

International Symposium on Lifelong Learning 2011

Panel Session 3 – Skills Development for Employability (TVET)
and Lifelong Learning

Keynote Presentation by Prof. Kenneth KING

Skills Development and Lifelong Learning.

Challenges for Poverty Reduction, Sustainable Growth and Employability

Abstract

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In this Symposium it will be more important to reflect on the relationship between skills development and lifelong learning than on TVET and lifelong learning. The background concept paper for the Symposium (Power and Maclean, 2010) looks at the relationships between all the different levels of formal and non-formal education in their connections with lifelong learning. TVET is included of course in these different subsectors. Here, however, our concern is with skills development both in formal education and training systems, as well as in the multitude of non-formal and even informal systems of learning. In a Symposium that is concerned with the role of skills in poverty reduction as well as in sustainable growth it is important to recognise that the poor don't easily access formal TVET systems; they have to rely on less formal pathways to skills development, including acquiring skills through work itself, including casual and exploitative work, with few formal opportunities for learning in the workplace.

Nevertheless, the basic assumption of the Symposium is that the crucial approaches to lifelong learning can and must be encouraged throughout all forms of learning. These foundational approaches include 'learning for self-reliance' (Roy, 2008: 7), 'helping people help themselves' (Ellerman, 2005), and 'learning to learn'. 'Learning to learn' is at the very core of lifelong learning. Creating the desire to continue to learn is central to successful education and training systems, but too often this desire or this love of learning are actually killed by education systems with their classifications and assumptions of failure (Avalos, 1986). Research shows that it only takes a single teacher, who believes in children's capacity, for this learning to learn to be kindled and burn throughout life. Equally, education systems where teachers routinely expect their pupils or students to excel are dramatically more effective than systems where teaching is predicated on the majority failing.

In too many countries still, it is assumed that children entering TVET schools or TVET streams have in some sense failed academically. There is therefore a challenge to our

core values of lifelong learning, just mentioned, at the very heart of many TVET systems. A crucial dimension of associating formal TVET with lifelong learning must be to open up horizontal and vertical pathways to further and higher education for those channelled into TVET streams and institutions. Only in this way can the so-called 'dead-end' status of TVET be effectively refuted (Adams, 2010: 14).

For the much large number of young people acquiring their skills through informal apprenticeship or through learning on the job in the workplace, in the majority of developing countries, there will be parallel reforms required if the minimum essential learning needs associated with their current work are to be given a truly lifelong learning focus.

In this paper, there will first be a conceptual clarification of the relations amongst TVET, skills development and lifelong learning, following on what has been said above.

There will then be a review of some of the evidence on the connections amongst TVET, skills development and poverty reduction. This will need to pay particular attention to the role of lifelong learning in facilitating these linkages, and to the role of reforms in such processes.

Equally, it will be vital to review the relations amongst TVET, skills development and sustainable growth, and particularly pro-poor growth. While it may be tempting to point to the strong utilisation of skills in economies which are producing a healthy demand for jobs, it will also be important to assess the links between skills and growth where there is not an enabling macro-economic environment. In both situations, it will be important to assess the role of a lifelong learning approach.

Finally, TVET and skills development are widely associated in both popular and policy discourse with employability, if not actual employment and work. Here it will be vital to distinguish skills acquisition from skills utilisation, and to review whether lifelong learning approaches to skills acquisition and utilisation can be productive.

Running throughout this discussion will be the importance of what existing research has to say on these inter-relations, and what further research may be most suggestive. But it seems possible that it is precisely in the rapidly growing economies of Asia, with some of their dramatic successes in poverty reduction, that some of the answers to these questions may be found.

References

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