



Importance and Challenges of TVET Policy Issue in Kurdistan Region-Iraq

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Abstract

This paper explores the significance of TVET policy issue and the challenges facing design and implementation of this policy in Kurdistan Region. There are two ministries concerned with education in Kurdistan region. The ministries are Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Research. This research paper provides a background of the setting, the issue, and the main concepts. Data was gathered from 22 policymakers and policy implementers. Data was then analyzed through grounded-theory method of analysis. After coding through NVivo, five main concepts emerged. The main finding of the study is that TVET is lagging in Kurdistan.

Keywords: TVET, Policy Issue, Policy Implementation, Grounded-theory, Codes, Concepts.

1. Introduction

The policy issue explored in this paper is the improvement of vocational and technical education for skilled labor supply for industries; but the dilemma, however, is that vocational and technical education (VTE) in Kurdistan is under-developed and not popular. It seems that there is a lack of rational realization that the value of a well-focused and modern vocational and technical education (VTE) program for Kurdistan may be very high, as it seeks to diversify into agriculture, industry, and tourism. This is because there is a direct link between a successful investment strategy and a successful skills supply system that is responsive to market demand for skills in the labor force. The major reason for the under-development of VTE is this: limited recognition by the government of the importance of VTE to effective economic development and poverty eradication, causing reluctance of potential students to enroll in VTE programs and chose a technical career in private sector—as opposed to an academic career or public employment (Ministry of Planning of Kurdistan Regional Government, 2012).

In 2003, there was only one Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) Centre in the Kurdistan Region, located in Erbil, and in 2010 there were three main Vocational and Technical Education Centers (VTEC), combined with Employment Centers under the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) – in Erbil, Dohuk, and Sulaymaniyah. However, because of a shortage of operating budget none of these centers is able to offer training.

The government's poor recognition of vocational and technical schooling system has led to a dire consequence: the enrolment in VTE is dropping, despite increasing numbers of schools and teachers, and budget for this area of education has not increased. Consequently, the Kurdistan society considers VTE is a low status education, and therefore youth tend to be discouraged from taking up VTE. The number of students enrolled in vocational secondary education gradually declined from 7,744 in the academic year 2003-2004 to 6,307 in the academic year 2009-2010 in spite of the increase in the number of vocational schools by 10%.



During the same period, the number of teachers increased by 46% from 861 to 1,255, which led to a decrease in the average number of students per teacher from nine to five. Several schools were idling even though teachers were present because of no budget for school operation. Supplying at least part of the labor required by new investments is one of the benefits and importing labor for these new ventures defeats the purpose (Ministry of Planning of Kurdistan Regional Government, 2012).

The aim of this paper is to explore TVET policy issue, its importance, and challenges for its design and implementation in Kurdistan. This research paper also aims at providing an overview of policymaking process and implementation. Moreover, it is hoped the findings and recommendations of this paper can be of benefit to the Kurdistan Region Government and other developing countries.

2. Problem Statement of the Study

The research problem in this paper is the mediocre situation of vocational and technical education (VTE) in Kurdistan which causes the serious shortage of skilled technical level workers necessary for many kinds of industries and businesses. This is a national crisis, and as mentioned before, this problem arises because of the Ministry of Education's poor attitude and disregard towards the importance of VTE for economic development in the past decades. The government's poor attitude and low disregard has triggered a similar attitude among youth and parents in the society. Thus, the government should launch a corrective measure using the mass media and social media about the good prospects in the business sector for the VTE graduates. Simultaneously, the government should build more VTE colleges to accommodate the new corrective interest. This study explores the views of education officials on the importance and means of revitalizing VTE and the views and readiness of secondary school students in joining VTE in Kurdistan. Also, this study investigates the feasibility of implementing a streaming policy—an intervention policy—to automatically channel the secondary school students into the VTE stream, i.e. selecting students who are interested to work in industries or to be entrepreneurs in the future.

3. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

3.1. The Policy Making Process

Hussin (2002) defines policy as a decision on governance made by either government agencies or private organizations for certain purposes such as pursuing development of society, addressing certain critical issues, maintaining the progress and sustainability of organizations, enhancing the welfare of people, regulating the discipline of people, or allocating resources and benefits to the people. For the issue of a government, the decision is usually called public policy, which can be in the form of directives by various executive bodies, or laws passed by the law-making institutions, or general orders by the top-most leader. Public policy is a choice made by governments to undertake some course of actions, including do nothing or maintaining the status quo, in the interest of public welfare and well-being (Howlett and Ramesh, 2003). According to Matland (1995, p. 154), policy means “the programmatic activities formulated in response to an authority's decision”. These activities include the programs and plans initiated by policy makers to implement the aspirations expressed by legitimating institutions. These institutions can be a government, a judicial agent, or an executive body. Hill and Hupe (2002) explained policy as an action taken or practiced by the government or leader considered to be beneficial or advantageous to the nation. According to this perspective, policy is a set of decisions taken by the top authority for a certain purpose. Hussin (2007) explained this purpose as “initiating a change of a situation or change of behaviors in the interest of welfare, order, development, and prosperity of a government or an organization” (p. 19).

3.2. Policy Implementation Process

Policies “have their own life cycle” (Hussin, 2007, p. 19), generally consisting of three major phases: formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Formulation of public policies varies



from government to government, some adopting the democratic participation of interest groups, while some others adopt the elite top-down approach in which top-level leaders or executives are in charge of formulating policies. In governments, the bureaucratic agencies of various types and levels are largely responsible for implementing policies formulated, and thus in this case, total comprehension of policy intent and content is critical for implementation. Policy implementation, according to O'Toole (2000), is "what develops between the establishment of an apparent intention on the part of government to do something, or stop doing something, and the ultimate impact in the world of action" (p. 266). Gerston (2004) holds that implementation is a "follow-through" component of the policy making process, and "represents the conscious conversion of policy plans into reality" (p. 94). Often times policies are not well-implemented due to poor understanding or misinterpretation of policy objectives and strategies, apart from constraints of resources and expertise.

Mazmanian and Sabatier (as cited in Hill & Hupe, 2002) describe implementation as "the process of carrying out policy decisions incorporated in a statute in the form of executive orders or court decisions" (p. 7). They further elaborate by pointing out that implementation begins with passing of an act, followed by decisions of implementation agencies, the compliance of target groups, the policy consequences, both intended and unintended (of those decisions or outputs), the perceived consequences of agency decisions, and evaluation of the policy.

3.3. Previous Research

In Kurdistan, the education area often neglected is technical and vocational education and training (TVET), probably because of the low status of this kind of education and its graduates in the eyes of Kurdistan society. This social attitude must change because TVET is critical for supplying the required human resources for industrial and business development of Kurdistan. This attitude has prevailed in Malaysia before, but now it is becoming better whereby the Malaysian government has constantly emphasized its importance and has expanded the number of vocational and community colleges all over Malaysia (Nor Hayati Ramlan, 2017). In her study, Nor Hayati Ramlan attempted to construct a competency model for TVET lecturers in Malaysia, and she found the four main critical competency categories were General Professional Competency, Generic Skill Competency, Specific Technical Competency, and Specific Pedagogical Competency. These four critical TVET competency categories had their own sub-categories as follows:

General Professional Competency

- i. Professional ethics
- ii. Personality and character
- iii. Potentials
- iv. Professional learning practices

Generic Skill Competency

- i. Communication skill
- ii. Teamwork skill
- iii. Problem solving skill
- iv. Interpersonal skill
- v. Entrepreneurial skill
- vi. Management skill
- vii. ICT skill

Technical Skill Competency

- i. General introductory skill (of one of the 25 technical areas)
- ii. Safety
- iii. Equipment and tools
- iv. Technical design



- v. Technical curriculum content (of a technical area)
- vi. Maintenance
- vii. Management and general accounting
- viii. Certification

Pedagogical Competency

- i. Instructional planning
- ii. Instructional process and methods
- iii. Evaluation and grading

Nor Hayati Ramlan (2017) suggests that all TVET lecturers or teachers must be assessed according to those competency and sub-competency areas, and they must achieve a high grade in order to be certified as qualified TVET instructors. The TVET competency model by Nor Hayati was a reliable and valid model for Malaysian education system as verified through the Delphi Technique research method.

4. Methodology

The research was conducted using classic grounded theory (CGT). A significant characteristic of CGT is for the researcher to suspend preconceived notions about the topic and allow a theory to emerge from the data collected. Glaser (1998) stated that grounded theory is “the systematic generation of theory from data” (p. 12). Data can be collected from any source such as brief conversations, lengthy interviews, magazines, books, articles, documents, newspapers, videos, artwork, music, photographs, surveys, and personal observations (Birks & Mills, 2011; Glaser, 1998).

My decision to choose CGT was based on the premise of the theory emerging from the data. Unlike many generic qualitative research methods, CGT does not set out to verify a theory, but rather to develop a theory from collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). CGT discovers a theory about patterns of behavior that resolve an area of primary concern for the participants in the substantive area (Glaser, 1998). This seemed like a logical approach to research in order to understand what behaviors impact successful aging.

4.1. Research Questions

In consideration of the research objectives, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the rationales and aims used by the policy making officers in designing TVET policy?
2. What are the underlying problems and solution strategies for each of the TVET policy issues?
3. What are the organization structure, mechanism, strategies, and resources needed for implementing TVET policy appropriately?
4. What are the kinds of competencies and dispositions of both the implementers and target groups involved TVET policy issue?
5. What are the constraints and challenges in implementing TVET policy?
6. What is a suitable policy making and implementation mechanism model for the TVET colleges?

4.2. Participants Selection

All the participants selected for this research were directly involved in either policymaking or policy implementation. Because any policy has two phases, both the policymakers and policy implementers had to be chosen and interviewed. The number of participants was twenty-two. Several criteria were used for selection of the participants. The first criterion was degree of involvement by the participants in the two phases of each policy. The second criterion was position of the participants, whether a policymaker or a policy implementer, whether a top official such as a minister or a school director. The criterion for selection of education officers, teachers, and administrators is seniority of work experience. The purpose of selecting participants that are more experienced is to get more reliable and authentic information. In



addition, they were also the “well-informed” (Yin, 2009, p. 108) participants as compared to junior ones.

4.3. Data Collection Procedure

In this study, relatively a large amount of time and multiple methods for data collection were used to get a clearer and in-depth understanding of leadership behaviors, best practices and capitals in selected transformed schools. The researcher used in-depth semi-structure interviews, direct observations and document reviews. The interviews were considered as the main source of data collection while field notes and documents reviews were done to substantiate the interview findings.

4.4. Interviews

Interviews can help researchers to get in-depth information from participants through interviewing. Merriam (2009) categorized interview ‘by structure’ as structured (standardized), semi-structured and unstructured interviews (informal). The most used type of interview in qualitative research is a semi-structured interview (Merriam, 2009; Packer, 2011). The purpose of the semi-structured interview is rapport development and to encourage the participant to speak (Packer, 2011). It includes a mixture of more or less structured questions with a flexibility in wording or order of questions (Merriam, 2009). It allows the researcher to probe or respond to the situation at hand (Merriam, 2009).

Consequently, for this study, semi-structured interviews were used to get an in-depth insight and understanding of policy making and implementation in the KRG. Interview protocols were developed and checked for their suitability by senior officers in the administration system. However, flexibility in questions remained throughout the interviewing process. Probing questions were used where required. Not only this but also interviews with the consent of the participants were recorded in order to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the response of participants. For this purpose, two quality tape recorders were used to minimize obstacles during the interview, and the researcher took notes during interview sessions. Then the recorded interviews were transcribed for analysis. The site and time of the interviews were decided on the basis of willingness and convenience of participants.

4.5. Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis are a simultaneous process in qualitative research that starts from the first day of data collection (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data collected through interviews, observation and documents were consolidated, reduced and interpreted to make sense of them (Merriam, 2009). In order to make sense of the data, and due to the large size of the data, the researcher used a software which is called NVivo to run the analysis. Since this research was conducted employing a grounded theory approach, the following initial steps were taken during data collection and analysis:

1. Theoretical Coding: Theoretical codes conceptualize the relationship between substantive codes through the use of Glaser’s (1998) coding families.
2. Sorting and Theoretical Outline: Fundamental to creating a theoretical framework is sorting memos. The memos are sorted based on emerging theory and by the relationship between the concepts. The theoretical outline with the memos sorted into the outline was the first draft of the final write up. The next stage was to refine the write-up into a final product.
3. Writing: The goal was to discover an emergent theory to better understand how individuals manage issues and challenges of policymaking and implementation, and effectively communicate the theory in a final write-up.



5. Findings

5.1. Summary of the Coding Process

The researcher began with open coding, because of the exploratory nature of the study, every bit of data that seemed to be useful was selected (Merriam, 2009). The texts the selected codes were labelled keeping in mind the research questions and conceptual framework of the study. Then, the researcher proceeded to axial coding and reanalyzed all codes and aggregate similar codes together to form potential categories. The repetitive words used in codes were examined to form categories as well codes giving same meaning were collated together. The codes emerged from data through open coding constant comparison was used to find similarities and differences. The similar codes were combined to form categories and subcategories. The final stage of coding, selective coding, is where the researcher identified the core categories and themes. The categories already identified from axial coding were compared with each other to form a broader theoretical scheme. The codes were combined to form the central themes and relationship between the themes. Five major concepts emerged which are discussed below.

6. Concepts

6.1. Technical skills

The first issue the TVET policymakers mentioned was technical skills. They stated that among the many goals of TVET colleges is developing technical skills for the students enrolled in those colleges. This is an issue because in modern era Kurdistan Region lacks a workforce that have enough technical skills to be able to fix technical problems people face in their daily lives. For example, Kurdistan Region depends on foreigners to fix peoples' air conditioning units which should be simple tools to install and repair when needed. There is lack of skilled workers because the number of TVET colleges is very small compared to those in developed countries. While Kurdistan Region imports food, fruit, vegetables from outside, it should start considering opening more TVET colleges to prepare more graduates for the needs of the region. These graduates need to be trained in various specializations to be able to attend to different technical issues people and government face. The graduates must be prepared for the real-world scenarios in which they will be encountering after graduation.

6.2. TVET value

TVET policymakers emphasized the need for opening more colleges to graduate skilled students in Kurdistan Region. They also pointed to the problem of why TVET colleges have been neglected by the government. They attributed the problem to the declining value and poor attitude towards TVET colleges. They accused the government for the decline of desire for TVET colleges because the government pay all the attention to certain colleges such as College of Medicine, College of Engineering, College of Science, but it has ignored TVET colleges. It does not allocate enough budget for these colleges. When TVET colleges do not have enough financial, equipment and staff, they will not be able to run their programs effectively. This negligence by government has made high school students not apply at these colleges for degrees because high school students believe that they will not have a good future with a degree from these colleges. Another reason, also mentioned above under the concept of technical skills, is secondary school and high school students see the government and corporates depend on and use foreign workforce, therefore, they feel they will not have a good chance getting hired. It is time for the government to reevaluate its concept and peoples' view of TVET institutes by reforming TVET which should include opening opportunities for TVET graduates to work. Another step which should be taken is attracting students to these colleges and institutes by providing necessary funds.



6.3. TVET status

Another topic of the interviews was comparing the status of Kurdistan Region TVET colleges to those of other countries. A policymaker, who is from Lebanon, stated that low status of TVET colleges is an issue in most of the regional countries. However, compared to the developed countries such as European countries, TVET in Kurdistan region is lagging. The reason why TVET colleges are thriving in developed countries is because they invest in and give a high regard TVET colleges. They provide good budget and support for these colleges which makes them equally desirable with other colleges. The developed countries study their future needs; therefore, they plan for it by training students in TVET colleges for their market and government needs. This way they plan ahead. They also give students confidence that they can believe in their ability to do great things such as inventions.

6.4. TVET staff

In addition to government negligence of TVET colleges, another reason for lack of skilled workers in Kurdistan Region is quality of teaching staff at TVET colleges. Most instructors in these colleges do not possess up-to-date knowledge for solving technical issues. The instructors who are professionals tend not to stay in these technical colleges because of better paying job opportunities. They may leave the country and go abroad to teach, or work for a good salary in large companies. For these reasons, KRG needs to hire professional staff even if it requires hiring from other countries. Managerial positions should also be reconsidered to be given to individuals who are tech savvy, knowledgeable and passionate about TVET instruction. This is an issue because TVET college heads and staff are sometimes hired from other colleges that have nothing to do with TVET instruction and goals.

6.5. TVET reform

After discussing the issues that have made TVET colleges decline. The policymakers discussed ways to address those issues. They pointed to several important steps the government must take to make TVET colleges desirable and active. The first strategy they stated needed to be adopted was making laws to reform TVET colleges. For them, the government must start from scratch and plan solutions and reform for TVET colleges because without a plan and strategies these colleges will not attract students. Another important solution the government has to implement is to build Public Private Partnership. By that, the policymakers meant government utilizing the skills of Private sector professionals to improve TVET college programs. With this step, the curriculum must be redesigned. Moreover, the policymakers also suggested that government can contract with TVET college professionals from developed countries to come and teach in Kurdistan Region TVET colleges.

7. Discussion

While it was felt that TVET colleges in KRI have issues, the policymakers reiterated the issues and expressed their grief over the sad reality that TVET colleges in KRI are falling behind and immediate steps must be taken to stop further damage. The sad reality can be seen in the fact that TVET colleges in Kurdistan are in decline. Students do not want to enroll in these colleges unless obliged by their low grades. Parents encourage their children to study hard in order not to end up in one these colleges. This is sad but true. The value of TVET colleges have been and still is in decline. This decline in views towards TVET colleges mainly stems from the idea that only doctors, engineers and scientists will have steady careers. It is also due to the fact that stakeholders do not understand the importance of these colleges. If the stakeholders in the government had thought about importance of and essential



need for these colleges for state building, they would have paid attention to them. The negligence can be seen in the fact that there are not local skilled workers to attend to daily issues that face individuals in the country. Even in the case of small mechanical issues, the government resorts to foreign workers. This shows that TVET graduates are given adequate instructions on how to be ready for real-life technical issues. Most of the graduates turn to other jobs that have no relation to what they are supposed to do. This is not their fault because they do not learn enough. Their faculty and teachers do not have up-to-date knowledge and expertise of the current technical issues. Some of the interviewees strongly suggested a reform for TVET colleges, faculty and curriculum. Some of them also recommended Public Private Partnership to help bring life back to TVET institutes. The policymakers strongly emphasized change. Redesigning curriculum is a must in order to help the colleges prepare students for market needs. TVET faculty must be enrolled in workshops to equip them with latest information and be ready to deliver best hands-on instruction.

8. Conclusion

Through analysis of the data from the participants, the researcher found out that TVET has been lagging in all respects in KRI. However, TVET policymakers and implementers proposed many ideas to reform and improve TVET. Among the main points raised were the following:

1. Technical skills should be emphasized TVET teaching curriculum and syllabi.
2. Students should be prepared for the market needs and real-world scenarios which they will face after graduating from TVET institutes.
3. Number of TVET colleges need to be increased and new colleges should be opened in all places in KRI.
4. Government must reevaluate admission programs to TVET colleges by giving value to these institutes so that they are desirable by both parents and students.
5. TVET value can be regained by supporting the TVET graduates in their post-college career jobs.
6. More funds should be allocated to TVET colleges in a way that they can operate independently without being in need for staff, equipment and buildings.
7. Teacher quality in TVET colleges should be improved to ensure the teachers have up-to-date knowledge of science and world developments that are related to TVET issues.
8. TVET should benefit from foreign experts to train their teachers and students. The colleges can also send teachers abroad to help them gain more knowledge in their fields.
9. Redesigning the curriculum is necessary for better TVET graduates and performance in public and private sectors.
10. TVET institutes should cooperate with the private sector in KRI to benefit from its expertise and state of the art equipment.
11. Policymakers and implementers mentioned that reforming TEVT also includes changing or rotating TVET college heads to give opportunity for individuals who can benefit TVET.
12. Continuous professional development programs should be run in the form of seminars, training and new curriculum for TVET teachers who should be evaluated annually for their performance.
13. More hands-on teaching methods should be employed by TVET teachers.
14. More support must be provided in terms of technology to keep TVET colleges up-to-date with world changes.

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پوخته

ئه م لیکۆلینه وه به گرنگی سیاسه تی کۆلیژ و په یمانگاکی ته کنیکی له هه ریمی کوردستان ئاشکرا ده کات له گه ئ ل ئاریشه کانی روبه روی ده بنه وه له کاتی دارشتن و جیه جه کردنی سیاسه ته کان. وه زاره تی په روه رده و وه زاره تی خویندنی بالا و توژینه وه ی زانستی دو وه زاره تی هه ریمی کوردستانن که به رپرس و په یوه ندارن به بواری په روه رده وفیرکردن. ئه م لیکۆلینه وه به باکگراوند و چوارچۆیه و، کیشه و چمکه سه ره کیه کان ده خاته رو. له میانه ی دیداری راسته وخۆ له گه ئ ۲۲ له داڕژیه ران و جیه جیکارانی سیاسه تی په روه رده ییداتا کۆکراوه ته وه و له رینگای تیوری لیکۆلینه وه ی مه یدانی شیراوه ته وه . دواى دیاریکردنی کۆده کان به هۆی به رنامه ی ن. فیقۆ، پینچ چمکی سه ره کی ده رکه وتن. گرنگترین ده ره نجامه کانی ئه م لیکۆلینه وه به بریتیه له وه ی که بواری په یمانگا و کۆلیژه کانی ته کنیکی له هه ریمی کوردستان له دواوه ن و چۆن پیش ده خرین.

ملخص

تستكشف هذا البحث أهمية قضية سياسة التعليم والتدريب المهني والتقني والتحديات التي تواجه تشريع وتنفيذ هذه السياسة في إقليم كردستان. هنالك وزارتات المعنيتان بالتعليم في إقليم كردستان.الوزارتان هما وزارة التربية والتعليم ووزارة التعليم العالي و البحث العلمي. تقدم هذا البحث خلفية،الإعداد، والقضية ، والمفاهيم الرئيسية. تم جمع البيانات من 22 من مشرعى و منفذى السياسات التعليمية. ثم تم تحليل البيانات من خلال طريقة تحليل نظريةالبحث الميدانية الاساسيهgrounded theory approach. بعد الترميز من خلال برنامج N-Vivo ، ظهرت خمسة مفاهيم رئيسية. النتيجة الرئيسية للدراسة هي تخلف التعليم والتدريب التقني والمهني في كردستان وكيفية تحسينه.