Levelling the playing field: vocational education as a prestigious pathway

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SKOPE

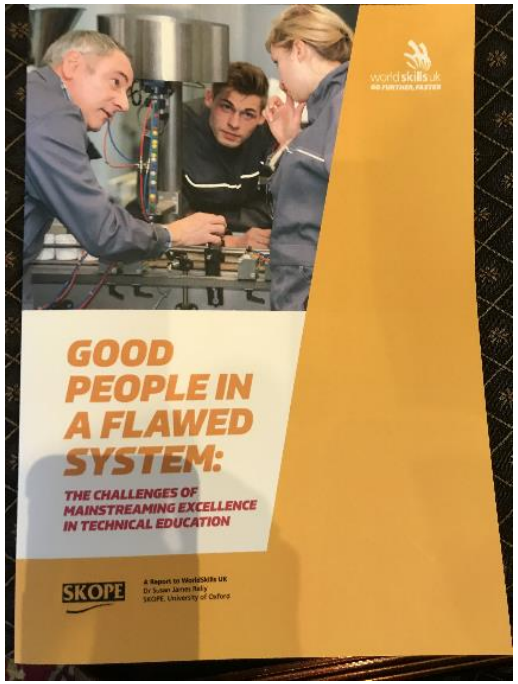
EDGE FOUNDATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Research question

- How do other countries, with interesting or pioneering technical education systems, develop the skills of their technical education workforce to ensure high quality teaching standards?



The research team

The research was completed through a collaboration between the Oxford University Centre for Skill, Knowledge and Organisational Performance (SKOPE) and The Edge Foundation. Over the last two decades, SKOPE has become established as a world leading research centre in the field of vocational education and training systems, skills formation, and the intersection between education and work. The Edge Foundation is an independent education charity that is specialising in researching effective practice and influencing VET policy. Edge has been promoting high quality vocational education and training and has a particular interest in apprenticeships at all levels and skills development. **Both institutions believe that skills break down barriers!**

Name	Role	Responsibility
Dr Susan James Relly	Principal Investigator (PI)	Project Management; all aspects of research process
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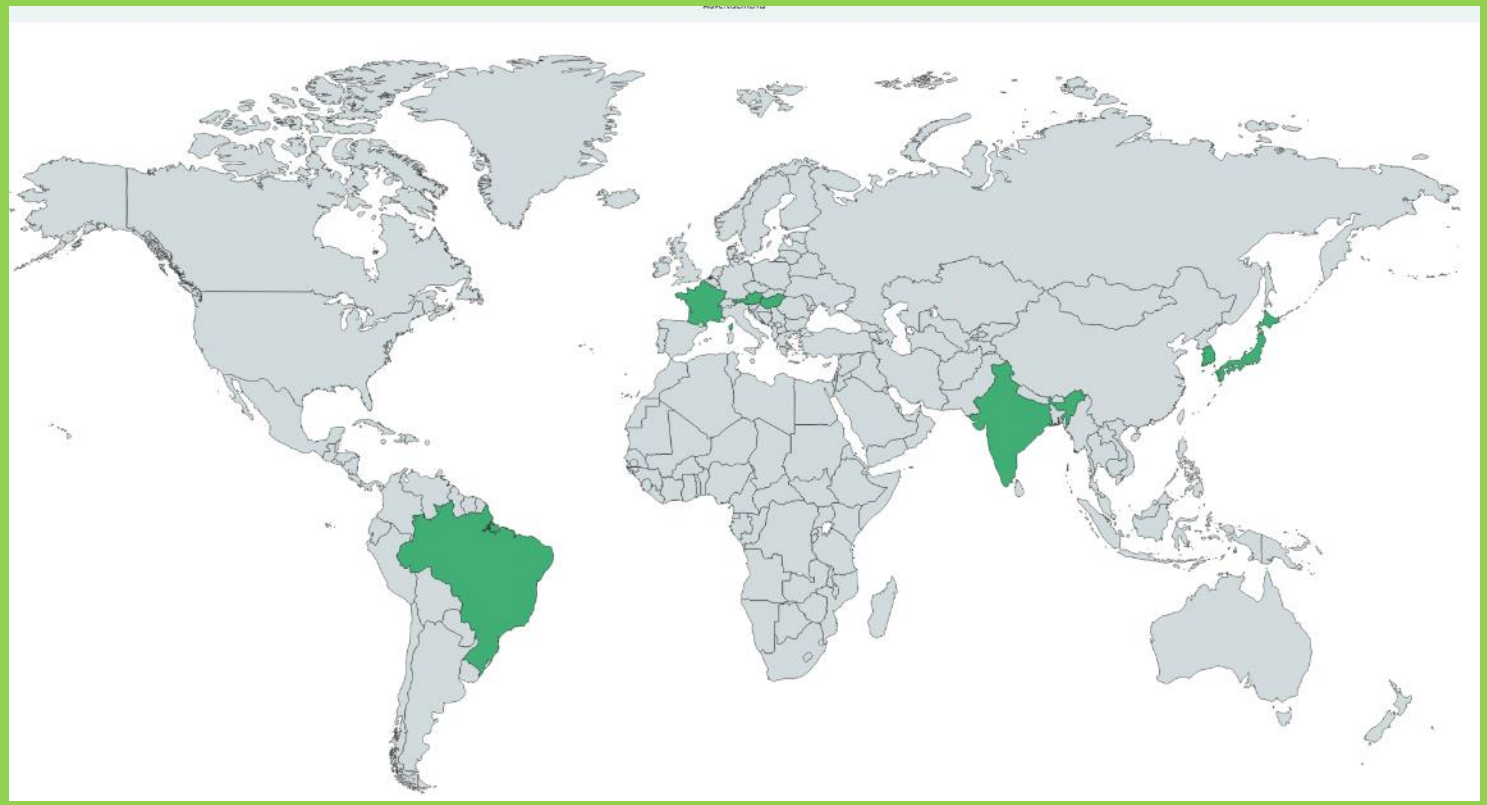
Seven countries



Austria
Brazil
France
Hungary
India
Japan
South Korea

Methods

Approach

Our first step was desk-based research to inform the literature review and country case studies. This included academic literature on the education and training systems of the selected case countries, policy literature pertaining to those countries, other grey literature, and the gathering of secondary data to understand the technical education systems in those countries. We understood the importance of developing an interview instrument that ensured analytic comparison of data across countries where different languages are spoken. To that end, our approach will use back translation that will involve the following steps:

1. Develop the interview schedule based on the literature review;
2. Conduct a pilot to test interview schedule;
3. Translate the schedules from English by our research assistants into each of the seven languages (Portuguese; South Korean; German; Hungarian; Hindi, French; and Japanese).
4. Translate the schedule back to English by a native speaker, other than the translator, to ensure consistency; and finally,
5. Conduct the interviews.

Methods

Sample

Building on our own networks and the introductions from WorldSkills UK to key members of the skill development communities in our case study countries, we adopted a snowball sampling methodology to ensure we include a minimum of 8-10 interviews with a wide range of stakeholders including but not necessarily limited to:

- Policymakers;
- Further education (or equivalent) representative;
- WorldSkills Training Manager;
- Awarding Body (or equivalent) representative;
- Those involved in E&T workforce training and CPD; and
- Teachers and trainers in the TVET system of that country.

	Austria	Brazil	France	Hungary	India	Japan	South Korea
WS delegate	1	3	1	3	1	1	1
Teacher	1	3	1	1	2	4	2
Policy maker	2	2	1	1	6	2	2
Student			1				
Training supervisor in company	5		1			1	
CPD Manager			1				
Chambers of Commerce				1			
TVET expert, policy advisor				2			
Observation of CPD event				6 hours			
Total interviews	9	8	6	11	9	8	5

Findings – Austria

- Austria have over 95% SMEs
- 70% in dual apprenticeship route
- 30% in school post-15 years
- High quality TVET courses, which have esteem
- 84% of non-tertiary graduates aged 25-34 employed

- Around 70% of Austrian students are in vocational school, which is far higher than the OECD average of 46% (OECD, 2017).
- The long tradition of TVET, the high levels of participation, and the high-quality of TVET courses can help to explain the high rates of employment for post-secondary non-tertiary graduates aged 25-34, 84% of which are employed compared to the OECD average of 76% (OECD, 2017).
- However, the image of apprenticeships in Austria is generally regarded with lower prestige than the academic (and university) route.
- This perception seems to have changed in the last decades: 50 years ago an apprenticeship was considered a real achievement and well-regarded qualification, now this is less so; more recently teachers tended to talk negatively about apprenticeships.
- It is still clear though that in Austria, an important part of a company's ethos is the tradition of training young people, and companies tend to have a well-structured system for doing this.

Findings – Brazil

- 11.5% TVET in high school
- 10.8% TVET post-high school level
- 7.6% post-high school level short cycle education
- TVET very much aligned to business needs

- Despite the fact that a small percentage of students follow the vocational route, all interviewees considered TVET to have a central role in the educational system.
- Vocational courses were designed according to the needs of business, therefore students will enter the job market with the skills that business is looking for.
- TVET students were described as being advantaged in comparison to students who complete high school because they will have gained a professional identity through their TVET courses allowing a quick entrance into the job market
- WS representatives and teachers who were interviewed also stressed that students who completed vocational courses and were competitors received incredible job opportunities, some were invited to teach vocational courses, others were invited to work abroad or to continue to be involved at the WS as subject experts.

Findings – France

- 24% of 15–19 year-olds on vocational pathways
- 6% on courses combining work and study
- Apprenticeships increasing

- Upper secondary school (15) students choose between three-year general or technological Baccalaureate or vocational track.
- Baccaluareate leads to university regardless of general or technological
- Variety of different vocational lycées, prepares students for either a two-year professional skills certificate (Vocational Aptitude Certificate (certificat d'aptitude professionnelle, CAP) or a three-year Vocational Baccalaureate.
- Apprenticeships in higher education account for 75% of (an increase in apprenticeship enrolment) increase, and these programmes now represent over 40% of all apprenticeships (OECD 2016).
- There remains a value-based distinction between the academic and technological Baccalaureate – *the intellectuels* – and the vocational tracks – *the manuels* – or those who work with their hands.
- Within the French education system, as in many others around the world, there was an assumption that the academic pathway is the gold standard.
- However, 2018 reforms were seen as having a positive impact on the value placed on vocational pathways. Although this had been affected by COVID-19 and the damage done to the economy, these policy changes appeared to be having a notable impact on both the numbers of apprentices/ vocational students and the training structures and resourcing.

Findings – Hungary

- Hungary have over 95% SMEs
- Change in govt has resulted in radical changes for TVET
- TVET participation rate at 23%

- In Hungary participation in TVET is low; 77% of learners at upper secondary level choose non-vocational education. In Europe the average in TVET is 48% as opposed to 23% in Hungary.
- The government has introduced measures to encourage more young people to do TVET; they introduced a scholarship system to encourage young people to enter TVET and financial incentives for employers to take on apprentices. This is particularly visible in the three-year vocational schools (not leading to 'Matura' examination) where numbers gradually declined between 2010 and 2018 by almost 50% (Ministry of Human Resources, 2020).
- The newly introduced 'technikums' which offer direct entrance to HE without an entrance examination and the two-year academic programme could positively impact parents' views; the prestige of TVET is gradually getting better.
- Parents would like their children to get high qualifications quickly and easily, preferably through higher education.
- The attitude of parents towards TVET was a challenge. Parents value education but often see university studies (higher education) as an ultimate aim. Young people often do not make their own decisions as they were 14 and 15 year olds. Instead, parents have great influence on the direction they take based on the information available to them, often locally.

Findings – India

- E&T system one of the largest in the world
- 1.5 million schools
- 8.5 million teachers
- 250 million children
- TVEWT participation just under 3%
- TVET largely focused on delivery post-lower secondary school level
- 36 SSCs set up in recent policy changes

- TVET has been and continues to be 'inextricably linked to jobs and wages in the minds of both students and parents' (Chandran Wadia and Dabir, 2020, p.81), which means that until there is significant change in the employment opportunities provided to students after they complete their skill training, negative perceptions of TVET and its opportunities will continue to persist.
- Skilling is not considered an aspirational route by parents and students alike, with multiple initiatives having been rolled out by the government of India to try and make vocational education more mainstream at both the secondary and higher education levels.
- One of the ways that policymakers sought to challenge the low aspirational feel of TVET was to make skills related learning more accessible and part of mainstream education. All the interviewees were incredibly positive of the reforms that were outlined in the NEP in 2020, which attempted to move the approach to TVET to a more integrated manner.
- The admissions criteria for higher education institutions are still quite stringent and so do not recognise vocational qualifications to the same degree as the more academic qualifications, leading to a lack of 'vertical mobility for students from the vocational education stream' (MHRD,2020, p. 44).
- Although attempts were made to address this with the implementation of the NSQF in 2013, this was something that the NEP hoped to change. Until changes like this come into effect, significant work remains to be done to demonstrate to the general public that taking a course in the skilling ecosystem can lead to a job that provides a decent salary and can have respect in society.

Findings – Japan

- Strong traditional cultural norms for education
- 23% young people enrolled in TVET
- TVET at upper-secondary and tertiary (post-18 education:
  - Specialised training colleges age 15
  - Kosen – Colleges of Technology (5 years). Very highly regarded.
  - Tanki Daidaku – junior colleges offering 2-year TVET prgorammes post-18
  - Professional schools – 2 or 4-year programmes

- Despite high enrolment in education post-15 in Japan, those following vocational streams at this age are considerably lower than international averages; only 23% of upper secondary students are enrolled in vocational education, compared with the OECD average of 44% (OECD, 2018).
- Parents traditionally place a higher emphasis on traditional academic education rather than vocational education. Vocational school remains a backup option for students with lower grades or those who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The culture in Japan is one that places high emphasis on academic education and educational success in general.
- Vocational schools have been successful in attracting secondary school graduates with lower grades but also university graduates who were not able to secure employment upon graduation and return to school to do a TVET qualification (Tsukamoto, 2016).
- Low reputation and recognition of TVET was a theme that was prevalent among all interview participants. All teachers are acutely aware that TVET is less valued compared to the academic pathways. A policy maker claims that this is in part because people in general hold uninformed and unfair views on TVET.
- Due to more recent changes in industry (such as increases in technology and digitalisation), and consequently in the skills required for work, TVET institutions, especially the specialised courses at professional training colleges (“senmon gakko”) have been gaining in popularity. Enrolments in these TVET institutions and courses are now growing after a period of continuous decline (Tsukamoto, 2016).
- Apparent lack of parity of esteem between manual and non-manual routes within TVET. A policy maker emphasised that vocational education is often historically associated with being *‘dirty, manual, relentless, and rough’*, but highlights, in reality there were in fact a huge range of new emergent categories of vocational education (he describes this emerging type as “follow-your-dream” type, “Yumeoi Kei” in Japanese).

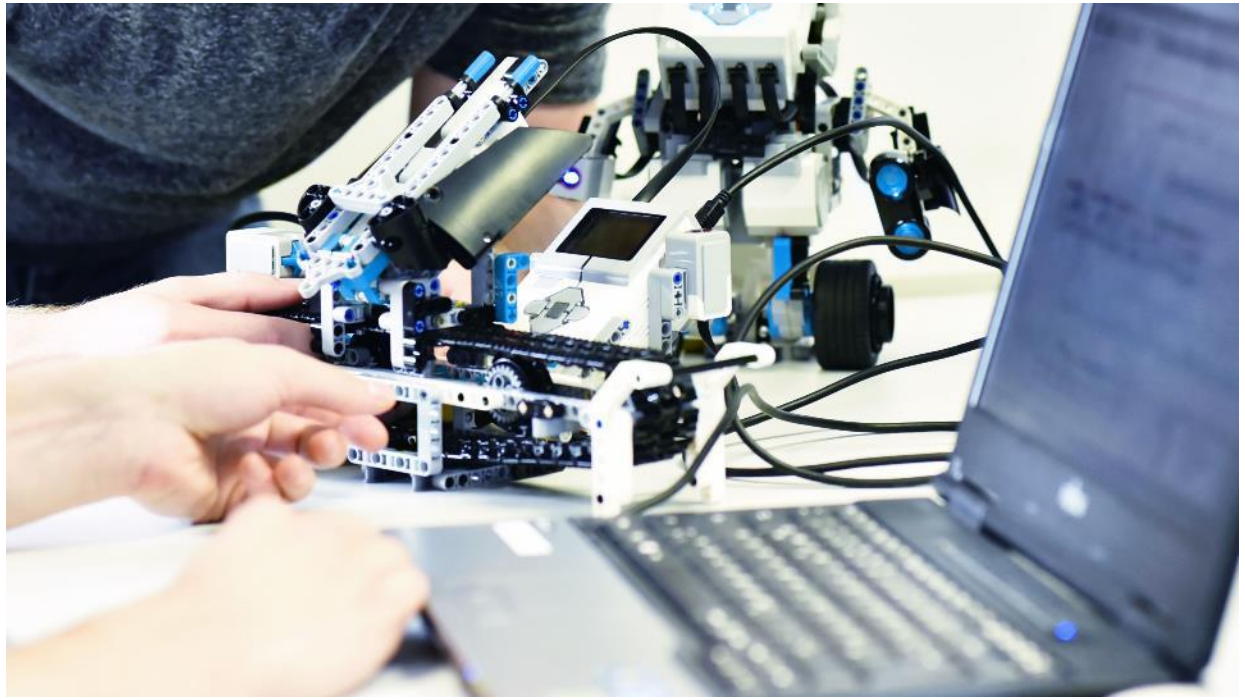
Findings – South Korea

- 20% of students attend vocational high schools
- Vocational education (theoretical) falls under Ministry of Education and vocational training (developing technical skills, practical) is under Ministry of Employment and Labor

- There has been an overemphasis on university education, and a shift away from vocational education, with TVET considered a low and undesirable path for students.
- This negative perception of TVET caused local governments to have less funding available for TVET training and education programmes, with more money being made available for the more academic pathways.
- Clear purpose of TVET is the education-industry connection, strong academic preference weakens this connection by making students in TVET prefer degrees, and certificates that are far from the skills needed in the industry.
- With the increasing negative perceptions of TVET, both policymakers and educators were keen to point out that fewer and fewer students were opting for training to have careers in, for example, masonry or plastering which has meant that there has been a decrease in student participation in certain skills for the WorldSkills competition as well.

Findings

The distinctiveness of the countries was apparent; yet, they faced similar challenges in terms of low prestige, the ability to manoeuvre through up-to-date industry and technological knowledge, and aligning with the economic purpose of TVET to name a few. Each country provides important lessons in terms of policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012).



Conclusions

- Policymakers, teachers, employers, and other stakeholders were providing ways and means to promote the vocational route (Chankseliani and James, 2016).
- A tension was evident in the social and familial influence on student choice around TVET.
- This tension was high across all countries and needs to be taken into account for the positive development of TVET.
- The stereotype of students being less academic was dominant across all of the countries. In Austria, a common typecast of a vocational-school student was that they were worse at subjects like German and English, but good or average at maths.
- Likewise there was also a trend for more young people with an immigrant background to do vocational training.
- The perception that TVET was a second-class route was evident and was often perpetuated by the fact that students who struggled at school or were disruptive were pushed into vocational courses and apprenticeships.

While most countries have given more prominence to HE over recent decades they are all starting to see the importance of skills and have been developing policy accordingly, especially using WorldSkills as a driver for change of perceptions. This work needs to continue to include parents so that they too can see the value in the vocational route.

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