

THE NEED FOR PLANNING SECONDARY EDUCATION TO DEVELOP VOCATIONAL-ORIENTED COMPETENCIES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE WORLD OF WORK

W.M S. Wanasinghe¹

Department of Secondary and Tertiary Education, The Open University of Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

Education and development are inter-related. The reason for this inter-relationship is that development of human resources contributes to the development of a country. Kularathna (1982) stressed that there are no greater inputs to the society than investment in education. Giddens (2008) pointed out that the current world of work needs multi skilled people. But Haralambos et al (2000) argue that more people gain their skills out of the school rather than when they are in school. According to those views, present secondary education system must be changed. Secondary education should be more oriented to the world of work. Jayaweera (2004) pointed out that there were attempts to introduce various reforms to secondary education for the development of vocational oriented competencies which were not successful. One reason would be that many Sri Lankan people believed practical oriented jobs as low grade jobs. Education must prepare students to the future world of work. According to Hughes and Krochler (2005) secondary education should focus on developing vocational oriented competencies.

The present study focused on the identification of (1) perceptions of students, teachers and parents regarding current secondary education, (2) vocational oriented competencies expected by employers from potential employees, (3) the relationship between the secondary education curriculum and the world of work, (4) strategies for developing vocational oriented competencies in students so as to equip them for the world of work of the future and (5) it makes recommendations to gear secondary education to the world of work.

METHODOLOGY

This study used the mixed method approach to conduct the research. To identify perceptions of different stakeholders on secondary education, survey method was used. In addition, to identify the relationship between the secondary education curriculum and the world of work content analysis method was used. A sample representative of 1AB and 1C schools in Kandy district was selected for the survey. The study was conducted in 20 schools selected from the above district. In the selection of schools apart from school type, attention was also paid to the location of schools - urban, rural and estate and the medium of instruction, Sinhala or Tamil.

From those schools, 500 students, 200 parents and 200 teachers were selected according to the random sampling method. In addition, 60 employers and 50 key persons selected according to the purposive sampling method were included in the sample. For collection of data, questionnaires and interview schedules were used as instruments. In addition the study used a check list to collect data about the relationship between secondary education and the world of work. The responses of teachers, students and parents, who participated in the above survey, were triangulated.

In order to examine the relationship between the secondary education curriculum and the world of work, a content analysis of Teacher Instructional Manuals of 19 subjects in Grades

¹Correspondence should be addressed to W.M ShamindaWanasinghe, Department of Secondary and Tertiary Education, The Open University of Sri Lanka (email: wmw@ou.ac.lk)

10-11 and Teacher Instructional Manuals on Life Competencies and Citizenship Education and Practical and Technical Skills for grades 6 to 9 was carried out.

Data analysis was carried out using both qualitative and quantitative methods. For quantitative analysis percentages and the Chi-squares and level of significance were calculated using the SPSS computer software. In qualitative analysis the content analysis technique was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the results of data analysis it was evident that the perceptions regarding secondary education were positive. Further, it was possible to conclude that greater importance should be given to basket subjects. The interviewees said education must provide more opportunities for development of vocational oriented competencies in students. Content analysis revealed that use of practical methods in teaching, development and evaluation of vocational oriented competencies in school, development of positive societal attitudes regarding vocations, and provision of greater importance to co-curricular activities was evident in secondary education.

Regarding the second objective of the study it was found that employers of secondary level students expect an emphasis to be given to soft skills. The interviews helped to identify 18 vocational oriented competencies considered as important by the employers. Those are Language proficiency, Computer literacy, Communications skills, Efficiency, Leadership qualities, Team work, Creativity, Practicability, Personality, Management skills, Love to society, Good inter relationships, Problem solving skills, Commitment, Readiness to take up responsibility, Decision making skills, Analytical thinking and Risk taking. Among these priority was given to language proficiency and computer literacy. Views were also expressed that in the future there could be a less demand for physical labor.

The study enabled the researcher to identify several measures that could be implemented for the development of vocational oriented skills which could be incorporated in a programme of action. Students', teachers' and parents' perceptions on secondary education were identified. Moreover, students' expectations to develop vocational oriented competencies were identified. Each sample said that some marks should be given for vocational oriented competencies when students are selected for admission to higher education or recruited for jobs. The study stressed the importance of participation of employers in the formulation of education policies. The sample expressed the need to identify new trends through the study of the world of work and innovation education in parallel. Establishment of training institutions at zonal level for the development of vocational oriented competencies, establishment of a quality structure in curriculum development committees, reduction in the volume of subject matter in syllabi, provision of greater opportunities for the teaching of vocational oriented subject matter, introduction of a technical stream at senior secondary school level, training teachers for the development of vocational oriented competencies, subjecting vocational oriented competencies to evaluation at national examinations also, making participation in co-curricular activities compulsory, formalization of vocational guidance programmes and bringing about a change in societal attitudes.

The study analyzed the relationship between secondary education and world of work by comparing Teacher Instructional Manuals with selected national goals of education and basic competencies identified by the National Education Commission. It also analyzed identified vocational oriented competencies. The study found that there are more vocational oriented competencies included in the current secondary education curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some important recommendations emerging from the study are as follows:

1. Reduction in the volume of subject matter in syllabi and increase of practical oriented activities.
2. Greater importance should be given to basket subjects
3. Introduction of a technical stream at senior secondary school level
4. Establishment of training institutions at zonal education level for the development of vocational oriented competencies.
5. Institution of a quality structure in curriculum development committees.
6. Training teachers for the development of vocational oriented competencies and awareness for the world of work.
7. Subjecting vocational oriented competencies to evaluation at national level examinations.
8. Formulation of an action plan aligned to the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 & 4 at secondary school level.
9. Improve the practical relationship between secondary education and world of work.
10. Make participation in co-curriculum activities compulsory.
11. Formalization of vocational guidance programmes.
12. Bringing out a change in societal attitudes for secondary school education and the world of work.

Finally, it was possible to conclude that the development of vocational oriented competencies could be done in students at secondary level education if the existing academic orientation and examination dominance were minimized to bring about a change in the competitive pattern of education. Furthermore, the need to pay attention on education of, not only those who continue to the higher education level but also on the majority who drop out after their secondary education, was emphasized. It was clear that such programme of action would enable the creation of a future generation capable of facing the challenges of the world of work.

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