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Quality assurance as a way to support labour markets: a reflection on TVET policies in Bangladesh

Abstract

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems are not geared towards the market needs in Bangladesh though the country has a comparative advantage in the production of labour intensive goods and services. The government determined that the TVET sector has to emphasize clearly the development of skilled workers with special attention given to quality assurance. Populations in the most developed nations are declining, on the other hand, Bangladesh is becoming now the most densely populated country in the world. In recent decades, remittance has become one of the main sources of economic growth and development. The remittance would be higher with the same number of expatriates' workforce provided the quality assurance has given a preference. It is evident that quality assurance in TVET is not well understood by the stakeholders in the region. This paper explains the current structure, system and policy of TVET in Bangladesh. It also provides information about government initiative and drives to develop a quality assurance system.

Keywords: TVET, Quality Assurance, Skilled Manpower Export, Remittance, Bangladesh

1 Introduction

Basically Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) mirrors the double role of education and training for social and economic development, assuring the students' personal and professional skill development so that they are able to become active citizens in their community. In line with an individual's aspirations and learning potentials, the state should ensure equal chances and equitable access to TVET. It is the progressive pathway with no dead ends for all the educated to develop a career. Training creates job readiness and more skilled manpower. TVET doubles the qualification opportunities in academic and professional life because TVET graduates passing academic examinations are entitled to continue studies through tertiary university education. But historically in Bangladesh, TVET is the last choice of education and students are treated as less meritorious. Statistics show that only 3 percent of all secondary students are attracted to the TVET sector. TVET in Bangladesh faces challenges related to increasing numbers of TVET seats and to creating programs which are demand-driven by the stakeholders. The country's natural resources are insufficient to meet domestic demand, as Bangladesh is overpopulated. Therefore developing human resources can be a viable proposition to meet industrial demands. Also for comparative advantage,

skilled manpower needs to be developed through TVET. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers constitute around 70 percent (Asian Development Bank 2015) of the Bangladeshi workers working overseas, who received \$15.31 billion as remittance (Bangladesh Business News 2015) and occupied the 8th place in the list of the world's top ten remittance recipients (The Financial Express 2014). The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has not yet properly addressed about 53.28 percent drop out students in secondary level education (The Daily Star 2013) to participate in the TVET sector in order to reduce unemployment. Hence, quality assurance has become an important aspect of TVET. Quality assurance in TVET includes several activities associated with procedures for quality assessment, monitoring, and improvement. Thus, Bangladesh can earn a manifold increase in remittance through enhancing QA of TVET and exporting skilled manpower.

In this study, the document analysis technique has been applied by investigating various sources i.e., government reports, papers from conference proceedings, referred journals and internet sources. G.R. Adams and J.D Schvaneveldt (1985, 293) argue that “any record (written or oral) that contains information about human behaviour, social conditions and processes can be sub-summed under the broad area of documents.” Mainly the articles were discovered randomly using Google and various journal databases, e.g. ScienceDirect and TVET@ Asia were considered. Five keywords were chosen to conduct the search: Technical and vocational education and training, labour market, skilled manpower, TVET policy, and quality assurance.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents an overview on the history and current status of TVET in Bangladesh. Section 3 explains quality assurance in general while section 4 discusses it in Bangladesh context. Section 5 concludes.

2 Historical background and current status of TVET in Bangladesh

2.1 History and trends of TVET institutions

In 1874, Ahsan Ullah School of Engineering, at present Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), was established in the then British India. It was the only centre for technical education in the Assam and undivided Bengal. During the partition in 1947, the institution was known as Ahsan Ullah Engineering School. Subsequently, the institution was renamed Ahsan Ullah Engineering College. In 1955, two polytechnic institutes were set up in Karachi and Dhaka respectively based on the report of the Council of Technical Education in Pakistan on February 1949. In the founding phase, East Pakistan Polytechnic Institute (EPPI), at present Dhaka Polytechnic Institute (DPI), received financial assistance from Ford Foundation of America. In the late 1960s, the process of establishing one polytechnic institution in each major city was started. Thus, 17 polytechnic institutes were set up in the then East Pakistan.

Before partitioning from British India in 1947, there were 21 public and only one private Technical Institution in this region where Bangladesh is situated now. The country became

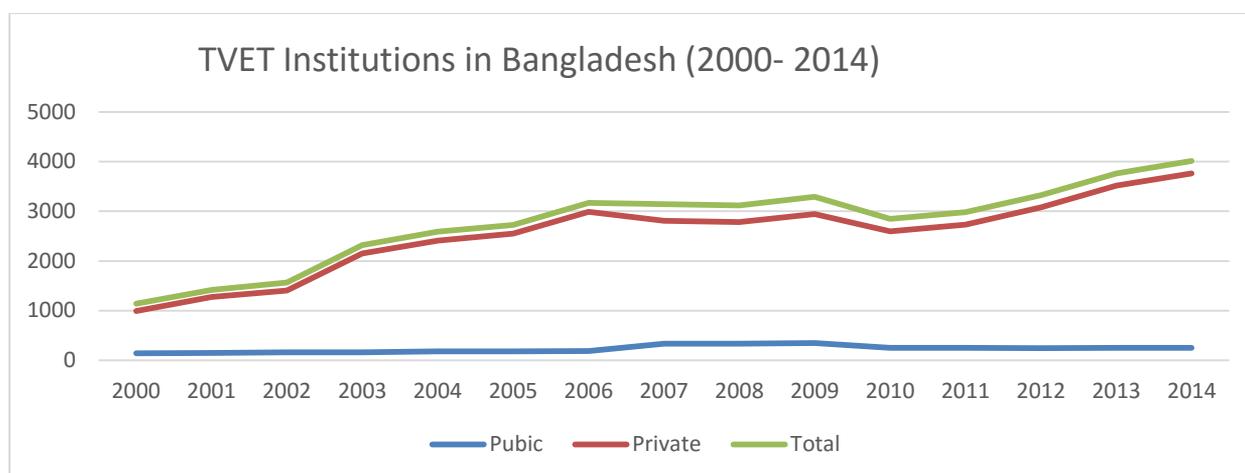
the eastern wing of Pakistan when Britain left the Indian subcontinent. Bangladesh was associated with Pakistan until independence in 1971. During the Pakistan period, 1947-1971, another 45 Technical Institutions were established. In the period from 1972-1990, the country was ruled basically by three regimes, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, General Ziaur Rahman and General Ershad. In this period, only 53 technical Institution were established. 1991-2000 period can be marked as another dismal decade of establishing technical Institution from government initiatives. Putting aside the quality assurance issue, compared with any period in the history of Bangladesh, the period from 2001- 2013 can be labelled as the golden era of technical education. Of the total 237 public and 1366 private technical institutions, this period alone established 124 public (around 52 %) and 1094 private institutions (around 80%) respectively. Details are in the Table 1:

Table 1: **Technical institutions with respect to establishment period (Independent Institution) 2014**

Management	Before 1947	1947-1971	1972-1990	1991-2000	2001-2013	Total
Public	21	42	33	17	124	237
%	8.86	17.72	13.92	7.17	52.32	100.00
Private	1	3	20	248	1094	1366
%	0.07	0.22	1.46	18.16	80.09	100.00
Total:	22	45	53	265	1218	1603
%	1.37	2.81	3.31	16.53	75.98	100.00

Source: BANBEIS-Educational Database (<http://banbeis.gov.bd/data>)

In 2001-2014 period, Bangladesh had three governments. 2001-2006 period was ruled by a four party alliance under premiership of Begum Khaleda Zia (widow of General Zia), BNP Chairperson. From 2007-2008 an interim government was ruled by Fakruddin Ahmed and from 2009-2013 Bangladesh was ruled by a fourteen party alliance under premiership of Sheikh Hasina Wazed (daughter of Sheikh Mujib), Awami League Chairperson. From the graph below, two completely opposite scenarios of establishing public TVET institutions can be shown, depending on the current regime: During 2001-2006, number of public TVET institutions increased from 143 to 186 while during 2009-2013 the number decreased from 345 to 245. However, the number of private TVET institutions shows an increasing trend over the years. In terms of encouraging private initiatives, the 2001-2006-government was more successful compared with the 2009-2013-government. Between 2001 and 2006, the number of private TVET institutions increased from 994 to 2987 (around 200 percent) while this number decreased to 2781 in the period of the interim government and again during 2009-2013 period, the number increased to 3518 (27%). Trends of TVET institutions in Bangladesh for 2001-2014 period are shown in the following Graph.



Source: Bangladesh Education Statistics 2015.

Figure 1: Trends of TVET institutions in Bangladesh for 2001-2014 period

At present, according to the BANBEIS-Educational Database 2014, there are 4014 technical and vocational educational institutions in Bangladesh. Out of these, 3255 (around 80%) institutions are offering 2 years for a secondary school certificate (vocational) (SSC Voc), 2 years for a higher secondary certificate (vocational) (HSC Voc) and (business management) (HSC BM). Polytechnic institutions are the second largest group of TVET institutions comprising 286 private and public institutions which represents around 7% of the total TVET institutions. The number of Technical School & Colleges, Agriculture Training Institutes, Technical Training Centres, and Textile Institutes & Vocational is altogether 466 - they represent almost 12 percent of the total TVET institutions. Data on teacher and students' enrolment shows a picture of male dominance in TVET system where women are underrepresented: only 20 per cent of the teachers are female and around 27 per cent of the students. The detailed scenario is shown in table 2:

Table 2: Number of institution, teacher and enrolment by type, 2014.

Type of Institute	No. of Inst.	Teacher			Enrolment		
		Total	Female	% of female	Total	Girl	% of girls
S.S.C Vocational, HSC Voc./ B. Management	3255	18567	4140	22.30	376854	137315	36.44
Polytechnic Institute	286	4665	761	16.31	170069	19263	11.33
Technical School & College	170	2306	420	18.21	64926	13752	21.18
Agriculture Training Institute	109	960	191	19.90	29493	6462	21.91
Technical Training Centre	104	1300	216	16.62	28769	9999	34.76
Textile Institute & Vocational	83	865	154	17.80	15645	2104	13.45
Survey Institute	4	55	7	12.73	1249	67	5.36
Glass & Ceramic Institute	1	13	3	23.08	1047	54	5.16
Graphic Arts Institute	1	15	4	26.67	695	52	7.48
Marine Technology	1	52	5	9.62	916	106	11.57
Total (Tech & Voc Edn.)	4014	28798	5901	20.49	689663	189174	27.43

Source: Extracted from BANBEIS-Educational Database (<http://banbeis.gov.bd/data>)

2.2 Current status of TVET in Bangladesh: crises, challenges and initiatives

For rapid expansion of the country's industrial sector it is necessary to focus on human resource development. A recent survey by IC Net Limited reveals that this sector's growth is hindered because of shortage of manpower with technical knowledge and job-specific skills, and also institutional weakness in TVET (Malik 2016). The inadequate numbers of vocational institutions to meet the demand, negative public perception toward technical and vocational education (TVE), and high education cost are the reasons for low enrolment in TVE, the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) report says (Wadud 2014). The report also provides an estimation that education cost in TVET is even higher than general education. Monthly average household cost per participant for general education is Tk1257 (\$16) and for TVET Tk2577 (\$33) (Ibid).

Technical education, the most important avenue for creating skilled manpower, is neglected in the country. Several reports suggest that students of TVET and Diploma Engineers (coming from the TVET system) are being deprived and discriminated against in every sector. The whole TVET system is in a crisis because of lack of teachers, running double shifts without teachers, teachers not getting salary, not having class, admitting students and opening department without having teachers, closing the opportunity for higher education. The crisis has gone to the extent that there are no teachers for 60 to 80 percent of positions in Govt. polytechnics. In many cases, institutions are running without a principal and vice-principal (Barei 2014). Against the 5,229 positions of teachers and non-teaching staff, about 2,276 positions in various posts including 485 teachers have remained vacant for long time due to failure to fill the vacant positions at the right time, the DTE reports shows. Principal M A Sattar, President, and Bangladesh Technical Education Teachers' Association aptly summarises the current crisis of the TVET system when he suggests that: the sector drew the least allocation of resources despite being the most important part of education. Many technical and vocational institutions have been functioning with one or two teachers. The government at various times have promised to create a job structure having junior lecturer, lecturer, and professor to enhance the dignity of teachers. However, till now, teachers have received no such thing. As a result, second shifts in every polytechnic institute are crippling to run. Those shifts are running but 80 percent teachers are lacking. On the other hand, those teachers who are taking classes are not getting salaries month after month (Barei 2014).

There are 49 public polytechnic institutes in Bangladesh. Approximately 24,000 students enrolled in each year in two shifts (morning and evening). But students have to face enormous problems and challenges in every step of their education. Moreover, nearly one hundred thousand students are offered study for SSC and HSC vocational degrees. They are also facing countless problems. The syllabus and curricula have not been modernized in accord with market demand. For example, in his observation of traditional TVET carpentry classes, Francis De Silva states that these classes have often run below capacity and have even closed down because trained carpenters were not able to sell their skills in the market. Now that demand from the furniture industry is growing, he suggests, TVET institutions reopen carpentry classes, using an updated curriculum. TVET institutions tend to have very old ma-

chines. Therefore, a priority must be to modernise these institutions and build the capacity of trainers to teach the new curriculum (De Siva 2016).

The National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) 2010-2021 identifies key challenges to TVET in Bangladesh which are: “shortage of skilled manpower; mismatch of jobs and skills; training content and quality are not highly valued in the market as all workers receive similar wages; shortage of well-equipped training institutes and at the same time underutilization of existing institutes” (GED 2013, 82). Moreover, there is lack of government monitoring of private sector TVET, teachers are not properly trained, and institutions do not have upgraded equipment to cope up the changes of the TVET sector. Many of these institutions have no adequate infrastructures i.e., class room, laboratory, library facility.

According to specialists, the present government has taken various initiatives about technical education. TVET is considered as a quintessential factor for sustainable development. To develop skilled manpower and attracting more female students to TVET, the government is working to establish 50 institutes of technical education (The Financial Express 2015a). Another report shows that the government is taking the initiative to set up technical education centres in all upazilas (sub-districts) (The Financial Express 2015b). The finance minister’s budget speech of FY 2015-16 focusses on the importance of a wider expansion and quality improvement of technical education in order to reap the benefits of demographic dividend. To this end, he informs, “a project of Tk. 9240 million is being implemented to establish one technical school in each of 100 upazilas. In addition, development projects have been undertaken for setting-up of a technical school in every divisional town, poly-technical institutes in 23 districts, 4 technical institutes for women in 4 divisions, and an engineering college in every division. Also, a project has been established to deliver basic literacy and life skill trainings to illiterate people of the 15- 45 years age group” (Ministry of Finance 2015, 36).

In the TVET sector, female participation is very low compare with their male counterparts. To address gender inequality in TVET, 7th FYP is doubling female quota for admission into TVE institutes. An ambitious target for 40 percent female enrolment in TVET by 2020 has been set. Moreover, to ensure enrolment, retention and completion, stipends and other financial support will be provided to the poor female students. 4 new Polytechnic Institutes exclusively for women have been set up in 4 divisional headquarters. Three additional women’s Polytechnic Institutes will be setup at Barisal, Sylhet and Rangpur divisional headquarters. Seven women’s technical school and college in seven divisions will be established (GED 2015, 608).

Several initiatives have been undertaken to address the skill level of migrant workers by Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare & Overseas Employment (MEWOE). A total number of 5 Institutes of Marine Technology (IMTs) and 27 Technical Training Centres (TTCs) have already been established. In addition, TTCs at Upazila level will be established to ensure skill training program at grass root level is on course. Over the last four years, the number of total trainees given skill and technical training has doubled from 59,554 in 2010 to 11,500 in 2014. Annually more than 150,000 people will be offered skills training, according to the plan of

the MEWOE. The unemployed youth would be transformed to skilled manpower. To this end, quality TVET will be provided at minimum cost where equal access will be ensured. According to 7th FYP, 68 (including 4 divisional offices) District Employment and Manpower Offices (DEMO) will be set up to help expand overseas employment opportunities, in the regions which are lagging, through the provision of technical advice and logistic support. An initiative would be taken to reduce costs of migration and remittance transfer. To meet demand for new skills and knowledge, a ‘Catering Institute’ will be set up to provide market oriented skill training; 40 upazila level TTCs and 1 IMT will be completed to ensure skill training program at grass root level; a permanent training institute for trainers will be set up to provide the quality component of training and skill development through capacity building of trainers (GED 2015, 608); and access to training of domestic workers will be extended, and annually about 50,000 potential female migrants will be trained in line with a target to increase the share of female migrant workers from 17.86 percent in 2014 to 30 percent in 2020 (GED 2015, 609).

Despite all the initiatives, the quality assurance system in Bangladesh is at nascent stage. There are certain things on which quality is highly dependent. These are: management and administration of teaching, learning and institutes and inspection and monitoring. Quality is also further enhanced through motivating, counselling and guiding, and providing placement services to the students.

2.3 Overseas employment and remittance

Economic transformation largely depends on skilled people who can comply with different stages of economic growth. During independence, Bangladesh was an agricultural country. However, the country is undergoing structural change from agriculture to manufacturing. One major constraint of industrialization is the skill level of workers who are not suited to pursue transformation at a rapid pace. The situation is such that low skill levels amongst the labour force are consistently identified as the major impediment to economic growth of the country. The way the 7th FYP sees it, “Low skill translates to low productivity and prevents the utilization of labour potential. Sectors like the RMG (Readymade Garments), which has grown rapidly, face a shortage of skilled workers and management. Inadequate human capital will be a limiting factor towards the absorption of 2 million plus labourers each year.” (GED 2015, 601).

Remittance from overseas employment is playing a significant contribution to the economy of Bangladesh. In the fiscal year 2015-16, migrant workers sent home \$15.31 billion in remittance, the highest in the country's history, according Bangladesh Bank (The Daily Star July 03, 2015). Thus overseas employment has become a major source of income for Bangladesh. A statistic shows that every year, Bangladesh exports nearly half a million workers to the overseas market. Officially, 4,354,438 Bangladeshi workers migrated for working from 2000 to 2010 (Asian Development Bank 2015, 5). Table 3 shows the categories of the migrant workers that have migrated from Bangladesh at different periods since 1976. The table depicts an alarming picture. The percentage share of professional, skilled and semi-skilled

manpower has been declining while less skilled manpower has been increasing over the years. The 7th FYP also reports that currently about 5 million Bangladeshi people are working in different parts of the world. Among them, one-third (31%) are skilled, 14% are semi-skilled, only 2% are professional and around half (52%) are low skilled. (GED 2015, 601).

Table 3: Different categories of Bangladeshi migrant workers

Year	Professional	Skilled	Semi-skilled	Less skilled
1976-1985	6.34%	34.76%	7.35%	51.54%
1986-1995	4.72%	32.12%	20.18%	42.97%
1996-2004	3.90%	32.01%	15.19%	48.88%
2000-2010	1.50%	29.05%	12.78%	56.65%

Source: Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET)

This trend is a major hindrance for Bangladesh to unleash its potential to become one of the leading manpower exporters and possible strategic intervators that could help Bangladesh achieve USD 30 billion annual migrant remittances by 2015. To this end, Ray, Sinha, and Chaudhuri (2007) suggest, “[T]he Government of Bangladesh needs to collaborate extensively with all the stakeholders— the industry players, educational and training institutions, banking and micro-finance institutions, NGOs and a strong eclectic industry association or forum to bring forth this change... they have to spur investment in education and training, ensure decent and quality employment for the migrant Bangladeshis...that would ‘professionalize’ the system of overseas employment to enable the Bangladeshi migrants to compete in the ever-expanding and highly competitive global market. (2007, 10)”

Demand of skilled manpower is increasing worldwide with the advancement of technology. Bangladesh can earn better remittance if migrant workers are given required skill training before going abroad. It is a good sign that Bangladesh has improved her skills development system over the years, however, the capacity of country’s labour remains low compared with the quality required in the international job market. Taking advantage of this ready supply of unskilled workers, for example, Malaysian government is keen to hire 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers in the 3D (dirty, dangerous and difficult) job sectors as local people are not interested to take up these jobs (The Financial Express 2016).

3 Quality assurance in TVET

Quality assurance is not only an essential element in the development of TVET both locally and internationally, but also a high-quality TVET system can serve as the impetus to boost economic development (MacDonald, Nink and Duggan 2010). For the last few decades, quality assurance has become an increasingly important aspect of TVET planning and prac-

tice all over the world. Multilateral organizations such as the World Bank (WB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and others have placed emphasis on quality assurance. For example, UNESCO defines quality assurance as “a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfils expectations or measures up to minimum requirements” (UNESCO 2007, 16). At present, expanding and diversifying training systems is not enough; the ever-increasing demand for TVET calls for developing and implementing formal quality measures i.e., quality assessment, monitoring, and improvement.

If quality is judged by outcomes of TVET system, then qualifications are the most important dimension. It is argued that any TVET program which leads to qualifications must have some quality components imbedded in it. Over the years public expenditure to advocate TVET has increased however it does not mean better quality. Therefore, developing quality assurance mechanisms to determine benchmarks and standardize TVET has been much greater demanded from the stakeholders.

Outcome-oriented quality assurance should indeed be based on the country’s employers’ demands. A reliable labour market depends on the information, priority, occupational areas, and supply and demand curve. Innovative changes in technology increase the ability to produce better quality product and service. Market-driven demand requires collaboration and coordination with the employers. Gathering labour market information is a key responsibility of the TVET system. To this end, methods need to be developed for surveying employers. Then the training of school graduates, up-skilling of employees, attendance of students in TVET institutions and similar training organizations need to be guided based on labour market information.

It is imperative that domestic industries play a vital role in the TVET system so that training is aligned with the needs and TVET students can be integrated into their workforce.

As a part of transformation of TVET system, Quality Assurance involves re-engineering the existing system so that TVET can contribute to employment generation, increase global competitiveness, and help to achieve the status of higher middle income country as per Vision 2021. At present, it is important to pay attention to quality assurance that develops a highly trained work force which is capable of facing any national or global challenge. Thus they can meet the country's needs in the domestic and foreign job market.

4 Quality assurance of TVET in Bangladesh

The population of Bangladesh was nearly 70 million during independence and it doubled to 149.8 million in 2012 making it the 8th largest country in the world. There is a projection that population will reach 177 million in 2021 and 228 million in 2051 (GED 2013, 14). Currently, 1222 people are living per sq. km which makes Bangladesh the most densely populated nation on earth (WDI 2014). Thus, up until now, in a land of 147,570 sq. km, a large

and increasing population size has remained the major challenge. Providing basic needs such as adequate food and clothing and minimum shelter and creating opportunities such as productive employment, access to quality education, adequate social protection, health services, and a healthy environment becomes a daunting task for any government in Bangladesh. (GED 2013, 14)

Bangladesh has achieved rapid and spectacular improvements in eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary school enrolment and near to achieving universal basic education (Mahmud 2008). However, Bangladesh needs to improve quality of education, Olav Seim, director of the Education For All (EFA) International Coordination Team, UNESCO said (The Daily Star, March 25, 2010). Due to the neglect of technical and vocational education and a chronic over-supply of graduates, Bangladesh is currently facing high graduate unemployment (Asadullah, November 13, 2014). A sizable increase in working-age population has created 'Demographic Dividend' and comparative advantage for Bangladesh. However, to reap the benefits of demographic dividend, Bangladesh's challenge is to create the conditions for faster growth of productive jobs in manufacturing and in services in the formal sector (Khuda and Quibria, March 08, 2015). If Bangladesh can properly utilise its comparative advantage to produce labour intensive industrial products, foreign investment inevitably could be attracted, which can result in entrepreneurship and job creation. To this end, the quality of every educational strand must be assured. Currently, several agencies have introduced quality assurance to enhance the quality of TVET students. Specifically, National Technical & Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF); Competency Based Industry Sector Standards & Qualifications; and Bangladesh Skills Quality Assurance System have the function of ensuring quality assurance under the umbrella of the Bangladesh skills development system (GED 2015, 605). This section critically evaluates the presence of quality assurance in the current TVET policies.

4.1 TVET in development plans

Technical and vocational education (TVE) had been given a special importance for human capital formation in the first five year plan (FYP) in 1973 and subsequently in any major plan and strategy. Vision 2021 calls for transforming Bangladesh from a low income economy to the first stages of a middle-income country at a time when the country is going to celebrate 50 years of independence. It is a vision of a country in which all citizens have access to a modern TVE so that the country can meet the human resource needs as per the requirement of a technologically advancing nation (GED 2012, 10). Vision 2021 further notes that higher quality, competencies and qualifications will be the main focus while designing TVET and skills development programs so that demands in local industry and the international labour market are met. Making ICT education a compulsory subject on the primary, secondary, and tertiary level curricula is one major step towards this end (GED 2012, 83). The perspective plan 2010-2021 clarifies the initiatives to enhance the quality of TVET: (1) efficiency and quality of programs, (2) link between training and job markets, and teacher training, (3) capacity utilization of public training institutes, (4) private investment in skill development and training

and (5) encouragement of private companies to organize in-service training of labour (GED 2012, 17).

The 7th Five year plan (2016-2020), which Bangladesh government has been implementing since July 2015, raises an important issue that there are incentives for skill development and it is highly valued in the market. However, an alarming mismatch of jobs and skills, highlighted by the narrowing wage gap between skilled and unskilled workers, persists. Another issue that needs consideration is quality and content in training. To address these issues, the Plan has reiterated again the role of TVET programs for increasing the skilled labour force and suggested the modification of the structure of the existing TVET system to allow greater access so that everyone in the society including the poor can benefit from the system. To this end, the Plan also recommends that more flexible, non-formal, and variable-duration approaches need to be adopted for greater participation in skill development activities (GED 2015, 585).

In the National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) 2010-2021, three inter-related reasons are provided in support of enhancement of the quality of labour. First, to achieve full employment by 2021, knowledge, skills, and creativity of labour needs to be enhanced through training. Secondly, preparing labour with better skills so that they can contribute in diversified manufacturing and skill intensive service sectors to ensure sustainable development. Thirdly, labour needs to be skilled to send them to the overseas market (GED 2013, 81). The statistics of the Labour Force Survey 2010 shows that only 23 percent of the labour force have completed primary education and a large number of this group, about 40 percent, do not have any formal education. Only 0.1 percent of labour has any technical/vocational training. Thus the quality of the labour force in terms of formal education and training is low. (GED 2013, 81).

To assure quality, National Skill Development Council (NSDC) and National Skill Development Policy (NSDP 2011) have been implemented through a joint collaboration of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour & Employment (GED 2013, 81). NSDP seeks to ensure Bangladesh's competitiveness in the global market through improved skills, knowledge and qualifications that are recognized for quality across the globe (GED 2015, 604).

4.2 Quality assurance through National Skills Development Authority (NSDA)

Considering the situation of Bangladeshi workers discussed in the preceding sections, it is imperative for the government of a republic to seriously work for skill development before sending any worker overseas and take care of the workers in terms of their employment status. In the budget speech for FY 2015-16, the Finance Minister of Bangladesh stated that a National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) is being established to coordinate activities of 22 ministries and divisions which are involved in implementing labour skill development activities (Ministry of Finance 2015, 30). Moreover, a National Human Resource Development Fund (NHRDF), with initial funding support from the government and development partners and later on from industrial firms, is being created to ensure continuous funding for

these activities. This fund will be used by NSDA to formulate, implement and monitor training programs on a priority basis after taking into consideration the demands of domestic industries and international markets (Ministry of Finance 2015, 30).

4.3 Skills for Employment Investment Programme

A project titled “Skills for Employment Investment Programme” has been undertaken by the Finance Division aiming to enhance the skills of 1.5 million people. Different course curricula have been prepared under this program considering training needs of various industrial sub-sectors. At least 70 percent of the trainees will be employed in the relevant industries. Also, the Industry Skill Councils will be strengthened so that they can conduct labour market survey, formulate training curriculum and evaluate them. Moreover, a plan has been adopted to establish 30 Centres of Excellence (CoE) in 15 industries to impart quality training. An initiative has been taken to have the certificates awarded by this project endorsed by the ASEAN countries. To this end, to improve the standard of BTEB, a twinning program is ongoing in collaboration with Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) (Ministry of Finance 2015, 30-31).

4.4 Quality assurance through National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF)

Bangladesh has launched the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF). The new NTVQF has eight levels – two pre-vocational; four skills levels for tradesperson; a master craftsperson / supervisor level, and a diploma level (Government of Bangladesh 2009). The framework supports flexible delivery of training programs whereby individuals, based on their circumstances, can stop and start their programmes. This has enabled easier access to formal TVET for poor or disadvantaged groups. At the top end, there is a pathway for the students to study in BUET (Kashem, Chowdhury & Shears 2011). At each of the levels, learners are provided an exit point to join in the workforce and those who are already in the workforce, from time to time, may leave work to join in training programmes to further enhance their skills and qualification under the framework (Kashem, Chowdhury & Shears 2011).

The framework has been developed to expand the number of qualifications based on the growing and changing occupational and skill profiles in both domestic and international labour markets. This framework establishes a common national benchmark for the naming and achievement of qualifications excluding university degrees. The NTVQF also provides a new benchmark for the international recognition of the skills and knowledge of Bangladeshi workers (GED 2015, 605-606). This will facilitate the movement of expatriate workers to other countries and it also gives a message to prospective investors that Bangladesh has a modern TVET system and by implication a competent workforce and is a viable investment option (Government of Bangladesh 2009).

4.5 Competency based training and assessment (CBT&A)

Competency based training and assessment (CBT&A) is “supportive to introduce demand driven training, and result in the development of partnerships between industry sectors and the training organizations. CBT&A represents a shift away from traditional theory based approaches to delivery and assessment by placing greater emphasis on the achievement and demonstration of practical skills required to perform at a specified standard demanded by industry” (GED 2015, 606). The Bangladesh Skills Development Policy mandates the implementation of CBT&A system to ensure that individuals actually achieve the industry skills (Government of Bangladesh 2012, 6). CBT&A shifts training away from traditional theory based approaches to an approach to delivery and assessment that emphasises the achievement and demonstration of practical skills required to perform at a specified standard demanded by industry (Government of Bangladesh 2012, 7).

4.6 Bangladesh Skills Quality Assurance System

Bangladesh Skills Quality Assurance System aims to improve the quality of skills development in Bangladesh. The system has introduced new national quality standards to ensure nationally consistent and high quality training and assessment services for learners (GED 2015, 607). The system contains quality assurance in three levels: (a) Internal quality assurance system and evaluation by the training provider; (b) National system of external evaluation and accreditation; (c) Evaluation and accreditation of the national accreditation agency by an international association of peers according to generally accepted criteria and principles (Government of Bangladesh 2012, 7).

4.7 Full-utilization of resources

At the institutional level, the quality of education is questionable because institutions are suffering from under-utilization of resources, lack of equipment, low levels of enrolment, lack of qualified instructors, high drop-out rates, shortages of teachers’ training facilities, and a high degree of centralization (World Bank 2006, 35). The lack and under-utilization of available resources is indicative of poor distribution and management of resources. Students often cannot participate in practical training and are limited to only theoretical study due to a lack of sufficient equipment. Dhaka based over-centralized curriculum development and staff and resource management is an impediment to enhance the scope to develop TVET taking advantage of local level responsibilities and initiatives. Recently, several initiatives have been taken for the best utilization of available resources. For example, opening double shifts at the diploma-level polytechnic institutions, opportunities for laboratories at the SSC- and HSC-level schools and offering basic level courses in the diploma-granting institutions (World Bank 2006, 35). It is necessary to properly assess and ensure full-utilization of resources.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

Quality assurance can play a decisive role in modernizing TVET and improving performance and attractiveness to the population. Outputs and achievements of TVET can be recognized through quality assurance. Both the assessment of the institution and the end product graduating from the institution are included, among other things, in determining quality assurance in TVET. Emphasizing quality assurance has to be at both levels: institution and TVET graduates. The institution has to give importance to their curriculum, teacher's quality, infrastructure, training procedure, learning methods, stakeholder's desire, and market demand to survive in the competitive workforce.

Bangladesh needs to emphasise quality assurance in the TVET system in a way that is responsive to changing labour market demands, and to increase the effectiveness of TVET outcomes in improving the match between education and training demand and supply. Support from all stakeholders and a steady flow of funding are the essential components for the success of the TVET system. Hence, both the private and public sectors should collaborate to fund quality assurance mechanisms for TVET.

It is a prerequisite to establish and maintain a culture of quality among TVET practitioners, if the country desires to build an effective and efficient TVET system. To this end, all stakeholders need to understand the processes involved in quality assurance and should not accept any performance that is below the established standards.

It is evident that significant progress has been made in the establishment of a quality assurance mechanism for TVET in Bangladesh. To establish acceptable standards, there is need, however, to place more emphasis on the efforts of the national agencies and coordination to ensure uniformity across the country. It is also necessary to set up the benchmark of national standards in a way that is easily comparable with those established internationally. It would not only smooth the process when there is a skill one wants to migrate but also ensure better earnings. Thus Bangladesh can maximize the remittance received by optimizing usage of human resource through quality assurance in TVET.

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