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VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT IN PUNJAB

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Abstract

The article explores the role of vocational training in enhancing sustainable employment in Punjab, Pakistan. The study focuses on the factors such as institutional capacity, labor-market relevance, quality of training, linkages to industries, access, digital skills, and post-training employability. It should be noted that this article differs from the general discussion of employability in this region.

Study uses secondary qualitative data from governmental sources, professional publications, labor-market reports, policies, tracer studies and other works of literature. The data was analyzed thematically, descriptively and comparatively to reveal the key institutional and labor market factors that determine vocational training's employment outcomes. The results demonstrate that vocational training institutions in Punjab have expanded the opportunities for skills development, but graduation does not guarantee stable employment. Key factors influencing vocational training's employment outcomes are curriculum, employer links, apprenticeships, teachers and staff, quality assurance, digitalization, and graduate tracking. The study identifies the difference in access and participation based on gender and urban-rural location. The results suggest that there is a need for increased links between vocational training institutions and labor-market demand.

1.INTRODUCTION

Vocational and technical education play a crucial role in preparing the youth for active participation in the labor market. Technical and vocational education and training are especially important in developing countries like Pakistan where a substantial portion of the young population enters the labor market without adequate skills to secure a suitable job. According to the International Labour Organization (2019), a skills gap between jobs and workers' skill sets can lead to high levels of unemployment, underemployment, and low utilization of human resources.

In Punjab, a number of institutions contribute towards broadening technical and vocational training: TEVTA, PVTC, and PSDF. These institutes offer various forms of training under distinctly different institutional arrangements. However, the number of people trained does not represent the importance of these institutions. The critical question is whether training promotes graduate's employability, entrepreneurship, and attachment to the world of work while facilitating their career progression. Human capital theory is best suited to answer this question. According to Becker's (1993) model, education and

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training increases human capital by building knowledge and skills that, in turn, contribute to higher economic productivity. It means that vocational training, when combined with relevant skills, increases graduates' employability because skills correspond to the demands of the labour market. The present article thus focuses its attention from general employability to sustainable employment after receiving vocational training. The article therefore tries to assess the influence of institutional and labour-market factors on the capacity of vocational education to yield substantive employment outcomes in Punjab.

Objectives of the Study

1. To observe the contribution of vocational training institutions to employment in Punjab.
2. To explore institutional and labour-market barriers affecting post-training employment.
3. To study the role of curriculum relevance, industry linkages and training quality in sustainable employment.
4. To dig out the issues related to access, digital skills, and graduate monitoring.

Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative research design that was based solely on secondary information. Thus, the information was gathered from government reports, institutional repositories, labour-market surveys, policy documents, tracer studies, and relevant scholarly articles on vocational and technical education in Pakistan. The study applied thematic, descriptive, and comparative methods of analysis. There was documentation and grouping of evidence related to training institutions, employment status, performance assessment, skills mismatch, industry linkages, access analysis, and post-training monitoring. The study concentrated on Punjab and evaluated evidence related to TEVTA, PVTC, and PSDF.

Vocational Training and Sustainable Employment

Vocational training can increase employment opportunities as it equips individuals with professional knowledge and skills. However, sustainable employment requires more than technical know-how and expertise. Graduates need to gain the ability to transition from obtaining vocational training to seeking employment, recruitment or enterprise development, adaptation, retention, and progression in their careers. Based on the thesis evidence, one can assume that vocational institutions in Punjab played a great role in enhancing a wide range of opportunities for skills development. TEVTA is responsible for managing public technical and vocational institutes that offer formal technical and vocational programs. PVTC ensures that vocational centres at a community and tehsil level provide access to disadvantaged groups. PSDF offers demand-oriented training to diverse training partners and focuses on technical skills that are relevant in marketplace.

Table 1. Comparative Role of Major Vocational Training Institutions

Institution	Role described in the study	Primary emphasis
TEVTA	Manages public technical and vocational institutes and longer diploma/certificate programs	Formal technical and vocational training
PVTC	Operates community and tehsil-level vocational centres	Access for disadvantaged and lower-income groups
PSDF	Funds training through private, NGO, and other training partners	Demand-oriented short courses and market linkage

Source: Thesis data; adapted from the original Table 4.1.

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The fact that the number of people receiving training within the framework of the project is expanding does not necessarily mean that the quality of such training works effectively to raise employment rates. Everything depends on how close the content of training is to actual demands in the job market. The Asian Development Bank (2022) highlights the need to improve the readiness of the workforce and the relevance of skills to address the needs of employers.

Institutional and Labour-Market Barriers

One of the key problems mentioned in the text is the inadequacy of vocational training in relation to changing labour-market trends. As technology changes it creates new demands in the job market, which then require updating the curriculum and educating teachers. The ILO (2019) states that skills mismatches represent one of the key challenges in the field, while the World Bank (2018) emphasizes the importance of developing employable skills in young people in Punjab. Another weakness of the system is the lack of connection between the training providers and the employers. The provision of apprenticeships, the use of the workplace to expose, the collaborative efforts of the employer and curriculum, and direct recruitment channels to employers can ease the transition from training to the workplace. Where this is not provided, it may be difficult for the graduates to gain experience. Gender and geographical inequalities also play a role and while initiatives have been taken to increase opportunities open to women, social norms, restricted mobility, and limited access to training facilities may constrain participation (ILO, 2011). Rural youth may also encounter more barriers due to distance, transport, a lack of institutions, and poor links to the labour market. Digital transformation presents an additional challenge. The modern job market involves the increasing need for digital literacy, but the level of digital infrastructure and instructors' competencies may differ. ILO (2024) highlights the particular importance of skills development for youth employment in evolving labour markets.

Table 2. Key Institutional and Labour-Market Challenges Identified in the Study

Theme	Issue identified in the study	Why it matters
Curriculum relevance	Some programs do not keep pace with changing technologies and industry needs	Can contribute to skills mismatch and underemployment
Industry linkages	Employer and apprenticeship connections are uneven	Weakens job matching and workplace exposure
Training quality	Facilities, equipment, instructor capacity, and quality assurance vary	Affects consistency of graduate skills
Access and inclusion	Rural-urban and gender disparities remain	Limits equitable participation and employment opportunities
Digital integration	Digital infrastructure and instructor capability remain uneven	Restricts preparation for technology-oriented work
Monitoring	Long-term placement, retention, and income tracking are limited	Makes sustained impact harder to evaluate

Source: Thesis data; adapted from the original Table 4.2.

From Training Completion to Employment

An important finding that emerges from this study is that the success of vocational education should not be measured by the number of people trained. Employment outcomes therefore include; placement, enterprise creation, retention, earnings, and progression. According to the PSDF tracer-related evidence presented in the thesis, over 600000 people were trained by the institution by 2023. On the other hand, the evidence in the tracer-related data cited reveals that about 58% of students who graduated from the cited training organization were placed or started businesses within six months of graduation (PSDF,

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2023). Nonetheless, there is a lack of information regarding retention and progression of the graduates. The above observation speaks about the importance of graduate-tracking systems. Without information on what happens to their graduates after training, organizations cannot know, with a high degree of certainty, if their training programs actually help to create sustainable employment. Monitoring the employment status, income, retention rate, career development, and enterprise survival would give better insight on the value of these programs.

Discussion

The results of the research support the core statement of the Human Capital Theory that investment in education and training can increase individuals' productivity (Becker, 1993). At the same time, it has been found that the value of vocational trainings depends on the context in which they are obtained and applied. The mere existence of educational institutions cannot ensure employment. The relevance of curriculum, quality of trainers, modern infrastructure, industry links, apprenticeships, and labour-market information are all relevant. The findings coincide with ILO (2019) indicating that skills mismatch constitutes a key challenge in situations where the educational/training systems do not correspond to employment needs. The vocational training system in Punjab is also characterized by the presence of different institutions. It can therefore be seen that even though there is diversity within the vocational training agencies that exist, such as TEVTA, PVTC, PSDF, and others, the need to develop a better level of coordination is paramount to avoid the situations where institutions would appear to serve the same purpose. The development and implementation of national vocational qualification standards therefore contribute to the credibility and portability of vocational qualifications (NAVTTC, 2018). The results also indicate that job sustainability is a social concept. Training young women or rural communities may not be sufficient in overcoming their social impediments; instead, training should be accessible, affordable, easily available in convenient geographical locations, and be compatible with the social norms of the targeted population.

Conclusion

Vocational training can be beneficial for sustainable employment in Punjab, but with certain conditions. The results of the analysis presented in this study prove that it is related to such factors as relevance, quality, involvement, apprenticeships, digital skills, accessibility, and graduate tracking. The study therefore suggests that vocational education should be perceived as a part of the employment-transition system rather than an independent training process. Closer connections between educational institutions and employers, frequent curricula revisions, improved personnel training, more extensive workplace-based learning, utilizing technology, and a systematic tracking of graduates will improve the transition from vocational training programs into sustainable employment.

Policy Implications

There are various recommendations that can be derived from the study. Firstly, there is a need for more frequent revisions of the curricula in order to align them with the ever-changing occupational needs. Secondly, the role of the employers in the process of curriculum planning, apprenticeships, and general recruitment needs to be enhanced. Thirdly, there should be an improvement in the faculty development and the mechanism of quality assurance. Fourthly, providing the training opportunities for the rural students and the female students is necessary, since they might not have access to such possibilities otherwise. Lastly, it is useful to develop a tracking system, which will help to estimate the number of graduates employed, retained, wages progression, and other factors.

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Limitations

The study is limited by the fact that it does not include primary evidence. The research is based on secondary information only, which does not allow obtaining fully reliable and objective conclusions. Moreover, different institutions may have varied the data collection techniques, which does not allow representing the situation accurately. Finally, the research covers only one Indian region, Punjab, providing no primary evidence from either the graduates or the employers.

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