook of China	87
The Fifth National Population Census	87
Countries Selected for Comparison	87
Conclusion	88
6 Comparisons of Social and Economic Context	89
Context Comparisons Using Selected Indicators	90
Indicator 1.1: The Educational Attainment of the Adult Population (25–64), by Age	90
Indicator 1.2: GDP Per Capita in Different Countries	94
Indicator 1.3: Labour Force Participation Rates	96
Indicator 1.4: Unemployment Rates by Level of Educational Attainment and Gender	99

7 Resources	105
Input Indicators	105
Comparisons Using Selected Input Indicators	106
Indicator 2.1: Public Expenditure on Education as a Percentage of GDP (2004)	106
Indicator 2.2: Public Expenditure on Education as a Percentage of Government Expenditure	110
Indicator 2.3: Expenditure on Education Institutions per Student Across Levels of Education	112
Indicator 2.4: Per Student Expenditure on Secondary Education by Programme	119
Indicator 2.5: Public and Private Investment in Educational Institutions at All Levels	122
Additional Possible Input Indicators	125
Conclusion	126
8 Participation and Outcome Indicators	127
Participation in Initial TVET	128
Indicator 3.1: Participation Rates in Upper Secondary TVET Programmes	129
Indicator 3.2: Participation in Initial TVET by Gender	133
Indicator 3.3: Participation in Initial TVET by Age	134
Indicator 3.4: Participation in Initial TVET by Location	135
Indicator 3.5: Duration of Initial TVET Programmes	137
Indicator 3.6: Participation in Programmes Giving Access to Further Education	139
Graduation	140
Indicator 3.7: Upper Secondary Gross Graduation Rates, by Programme and Gender	140
Participation in Continuing TVET	143
Indicator 3.8: Participation Rates in Continuing TVET	144
Indicator 3.9: Participation in Continuing TVET by Gender	146
Indicators That Cannot Yet Be Included	146
Access and Transition	147
Completion	147
Labour Market Outcomes	147
Productivity Outcomes	147
Conclusion	147
9 Work-Based Education and Training	149
Considering TVET in the Context of Yunnan	149
The Economy and Labour Force of Yunnan	150
Segmented Labour Market	150
Urban and Rural Employment in Yunnan	152
Enterprise Registration (Ownership) Status in Yunnan	154

Data Collection Survey on Continuing Vocational Training in Yunnan	155
The Enterprises Selected for the Survey	155
The Questionnaires	156
Survey Process	157
Employee Feedback on the Survey	157
Employer Feedback	158
Analysis of Data from the Employee and Employer Questionnaires	159
General Characteristics of the Surveyed Enterprises	159
General Characteristics of the Employee Sample Reflected in the Data	159
Funding of Enterprise Training	160
Participation in Work-Based Training	161
Applying the Survey Results from Yunnan to International Comparisons	163
Comparisons with the EU Based on Key Quantitative CVT Indicators	164
Training Incidence	165
Training Access	165
Training Intensity	166
Training Cost	166
Comparisons of CVT (Work-Based Formal Training)	166
Surface Measures of Overall Performance	167
Comparisons of Aggregate Performance	170
10 Conclusion	173
The Performance of the Chinese TVET System	173
On International Comparisons and TVET Data	176
Final Note	181
References	183
Author Index	193
Subject Index	197