

# **Contextualizing the Role of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) towards Vocational Education in Kashmir in the Light of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 - A Perspective towards Kashmir Handicrafts**

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## **Abstract**

The District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) serve as nodal agencies at the district level, providing continuous professional development, training, and orientation at the primary level of our country's educational discourse. In light of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, mainstreaming vocational education in the educational curriculum is a subject of interest for all stakeholders, since any course or subject related to vocational studies requires relevant teacher training, resource individuals, and institutions. Handicrafts are an integral part of Kashmir's culture, emerging fashion scenario, and economy, being the major source of earning a livelihood. Given the rising rates of unemployment and underemployment, a significant challenge facing our education system is the creation of a workforce that lacks the necessary skills in traditional vocational fields unique to this region, such as Kashmir pashmina, papier-mâché, namda, gabba, willow-work, khatamband, carpets, shawl weaving, wood carving, and hand-embroidery (aari-work, tilla-work, crewel and chain stitch), among others. This emerging scenario is largely due to the disconnect between educational theory and educational practice. NEP 2020 recognizes the emerging crisis by acknowledging that educational theory and practices, while applicable in various Indian states with different geography, may not necessarily be applicable in a specific geographic region. This recognition makes the policy a visionary document. The policy addresses the grass-roots educational concerns, including the issue of teaching pedagogy and assessment aspects of our curriculum framework related to the vocational subjects. Over the years, Kashmiri handicrafts have significantly influenced both national and international

fashion trends. Therefore, in the Kashmiri context, NEP 2020's focus on indigenous vocational crafts at the grassroots level not only integrates vocational and academic streams from pre-school to higher education but also offers opportunities for the preservation of handicrafts. DIETs form the institutional backbone of the educational framework to implement NEP 2020 at the grass-roots level. The article attempts to examine how DIETs in Kashmir play a crucial role in providing academic and resource support, training, and direction. Additionally, it identifies relevant research areas that contribute to the development of support mechanisms for economic sustainability in the context of an evolving fashion scenario, as outlined in the national education policy.

**Keywords:** District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), vocational crafts, Kashmir handicrafts, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, vocational education

## Introduction

Vocational education can be described as the development of learners' expertise in a specific area of learning techniques to prepare them for the best practices related to specific trades, occupations, or vocations (All India Council for Technical Education, 2017). Vocational education also includes the education of vocational crafts, which are an important aspect of vocations practiced in India. In the Kashmiri context, handicraft and handloom practices have historically been associated with vocation, second only to agriculture. The region is home to the most luxurious handicrafts and handlooms in the world, e.g., kani-pashmina, Kashmir-pashmina, walnut wood carving, copper-work, khatamband, pinjrakari, papier-mâché, carpet weaving, namda, gabba; and embroidery like sozni, aari-work, crewel-chain stitch, hand-tilla work, etc. (Saraf, 1987). The highly specialized skill-based artists/artisans are famously referred to as 'The Golden Hands of Kashmir' as handicraft and handloom constitute the main vocational crafts. These vocational crafts serve as a vital source of income for 3.5 lac craftsmen and artisans. In 'The Wool Processing, Handloom, Handicrafts Policy Document, 2020', the Government of Jammu and Kashmir reveals that "the handloom sector provides direct and indirect employment to more than 40,000 weavers and ancillary workers in J&K, mostly belonging to SC/ST, backward, and economically weaker sections of the society." Products like carpets, fully-embroidered pashmina and kani shawls, crewel work, walnut and wood carving, papier-mâché, khatamband ceiling, chain stitch, etc. hold sway in the international and domestic markets and amply reflect the skill of 3.5 lakhs of craftsmen and artisans involved in the sector. These old-age vocational crafts have been passed down informally from one generation to another through family traditions and formally through specific institutions like Industrial Training Institutes (ITI's) and Polytechnic

Colleges offering long-term and short-term courses. The cultural and regional sanctity associated with these vocations, in addition to the low capital investment and emphatic source of earning foreign exchange, keeps these vocational sectors alive and thriving. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 prioritizes the integration of region-specific vocational trades into the existing educational curriculum, pedagogy, and policy, emphasizing the importance of local industrial setups and specialized skills to bridge the gap between industry and the existing educational system. The document impresses upon the need to mitigate the challenges faced by vocational education in India through restructuring and proper implementation of the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society as a whole. It provides an inclusive approach towards a socially, economically, and culturally meaningful model of education (National Education Policy, 2020). District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) constitute the third tier and the foundation of the education system in our country (Dyer et al, 2004). These are the nodal agencies responsible for implementing all educational policies at the elementary level of education. The achievement of NEP 2020 at the grass-roots level is possible only when the elementary school teachers are fully trained for the purpose.

### ***Overview of vocational crafts and vocational education in Kashmir***

During the 14th century, when Kashmir was experiencing a severe economic crisis, Ameer Kabir Mir Syed Ali Hamadani (RA) changed the demographics of Kashmir by bringing in approximately 700 specialists in various arts and crafts from central Asia, who taught Kashmir's various vocational crafts for a sustainable economy. The fifteenth century witnessed the emergence of the innovated techniques in shawl weaving, learning, and manufacture of other handicrafts, which is generally ascribed to Sultan Zayn al-'Abidin (1520–70 AC). He established educational institutions that taught crafts like wood carving, carpet and shawl weaving, papier-mâché, and various types of embroidery. He established a vibrant culture of *karkhanas/workshops*, where skilled artisans taught crafts to apprentices (Bhat 2023).

The sixteenth century also witnessed rapid growth of handicrafts, and the annexation of Kashmir by Mughals extended the trade to distant lands, particularly Central Asia, thus leading to economic prosperity (Digby, 2007). The historical accounts during the Mughal era denote that the Kashmir shawl industry thrived with 40,000 looms. The development of a state-owned factory system (*karkhana/workshop* system), as well as an emphasis on royal patterns and intricate weaving, gave Kashmiri shawls the place of royal apparel in the court. (Ashfaque, 2009). During Maharaja Gulab Singh's rule in

1846 A.D., demand for Kashmir shawls rose in European countries. During the rule of Maharaja Ranbir Singh (1865–72), the production of Kashmiri shawls increased, and French agents like Messrs. Uhlan represented Kashmir in France besides others who visited Kashmir for their business concerns (Shaban, Dar and Bharadwaj, 2015).

Political unrest and natural disasters have impacted the Kashmir handicraft industry, but it has persevered over time and continues to thrive due to the fashion demand. Every gender, regardless of caste, creed, or class, engages in handcrafting as a significant hobby in rural areas, transferring skills from one generation to the next through family traditions or local apprenticeships. Currently, Kashmiri artisans practicing handicrafts such as papier-mâché, walnut wood carving, kani-pashmina, khatamband, pinjrakari, willow-wicker, namda, gabba, and embroidery such as sozni work, aari work, tilla work, crewel-chain stitch, etc. are skilled entrepreneurs and economic partners (Planning Development and Monitoring Department, 2013-14). Traditionally, Kashmiri handicrafts like wood carving, copper-work, khatamband, papier-mache are practiced in *karkhanas* which are either within the houses or in the vicinity of master artisans, under whose supervision the apprentices learn, work, and gain experience. Similarly, both male and female artisans practice hand embroidery such as sozni-work, tilla-work, and aari-work at home. The future generations become accustomed to the crafts and learn the processes from the elders at home. The looms for weaving Kashmiri pashmina shawls are also generally located in the houses of artisans, and the associated people, like dyers and washers, either work from their homes or adjacent *karkhanas*. Typically, master artisans operate the kani-pashmina shawl and carpet looms from their homes; they also teach apprentices the intricate hieroglyphic pattern known as ‘taleem’, which future generations learn informally at home. The vision of Ameer Kabeer Mir Syed Ali Hamadani (RA) was to instill a culture of craft entrepreneurship in Kashmiris, keeping in mind Kashmir’s susceptibility to foreign invasions and harsh weather conditions. This has not only been instrumental in securing the local population economically in harsh times of conflict, floods, earthquakes, and winters, but it has also developed a sustainable economic model through localized apprenticeship.

Currently, the National Skill Development Framework (NSDF) gives secondary schools in Jammu and Kashmir the option to implement two vocational courses from Class 9th to Class 10th. These vocational subjects include IT/ITeS, Retail, Health Care, Tourism and Hospitality, Security, Agriculture, Telecommunication, Beauty and Wellness, Physical Education and Sports, Automotive, Electronics and Hardware Apparel Made-ups, and Home-Furnishing and Plumbing (Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education, 2023). At present, the scheme does not offer a localized Kashmiri handicraft course at the

primary or secondary level. There are 27 government Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and 15 private Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) in Kashmir Division. The Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), under the designated Heritage Craft Course Scheme of the State Council for Vocational Training (SCVT), offer a one-year course in wood carving skills, papier-mâché, shawl weaving, hand embroidery, carpet weaving, and technology, as well as fashion design and technology (Directorate of Skill Development, Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 2019).

The National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Budgam, offers undergraduate degrees in fashion design, fashion communication, fashion and lifestyle accessories, and textile design, in addition to a postgraduate degree in fashion management. NIFT offers subjects/modules related to Craft Research and Documentation, Craft-Based Product Development, Design Innovation, and Leadership with emphasis on Regional Crafts (National Institute of Fashion Technology, Srinagar, 2020). In 2018, the Central University of Kashmir established the Design Innovation Centre (DIC) as part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the Government of India's National Initiative of Design Innovation. This initiative follows the Hub and Spoke model, where Spoke Centers offer one-year diploma courses in various crafts, such as khatamband and wood work, papier-mâché and crewel, Kashmir craft designing, kani shawls, and pashmina, among others, throughout the Kashmir valley (Central University of Kashmir, 2018). Kashmir University offers Masters in Business Administration (Craft Management and Entrepreneurship) at Craft Development Institute (CDI), Srinagar, with special emphasis on Kashmir's regional handicrafts (Craft Development Institute, 2023). Kashmir University offers short-term courses on vocational crafts like papier-mâché. The District Institutes of Education and Training bear a significant responsibility in promoting vocational crafts at the primary level, thereby facilitating the successful implementation of NEP 2020 at the grassroots level.

### ***National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and vocational education at elementary level***

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provides a roadmap for collaborative curriculum framing among major educational stakeholders from school level to university level, paving the way for a formalized vocational education. At the primary level, NEP 2020 emphasizes the pedagogy, which is primarily based on experiential learning and discovery, play-way and activity, interactive classroom learning, and inquiry at the preparatory (Grades 3-5) and middle stages (Grades 6-8). It paves the way to restructure the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE-2020-2022) into an arts and story-telling integrated pedagogy, thus reconnecting education with regional

culture. It integrates arts and crafts and vocational skills with academic subjects in the school curriculum to provide students with flexibility in course/subject choice. The policy envisions holistic development by providing vocational exposure to learners from pre-school to higher education level in a localized setting. Vocational skills, arts, and crafts can be improved through enrichment programs based on local skill needs, practice-based curriculum with 10-minute bag-free periods to evaluate students with vocational experts, fun courses involving vocational crafts from Grades 6–8, internships with vocational experts from Grade 6 onwards, vocational courses through online and open and distance learning (ODL) modes, and exposure to a craft environment. All of these things help students grow as a whole. It would be helpful if institutions had the right tools for vocational subjects, like skill labs and short teacher education programs that teach teachers about vocational education at the primary level. It would also be beneficial if the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) was changed to include vocational subjects and Indian standards were brought in line with the International Standard Classification of Occupations maintained by the International Labor Organization. This would help things move in the right direction. Additionally, educational institutions should collaborate with the National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE) to map local job opportunities and analyze skill gaps. They should also work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local businesses, Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), polytechnics, Adult Education Centers (ADCs), and more to provide students with “Lok-Vidya” (vocational knowledge). This would be a big step toward creating a vibrant and multidisciplinary education system. The framework, which encourages every learner to pursue at least one vocation and engages local artists, craftspersons, and other handicraft experts as guest faculty and Artist(s)-in-Residence at educational institutions, aids in reimagining vocational education to be on par with mainstream education (National Education Policy, 2020). The document presents a unique economic model based on the promotion of craft entrepreneurship, in which even dropouts from school at any stage are able to earn as well as have a respectable position in society. Contextually, the policy eliminates the social stigmas associated with vocational crafts in Kashmir, enabling artisans or vocational instructors to secure positions in formalized teaching institutions.

### ***Role of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) towards vocational education in Kashmir as per National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 guidelines***

In Kashmir, District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) are the major agencies to impart training and provide academic and resource support towards the professional

development of teachers and other functionaries at the primary level. The primary functions of DIETs encompass general and subject-specific training and orientation for elementary school teachers, both pre- and in-service; orientation and training for resource persons, non-formal and adult education instructors, local community leaders, functionaries of voluntary organizations, and members of various boards of education at the district or village level, such as school complexes, district boards of education, evaluation centers for primary and upper primary schools; development of teaching aids and support material; evaluation and pedagogical methods and tools; and action research at the elementary and adult education level. There are seven branches of DIETs: Pre-Service Teacher Education (PSTE) Branch, Work Experience (WE) Branch, District Resource Unit (DRU), In-Service Programmes, Field Interaction and Innovation Coordination (IFIC) Branch, Educational Technology (ET) Branch, Planning and Management (P&M) Branch, and Curriculum, Material Development, and Evaluation (CMDE) Branch (Lalsawmzuali, 2019).

There are ten DIETs in Kashmir: Anantnag, Kulgam, Shopian, Pulwama, Srinagar, Budgam, Ganderbal, Baramulla, Bandipora, and Kupwara. The Samagra Shiksha program designates these DIETs to implement NEP 2020 at the primary and secondary levels. The policy offers a platform for future generations to preserve endangered handicrafts such as namda, kani-pashmina, and willow-wicker. It unites all stakeholders, including the teacher-student fraternity, policymakers, artisans, vocational instructors, and civil society groups, in identifying and bridging the divide. As outlined in NEP 2020, DIETs are responsible for implementing the policy by creating an educational curriculum that prioritizes themes with a strong cultural, geographical, and economic foundation.

NEP 2020 bridges the gap between educational philosophy and preparation. This gap was previously caused by a lack of coordination between the student-teacher relationship, teacher-training institutions, and the social, political, and economic environment, leading to structural anomalies in our educational system. Kalyani (2020) elucidates the significance of incorporating vocational education into the educational curriculum, as envisioned by NEP 2020:

- Holistic development: social, cultural, economic, physical, and mental development
- Strengthening inquiry, reasoning, and problem-solving skills
- Empowering of local communities
- Promoting creativity, innovation, sustainable development, and entrepreneurship

- Enhancing vocational and productive efficiency
- Promoting and celebrating our cultural heritage and value of identity.

As a result, DIETs' role in vocational education in Kashmir has expanded to focus on local vocational crafts. This would involve training teachers, conducting craft sensitization workshops, and collaborating with various vocational education institutions, including ITIs, polytechnic institutes, and skill and technical training institutes, to support curriculum development and evaluation. Engaging actively with community leaders, village education committees, youth, and other voluntary educational organizations would be crucial in promoting vocational education and the practice of vocational crafts as a means of preserving local culture.

### **Aim of the Study**

The objective of the study was to conduct a SWOC analysis to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges experienced by the staff of District Institutes of Education and Training regarding vocational education, with an emphasis on vocational crafts. The purpose of the SWOC analysis was to delve deeper and provide valuable insights into the current scenario of vocational training, particularly vocational crafts, and examine the scope for improvement and envisaged opportunities for growth and development in the vocational education system.

### **Methodology**

The study employed a qualitative research design to examine the perceptions of the staff (faculty members and administrative officers) of the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) in Kashmir in 2023. The researcher has also referred to the field notes taken during non-participant observations made during the ethnographic visits to the various artisans practicing traditional Kashmiri vocational crafts from 2016 to 2018. A purposive sampling technique was employed to collect data, reaching out to DIET staff from all ten DIETs in Kashmir who were willing to participate in the study and share their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges related to vocational education. Focus group discussions were conducted by obtaining prior oral consent from 6-7 members of each DIET in Kashmir. The principles of acceptance and confidentiality were taken into consideration. Each focus group discussion lasted for 20–40 minutes and was transcribed. The data analysis was inductive and focused on generating emergent themes to elucidate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges faced by the DIET staff in Kashmir regarding vocational education.



## Results

The researcher analyzed the findings from focus group discussions with DIET staff members and categorized the prominent themes to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of implementing vocational education. The findings are described below.

### *Strengths*

#### *Implementation of orientation programmes for vocational trainers*

While conducting focus group discussions, the first theme that emerged was the orientation programs for the vocational trainers at the secondary level, as per the training calendar of DIETs. According to the opinions of the DIETs' staff, the focus on vocational education and skill development has increased in light of NEP-2020. A DIET staff member opines, "The orientation programs are held by professionally trained personnel to emphasize the relevance and importance of vocational education at the secondary level. Since the role of DIET is academic enrichment, the vocational trainers are being trained as per the module specifications. We have got positive feedback on the completion of modules." Another staff member is of the view that orientation programs on vocational education guidelines are being conducted at the secondary level for different vocational subjects such as IT and ITeS, health care, automotive, etc. He adds, "We have been successful in conducting the orientation programs for the capacity building of the vocational trainers. The training sessions have been completed as per the module's requirements, and the resource persons employed for this purpose are well-trained."

The discussion with the staff members of DIETs revealed their keen interest in promoting vocational Kashmiri handicrafts. Various DIET staff members mentioned that workshops have been conducted periodically at the district level to promote vocational handicrafts like willow wicker, pottery, papier-mâché, etc. One of the DIET staff members opines, "Programs related to local handicrafts are held once or twice a year, where local artisans are invited to showcase the traditional handicrafts to acquaint the students with the regional handicrafts. The regional aspect of NEP 2020 has now been taken into consideration in addition to 'bag-less days.'"

#### *Curriculum development for vocational courses*

During focus group discussions, some of the staff members from Academic Unit I (DIET Shopian, DIET Kulgam, and DIET Anantnag), which has been designated for 'Art and

Vocational Education, acknowledged being part of module development for vocational courses in collaboration with resource persons. One of the staff members explains, “We are trying our level best to build rapport with the skilled people to seek help in making vocational labs in districts functional and relevant with regards to every skill and vocation.” The DIET staff of Academic Unit I also prioritizes the successful development of modules. One of the staff members expresses his view: “During module development, we roped in the best resource persons and expertise and developed modules while keeping in mind various necessary regional constructs, orientations, and steps. We have submitted the modules to SCERT Kashmir.”

The DIET staff members also stressed that there is a shift in policy toward the inclusion of vocational crafts in the curriculum. According to a staff member, “NEP-2020 has introduced the concept of bag-less days as an enrichment activity for 6-8 standards. This involves students visiting local artisans such as carpenters, potters, and metal workers for 10 days, aiming to familiarize them with the local vocational crafts prevalent in the area. Currently, SCERT and DIETs are actively working to alter the general perception of vocational education at both the UT and district levels. Furthermore, our organization recognizes the significance of practicing regional crafts. We occasionally invite local artisans to showcase their crafts, a practice that is expected to increase in the future due to the policy’s emphasis on vocational crafts.” The responses point towards the growing importance of vocational craft education and the inclusion of craft studies to sensitize students to the Kashmiri craft heritage.

### *Financial support*

During the discussion, the participants acknowledged that they received adequate funds from their major funding agency, Samagra Shiksha, Government of India, for the successful conduct of the orientation programs. One of the section officers of a DIET mentions, “The fund flow is smooth as far as the training and orientation sessions of vocational education are concerned.”

## **Weaknesses**

### *Infrastructural deficit in DIETs*

The researcher observed that the four DIETs, namely DIET Ganderbal, DIET Srinagar, DIET Pampore, and DIET Bandipora, don’t function from their own buildings. They have been allotted government buildings for schools, which do not align with DIETs’ infrastructure requirements. DIET Kulgam has an art and craft museum, whereas

other DIETs in Kashmir do not. A DIET staff member emphasizes, “The improvement in DIET infrastructure is a must in every organization; our biggest weakness is the lack of requisite infrastructure.” The observation reveals that there is insufficient infrastructure for the DIET staff. Another staff member explains, “The lack of requisite infrastructure is the biggest impediment towards the smooth functioning of our DIET. If we receive the necessary infrastructure, we can significantly improve our vocational education. “We have to hire multi-purpose halls from nearby schools for every training session, which makes it difficult to conduct outreach activities.” It may be concluded that most of the staff members believed that infrastructure enhancement could lead to greater work efficiency and better results.

#### *Remuneration for resource persons*

Participants in the discussions expressed the need to revisit, reorganize, and regularize the remuneration for the resource persons. During discussions, one of the senior DIET staff members opines, “While engaging resource persons, the major issue is the amount of remuneration. If a resource person or artisan earns more while working at home, it becomes difficult to attract them with the amount they get while training at DIET.” Another DIET staff member says, “If we call an artisan to apprise the teachers of the local handicraft or any skill, the remuneration amount has to be sufficient to attract the artisans.”

#### *Insufficient staffing*

During discussions, every DIET staff member highlighted understaffing as a major concern. One of the DIET staff members opines, “All HOD posts are vacant in this DIET; I have to also do the administrative work, which isn’t my domain. The majority of the posts are vacant. The workload is heavy. The additional responsibilities due to a lack of staffing have led to less concentration in my field of work.” Another DIET staff member adds, “The vacant posts in DIETs are the biggest hurdle to our organization’s smooth functioning.”

### **Opportunities**

#### *Hub and spoke model*

During the focus group discussions, it emerged that the DIET staff members hoped for the effective functioning of vocational/skill labs based on the Hub and Spoke model in designated schools. One of the DIET staff members states, “Since the guidelines mention that the skill, trade, or vocation would be selected based on local relevance,

thus regional handicrafts would also get an impetus. I hope our children will celebrate regional crafts besides other vocations that are equally important.” Another DIET staff member expresses, “My family has been in the handicraft sector; the social stigmas associated with handicrafts have created a negative attitude about these vocations. With the mainstreaming of vocational education, I am hopeful that the societal attitude will also change. At every level, we are promoting handicrafts like willow wicker. Our Prime Minister also wears a kani-pashmina shawl. I hope this model lets us celebrate every vocation.” Understanding regional vocations at the primary and secondary levels can shift mindsets, attract children to these vocations, and help them relate to them more easily.

### *Integrating vocational crafts into the curriculum as per NEP 2020*

The DIET faculty members expressed their support for the practical aspects of vocational education, as outlined in the NEP 2020. These include initiatives such as teaching crafts at the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) level, implementing bagless days, promoting toy pedagogy, facilitating online learning of vocational subjects, and hiring local eminent artisans as master instructors, among other measures. A DIET staff member says, “We welcome the policy structure; we are at the forefront at the district level to implement NEP 2020. As far as vocational education is concerned, we see a bright future, provided we can also include chapters of vocational crafts in our mainstream subjects like English, Urdu, Science, History, Geography, etc.” In addition to the practical aspect, the DIET staff member hopes that the vocations currently excluded from the mainstream will find a mention in theoretical subjects.

## **Challenges**

### *Lack of coordination and consultation*

During the discussion, many staff members highlighted the lack of effective coordination and consultation among the different government agencies, such as the School Education Department, Skill Development Department, Industries and Commerce Department, and Industrial Training Institutes, as well as the coordination between the Higher Education Department and School Education Department. The staff members underlined the importance of effective communication, coordination, and consultation among the various departments. During the focus group discussions, the opinions gathered were: “The approach we are following is a top-down approach; there are regional complexities that we encounter at the district level. The mandate is to address educational enrichment at the district level. The autonomy is lacking. Only three DIETs

have been given the mandate of 'Art and Vocational Education.' Effective district-level consultations are the need of the hour to increase work efficiency. The bottom-up approach needs to be considered."

Staff members proposed the need for a system that coordinates with other departments at the district level, creating a database of students excelling in various fields to prevent unemployment and provide them with opportunities to further develop their skills. In consultation with the Department of Skill Development, Industries and Commerce, and Handicrafts, the district level must create an updated data base. "It is the need of the hour to fulfill NEP 2020's objectives."

#### *Non-inclusion of vocational Kashmiri handicrafts in vocational education curriculum*

During the focus group discussions, it was observed that the staff members of DIETs recognize the importance of including Kashmiri handicrafts in the curriculum. One of the staff members remarks, "The curriculum of vocational trades at the secondary level doesn't include local vocational handicrafts. This presents both a challenge and a policy deficit. The implementation of NEP 2020 clearly mentions the inclusion and promotion of regional culture. The people in different districts in Kashmir practice various handicrafts; for example, District Ganderbal is home to willow-wicker crafts and sozni embroidery. Similarly, in Budgam, areas such as Kanihama exhibit significant potential for kani-pashmina crafts." It was inferred that though DIETs conduct workshops about culture and handicrafts and also invite artisans to showcase their talent once in a while, in real terms, vocational education would mean inclusion of major handicrafts in the curriculum.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions mainstreaming vocational education in the country at the national level, therefore opening new vistas for upcoming generations to work and innovate with craft practitioners with diverse geographical, cultural, ethnic, and technical craft backgrounds. It also provides opportunities to celebrate the Kashmiri handicrafts by learning about the production processes, aesthetics, uniqueness, and rich cultural heritage associated with the vocational crafts of Kashmir.

The successful execution of orientation programs and the development of modules indicate significant achievements made by DIETs. The orientation programs regarding

the importance of vocational education equip the vocational trainers to instruct the students. A faculty development program (FDP) is an established educational pedagogy that fosters knowledge skills as well as professional skills of any faculty (Bilal, Guraya and Chen, 2019). Faculty development programs help to boost faculty confidence and capacity, facilitate inter-professional learning, and foster a positive effect on future learning (Jones et al. 2015).

The Academic Unit I of DIETs conducted the crucial module development exercise to familiarize the vocational trainers with the significance and details of the trade. System-based modular development in faculty development programs emphasizes and promotes interactive teaching combined with self-directed learning. This instructional approach improves problem-solving, intra- and interpersonal skills, and attitudes toward the teaching-learning process. (Shafi, et al. 2020). As per the DIET staff, smooth fund flow from Samagra Shiksha paves the way for the successful completion of training programs about vocational education in DIETs across Kashmir.

Discussions with DIET staff members revealed the need to revisit the remuneration component, as it hinders attracting experienced and talented artisans to showcase their craft. Remuneration has a significant effect on work motivation and organizational commitment (Anggraini, Muchtar and Masdupi, 2019).

The lack of infrastructure and staff was considered a major impediment to DIETs' work in executing vocational education. Shah (2022) states that the DIET complex at Pampore is still under construction. Teachers in the district are forced to use a cramped one-room arrangement at the local higher secondary school in Pampore as a DIET center, as the building remains incomplete. Office space is one of the major physical aspects of a workplace that influences employees' performance. Poor infrastructure demotivates employees and impacts their workplace performance. (Chandrasekar, 2011). An organization with insufficient personnel experiences an increase in workload and less supervision, leading to stress, a decrease in work efficiency and effectiveness, and a decline in the overall performance of the organization and its workers (Engetou, 2017).

According to the DIET staff members, the hub and spoke model would aid in the implementation of vocational education at the district level. As mentioned by Cui (2011), the hub-and-spoke mode of secondary school organization is a potentially effective strategy for reorganizing groups of schools to support work-integrated education and training to enhance successful and smooth post-school transitions for young adults.

The DIET staff members opined that one of the biggest challenges is a lack of coordination and consultation, which leads to policy deficits. Coordination leads to

enhanced organizational performance. Planning and arranging resources in a well-coordinated work setup leads to improved internal results and a strong position in achieving internal objectives, even in the face of external competition. Furthermore, it increases organizational trust and focus, both internally and externally, which are important for organizational performance (Osifo, 2013).

The inclusion of vocational crafts in the curriculum as per NEP-2020 would be a welcome step towards the mainstreaming of vocational education in a real sense. The school curriculum must incorporate vocational courses customized to regional needs. (Biswas, 2008). According to the DIET staff members, the regional level lacks a proper framework to link vocational crafts with the curriculum, thereby hindering the development of a sustainable, formalized economic system. The handicraft sector remains informal and deprived of attention at the primary and secondary levels of education. The important role of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) in devising and restructuring educational curricula with consultations from the local artisan community paves the way for skill development as well as accomplishing the objectives of NEP 2020.

## **Recommendations**

Kashmir's handicrafts are an important part of the vocational trades practiced there. The findings reveal that Kashmir's vocational education curriculum does not include Kashmiri handicrafts. Understanding and addressing the concern through appropriate interventions is the need of the hour. To align with NEP 2020, the Curriculum Development and Studies wing of DIET, which has been allotted to Academic Unit-II of Division Office-Jammu, must initiate dialogue with Samagra Shiksha, School Education Department, Skill Development Department, and Department of Handicrafts and Handloom. This would assist in including important vocational crafts like kani-pashmina, walnut wood carving, namda, and carpet weaving in the school curriculum.

The findings point to the critical need for effective communication, coordination, and consultation among the various departments to come forward and implement NEP-2020 in vocational education. The government needs to continuously monitor the schools to follow the hub and spoke model. The schools designated as 'hubs' must provide the infrastructure, including vocational labs and experienced resource pools. There is a need for proper utilization of resources in the labs by the students of the schools designated as Spoke Schools for vocational training needs. To impart vocational training in local crafts and celebrate regional culture, vocational labs should be well equipped with the learning materials to gain hands-on experience about the area-specific crafts.

Exposure to a craft environment by way of visits to the local karkhaanas would help in promoting vocational crafts.

DIETs are important district-level academic and resource enrichment centers for educational discourse. The inclusion of vocational education in the curriculum is still in its infancy stage. Therefore, the government must empower the teacher education institutions in terms of infrastructure, human resources, and an environment in which the regional crafts flourish. It becomes imperative for policymakers and educational planners to explore the areas of research that would help identify economic viability as well as regional aspirations in terms of vocational education.

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