

# Impact of Industry-Academia Collaboration on Student Satisfaction in Vocational Education and Training

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## ABSTRACT

The contemporary unstable job market is challenging the “traditional” skilling practices adopted by vocational education training (VET) institutions, in favor of demand-driven skill transfer which is characterized by preparing students industry-ready. In this light, student satisfaction plays a pivotal role in assessing the course quality that aids in efficient skill transfer. Despite the relevance of the student satisfaction concept, empirical research has provided little evidence on its predictors in VET. The purpose of the study is to shed light on the quality indicators that predict student satisfaction. Data were collected on students from industrial training institutes (ITIs) of India.

## KEYWORDS

Extracurricular Activities, Industrial Training Institutes, Industry Exposure, Program Quality Indicators, Student Satisfaction, Vocational Education Training

## INTRODUCTION

“Vocational education is a silver bullet for the youth joblessness problem.” (Eichhorst et al., 2015, p.1). Vocational education and training (VET) system empowers individuals with better-paying jobs, increased productivity and entrepreneurship skills both in developed and developing countries (Kumar et al., 2019). It is mostly accessed by students from lower socio-economic status, working-class parental background and lower educational aspirations (de Oliveira Silva et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2019) as it endows good prospects for career progression and social mobility even during the financial crisis (Webb et al., 2017). Further, parents from working-class backgrounds prefer their children to choose VET due to the ‘safety net’ promise which ensures employability (Agrawal & Agrawal, 2017; Scholten & Tieben, 2017) and a ‘decent job’. Also, VET takes a shorter time for employability compared to general education (Kumar et al., 2019). Due to its socioeconomic relevance, it is regarded as an effective instrument for producing manpower with higher technical and professional skills, as an alternative to general education for students who lack motivation and resources to choose higher education. This acts as a framework for enhancing the standard of living of unemployed individuals and groups with special needs (Eichhorst et al., 2015).

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The relevance of VET is anticipated to increase in the next few years.

For example, the Indian government launched exhaustive reforms for improving the quality of VET to combat the impending skill requirements. India is facing a skill requirement of 300 million workforce requirement by 2022, of which 199 million youth has to receive formal VET to cater to the skill demand (Mehrotra, 2014). To combat the skill crisis, the Government has upgraded Government Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) through public-private partnership (PPP), where each ITI was headed by an Institute Management Committee (IMC) constituted by the industry partner as a society. ITIs in India are the major drivers of formal VET. The up-gradation of ITIs is set to take place for ten years from 2007-2008 to 2017-2018. The aim behind the initiative is to revamp ITIs by curbing the negative social perception associated with VET. As part of this, skills transfer is driven by the job market, where the industry partner plays an active role in collaborating with the institute. Organizing extracurricular activities like skill competitions and improving networking are the salient features of this initiative. Further, this initiative is anticipated to attract potential candidates into ITI and increase the retention rate. VET in India is principally accessed by students from low income and working-class families (Kumar et al., 2019) who in many cases receive a monthly stipend. Moreover, stipulated percent of seats were reserved for female participants and other minority classes (Neroorkar & Gopinath, 2019). Students who are unable to continue their education after schooling and minority sections are encouraged to participate. Therefore, VET is aimed at both the economic and social inclusion of the disadvantaged sections of the society.

Besides, despite the importance given to the VET, the student dropout rate is high in developed as well as developing countries (Cerdeña-Navarro et al., 2017). For example, ITIs in India are plagued by high dropout rates (Neroorkar & Gopinath, 2019). Although student persistence in VET is influenced by various factors (e.g., monetary reasons, personal hardships) (de Oliveira Silva et al., 2020), student satisfaction is one of the vital factors that influence student persistence (Schreiner & Nelson, 2013). Persistence in the course has a positive impact on a student's employability (Neroorkar & Gopinath, 2019). Student satisfaction is recognized as a driver of educational institute performance (Santini et al., 2017). Student satisfaction ratings are beneficial for student feedback on the course. Burnett and Clarke (1999) in guidelines on evaluating vocational education emphasized the course evaluation process helps in assessing the overall quality of the institute, in which student feedback plays a critical role in assessing the educational quality. Giese and Cote (2002) and Ward and National Centre for Vocational Education Research (Australia) (2008) elucidated student satisfaction as a final state achieved, following the evaluation of services offered. The satisfaction ratings help in maintaining the quality of VET for improving the productivity and employability of the youth (Agrawal & Agrawal, 2017; Pilz & Kumar, 2016a). The rewards of satisfaction encompass positive word of mouth, better student retention and the possibility of endorsing the institute to others (Ibrahim et al., 2014; Parker, 2008).

A rich body of empirical literature has proposed student satisfaction models in higher education contexts (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998; Abdullah, 2006; Elliot & Healy, 2001; Oldfield & Baron, 2000; Parasuraman et al., 1991; Senthilkumar & Arulraj, 2011). Although the concept of vocational education is introduced in the 1920s (Rai, 1920), scholars have highlighted the scarcity of empirical research on the evaluation of vocational education courses (Burnett et al., 1998; McGraw & Peoples, 1996) and student satisfaction (de Oliveira Silva et al., 2020) in specific. To close this gap, a few recent studies (de Oliveira Silva et al., 2020) have started to investigate the determinants and outcomes of student satisfaction, for instance, the role of impact of service quality indicators, learning outcomes, perceived employability, value and image as antecedents and loyalty as an outcome variable. These contributions have highlighted the role of perceived employability and learning outcomes in determining student satisfaction. Similarly in this paper, we focus on the role of the industry - academy collaboration and extracurricular activities as predictors of student satisfaction.

Industry – academy collaboration is defined as a process where corporations collaborate with colleges to offer training programs to students, thereby educating the students with required skills

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