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ASK CHILDREN WHAT THEY would like to become as grown ups, no one will be tell you that she or he is interested in becoming an auto mechanic, a plumber, a mobile handset repairer or an accountant. Because when it comes to only vocational education then students become apprehensive about their future. The challenge in the space of skills and vocational educational education is huge. It is surprising that children who require skills don't desire them. There are two major reasons for this withdrawal. Firstly, vocational education or skills have no social standing when compared to the professional education. Second is the social stigma... a skilled professional is not compared fairly with a person in a white-collar job.

Moreover students don't want to take up the road less traversed. With academic qualification, it is easier for students to pursue masters or go for research oriented academic programmes, but with vocational education, vertical growth of skill-holders is at stake. They may excel in the skill, but then they need to acquire degree to grow in the profession. This is a space which students just don't understand as to what can they do to acquire a better qualification or vertical mobility. Hence, students first go for mainstream education and then learn fashion designing or IT

In spite of an evolving audience, vocational education faces challenges

skills with not so focused approach in enhancing vocational skills.

Another aspect that I would bring forward is the absence of industry linkage. There is no clear mandate from the job providers on the industry requirements of skills and a clear growth trajectory. This lack of clarity affects our skill solutions as it becomes difficult to measure the results. There are a large number of candidates working in the unorganized sector where we have yet to establish a clear connect between skill acquisition and the role. There has to be a clarity as to where will the skilled candidates be placed on completion of a programme and what is the assurance that the industry will not disown them?

However, it is not that government is not taking any measure when it comes to eliminating or reducing the challenges being faced in the vocational education domain. Government has listed a National Skills Education Qualification Framework (NVEQF) which addresses few of the existing challenges. One, it brings parity with the formal education by defining various levels and making Level 1 equivalent to Class 9 and so on and so forth till Level 10. So, the first step is defined. The second step is vertical mobility. Under this framework, a student who pursues vocational education will have the flexibility to move into the mainstream education and vice versa. So, that also gets addressed.

When it comes to all the efforts getting wasted for lack of industry linkages, sector skills councils have been setup, which along with industry recommendation are setting up National Occupational Standards (NOS). These standards and educational framework have set the ground by standardizing educational requirements and industry requirements. As far as implementation is concerned, even when the groundwork is done, NVEQF has yet to get integrated

into the practices of schools and higher educational institutions. So, there has to be defined timeframes for the implementation of the same.

Secondly, awareness amongst the target profile needs significant enhancement. Even the stakeholders need to be equipped with new norms which would be implemented by the industry and parents also need to be addressed regarding the improvisation in the vocational educational sector. Lack of awareness is leading to more and more roadblocks in the implementation of the processes and no progress has been made even when things are clearly defined.

Association with sector skills council has helped us a lot in creating industry linkages and in creating massive awareness as well. Now, it is up to all stakeholders to see that the implementation goes on well. In pockets, I would say things are progressing. So, in partnership with NSDC, we've been doing vocational programs in 25 schools of Himachal Pradesh and there are other initiatives also that have been taken.

However, much more is needed and I am sure the success of all these campaigns will be measured only when the industry starts recognizing and rewarding the competency certificates that are issued to the students and when they finally starts accepting skilled candidates in relevant industries. That's how success can finally be measured. Transformation will happen when vocational education won't be the last resort of students opting for it. We hope that the day comes soon when the country as a whole gets benefitted because we are talking of a demographic dividend which needs to be actualized.