

UNESCO's role in TVET development

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TVET teaches knowledge, skills and mindsets designed to make learners more productive in *designated* occupational tasks, occupations or broader clusters of occupations. These are its distinct characteristics. In addition, TVET will often have other aims and concerns that it shares with general education. This is especially true for TVET in schools or other courses of long duration. General education is of course also important both as a foundation for TVET and for occupational productivity.

Many governments in economically less developed countries now express needs for more agency support for the development of TVET. How such UNESCO respond to such expressed needs?

In addressing the question of how best to respond to these needs, UNESCO should take account of characteristics of TVET. It should also take account of constraints on what UNESCO can achieve as compared to other agencies.

Some characteristics of TVET

- The ultimate measure of TVET success is its impact on productivity as compared to the cost incurred in achieving it—not merely “what is learned”.
- TVET typically has high unit costs and complex resourcing requirements (staff, facilities, equipment, consumables) compared to much of general education in schools.
- The main governmental counterparts to UNESCO are ministries of education (MoEs). But MoEs are not invariably “lead providers” of institutional TVET, and within an MoEs, the focus is rarely on TVET (in terms of priorities for scarce human and financial resources) but often on primary, secondary and higher education.
- Other Ministries are also involved in TVET; private institutional providers are often important (proprietary, foundations, NGOs), and target groups for TVET are much wider than those enrolled in the formal education system headed by MoE.
- Much TVET is employment based, with varying degrees of institutionalization, ranging from informal learning on the job to company based training systems.
- Some TVET is partly based in education and training institutions and partly in the workplace (e.g., dual systems, traineeships).

- Some countries have national training authorities and associated “training funds” which considerable autonomy from ministerial bureaucracies. Often they are accountable to boards in which employers are strongly represented.
- The target groups of TVET policies include persons who have been at work for some time or who long have been looking for work, not those only coming straight from school or who are still in school.

If UNESCO is to be a source of general policy advice on TVET, it will need to

- *look beyond its traditional concern with the public, formal “mainstream” education system under MoE,*
- *look beyond its traditional focus on children and youth of ‘school age’*
- *engage not only with ministries of education, but also with other public and private entities, e.g., ministries of labour, national training authorities, industries and firms, NGOs and other private institutional providers.*
- *show capacity for analysis of cost and for assessing the impact of TVET in the labour market.*

If the scope TVET is too broad for UNESCO’s remit, UNESCO should specialize its contribution on a particular niche within the larger world of TVET policies and provisions, and focus its own capacity development on that niche.

Constraints upon UNESCO’s capacity

- My hunch is that agencies which themselves are a major source of finance for TVET, are in a better position than UNESCO to offer advice inside the policy development process. A financing role for TVET is both a pressure and an incentive for developing TVET expertise because a financing agency must share responsibility for what is achieved and at what cost. A financing role also puts an agency inside a dialogue on development and implementation of policy. Some development banks have considerable experience in assisting TVET and have considerable in-house expertise and professional networks that they draw upon for consultancies.
- There are bilateral agencies with much experience from assisting TVET. For example, the Germans and the Swiss have kept up support to TVET through the thick and thin of agency aid flows.
- Agency engagement with TVET over a long period is an advantage in developing credible expertise. ILO has such experience focused on provisions under Ministries of Labour.

UNESCO should not “go it alone” with regard to general TVET policy advice. If UNESCO is to become a major source of advice on TVET policy development and implementation, it will need to recruit highly competent staff with international experience from development of TVET and from analysis of TVET policy. A challenge is to achieve such capacity development without itself being a source of finance.

UNESCO should build on what has been achieved at IIEP and UNEVOC, and collaborate with other and more TVET-experienced multilateral and bilateral agencies. Within the larger field of TVET, it should look for niches in which it can usefully complement what others may be in a better position to do.

Generating and sharing policy relevant knowledge on TVET

As could be expected from a university based academic, I perceive a need for more research on TVET (especially work that collects new primary data), better institutional mechanisms for knowledge development, better links between research and decision making, and better international sharing of knowledge and experience.

I have elsewhere recently argued the case for applied research on a number of TVET policy themes.¹ One can extend this case to also include country reviews of TVET carried out in collaboration between national authorities and external teams of reviewers, and one can argue a case for study tours by national teams undertaking TVET policy development. In particular, there are some recent policy trends whose strengths and weaknesses have been insufficiently followed up and analyzed. I have these in mind:

- national training authorities,
- national training funds,
- national qualifications frameworks,
- increased decentralisation of decision making to training institutions, and how to enable local boards and managers makers to cope with added complexity when such decentralisation occurs;
- diversification of financing (e.g., introducing fees, selling courses to institutional buyers),
- encouragement of private provisions (voucher schemes, enabling private providers to apply for finance from national training funds),
- incentives to industry to train more (e.g, tax rebates), and
- modularization of curricula.

Other themes are:

- performance indicators (including especially: cost analysis, what is learned in TVET, and the labour market impact of what is learned)
- labour market monitoring and forecasting (experience with different modes),
- human resource development (how to recruit, train and keep good teachers and managers),
- attempts to introduce dual systems of TVET (Under what conditions might large scale implementation be achievable?),
- vocationalized secondary education (in which TVET is but a minor part of a student's curriculum time),
- TVET for semi-literate and illiterate learners (e.g., how to stimulate replication of schemes that seem to work well), and
- keeping abreast of technology (especially ICT).

On themes mentioned above, there is often a flurry of review activity at the time when reforms of TVET are pending, but without much recourse to analysis of new primary data. Once decisions have been made on policy change, there is little incentive for national authorities and for the external agencies involved, to share with others the experience they

¹ I develop the argument further in J. Lauglo "Research for TVET Policy Development". Chapter in R. Maclean and D. Wilson (2009) (ed.) International Handbook of Education for the Changing World of Work. Dordrecht: Springer 2009. The paper is previously available as a booklet from the German agency InWent (initiated by its Magdeburg office)

make. There is a need for studies that make more use of new primary data than what is possible in the rush of a review of TVET. However, “availability” is not enough for findings to be used. Neither will a developed research field “speak with one voice”. Interpretations are often contentious, and prevailing diagnoses can change over time. Direct contact is needed between, on the one hand, persons engaged in research activity and on the other hand, persons inside the process of policy making and planning of TVET.

There is a need for mechanisms for stimulating more policy relevant long term research on TVET, and for building links between processes of knowledge generation and decision making.

UNESCO might consider how it could best assist in :

- *stimulating long-term generation of research on TVET policy issues,*
- *improving international sharing of findings from research on TVET,*
- *enabling decision makers considering reform of TVET, to access relevant experience in other countries (e.g., study tours abroad, national TVET reviews by teams of invited experts).*

Trying to cover the whole range of TVET themes would be a recipe for superficiality. UNESCO should proceed in a deliberately select way and build on what it already has been achieved, at IIEP and UNEVOC. IIEP provides an example of how research and review work on education can be usefully combined with training of educational planners. One possible strategy to consider for UNESCO, might be to strengthen the TVET aspect of IIEP's activities?