

# **Access and Equity in Vocational Education: A case study of a technical training centre in Bangladesh**

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# Abstract

The current debates on growth and employment in both developing and developed countries embrace the issues concerning education and training. These debates focus on the challenges that the process of globalization, and the intensely competitive environment for goods and services that it gives rise to, is impacting on the education and training systems. An important issue in this context is the manner in which the education and training system needs to be oriented so as to ensure that not only growth in the economies is achieved but also the concomitant growth in employment is enhanced.

In this context, access and equity concerns in the education and training system feature prominently. Although access and equity concerns in education and training systems may appear to have been somewhat lost in the din of market-economics, these need to be kept in focus to ensure provision of decent work and its attendant benefits to the society.

Vocational education has an important role in the education system as a means to develop knowledge and skills that helps the workforce in becoming more flexible and responsive to the needs of the labour market. This research investigated the status of access and equity at a technical training centre in Bangladesh against the backdrop of prevailing policies and other support available to the training centre for the purpose. The perceptions of the primary stake holders in the training centre, namely, the students, the training centre management and the supervisory staff, were explored with a view to assess the status of access and equity at the training centre.

The results from the investigation were used to develop a set of guidelines for improved access and equity at the training centre level.

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# List of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BMET	Bureau of Manpower, Employment & Training
HQ	Headquarters
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMT	Institute of Maritime Technology
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOEEW	Ministry of Overseas Employment & Expatriates' Welfare
NEC	(Bangladesh) National Education Commission 2003
NGO	Non-Government Organization
No.	Number
PC	Planning Commission
TTC	Technical Training Centre
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VET	Vocational Education & Training
WB	The World Bank



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# Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this dissertation is to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text and that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part for a degree at this or any other university.

The submission of this dissertation is in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctor of Education at the CQUniversity.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gopal Kumar Bhattacharya', is written over a horizontal line.

Gopal Kumar Bhattacharya

New Delhi, India

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

The important role that human resources play in the effective implementation of poverty alleviation and economic development programs and, consequently, the importance of ensuring access and equity in the education and training system, is recognized by the policy planners in Bangladesh (Ministry of Education website, retrieved March 23, 2009 from <http://www.moedu.gov.bd/>). This recognition is also seen reflected in important government documents. The report of the last (Bangladesh) National Education Commission, which came out in 2004, for instance, clearly identifies the areas which need to be addressed for enhancing access and equity in the education and training sector. It is evident that enhancing access and equity in the education system, including in the vocational education and training system, the subject matter of this research, is implicit in the government policies in Bangladesh.

This dissertation concerns an exploration of access and equity related issues in vocational education as manifested at a technical training centre (TTC) level in Bangladesh. The TTC, as evident from the nomenclature, is an institution which imparts vocational education and training. While the TTCs function under the Bureau of Manpower, Employment & Training (BMET) of the Ministry of Overseas Employment and Expatriate Welfare (MOEEW), the vocational and tertiary education, in general, is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MOE).

This research explores the access and equity concerns at the training centre level through the perceptions of the three principal stakeholders of the TTC - the BMET, the training centre management, and the students of the training centre. The research aims to identify the issues which are perceived to be giving rise to manifestation of access

and equity concerns at the training centre level as seen through the perception of these three primary stakeholders.

This chapter begins with a brief outline of some of the salient features of Bangladesh in relation to the education system so as to facilitate a better appreciation of the research context. The issues of access and equity in education and training system which underpin the research are highlighted. The research questions which have been framed, the rationale for the research, the significance, and the limitations are then discussed in the chapter. Finally, an overview of the contents of the remaining chapters within the dissertation is outlined.

## **1.2 The Research Context**

Bangladesh is a south-Asian country bordering India and Myanmar. It has a population of about 130 million, with a population density of 881 per square kilometer.

Approximately, 75 per cent of the population lives in the rural areas. The literacy rate according to 2001 census is 47.5. The literacy rate is higher for the males (53.9) as compared to the females (40.8). Bengali is the national language and English is widely spoken and understood.

The Bangladesh education system can be divided into three broad stages – primary, secondary, and tertiary education. The primary level, i.e. grade 1 to 5, normally begins at 6+ age. The secondary education, i.e., grade 6 to 12, comprises three stages. The first three years (grade 6 to 8) is known as the junior secondary stage. The next two years, i.e. grade 9 and 10, is known as the secondary stage. The last two years of the secondary education, i.e., grade 11 and 12, is known as the higher secondary stage. The diversification of courses takes place at the junior secondary stage. At this stage, vocational and technical courses are offered in vocational and trade institutes and schools. Vocational courses are also available in high schools. At the secondary stage, there are three streams of courses. These are grouped as the ‘humanities’ group, the ‘science’ group and the ‘business education’ group. The primary education is managed by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education while the management of the post-

primary education, including the tertiary education, is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The government supports 'madrasah' education. The madrasahs provide Islamic education along with general education. Apart from the madrasahs which receive public funds, a number of private madrasahs also function as a part of the education system.

The technical and vocational education is available in the country from the secondary stage of education. There are certificate courses which can be joined after completion of three years of schooling at the secondary school, i.e., at grade 9. These courses prepare skilled workers in different vocations. Two-year vocational courses can be taken at the higher secondary stage, which are conducted in government schools (the name of such institutions has since been changed to Technical School & College). The affiliation of the technical institutes is regulated by the Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB). The testing and certification of the students completing different courses in different vocational and technical education is the responsibility of the BTEB.

### **1.3 Background of the Research**

The importance of education and training as a vehicle for development and growth, not only for societies but also for individuals, has long been recognized (see, for instance, ILO 1998, Middleton, Zideman & Van Adams 1993). It is manifestation of this recognition that has prompted the national authorities, both in the developing and developed world alike, to continually strive for a more effective and efficient education and training system with due attention to access and equity concerns. As Dr. Yolanda Moses, President of the American Association for Higher Education, points out, access and equity issues at the present juncture are "not just about social justice; the issue also has economic implications" (Moses, cited in Carriuolo, Rodgers & Stout 2001: 20). It is, therefore, not surprising that the policy planners aim for a more effective and efficient education and training system with a view to move towards the objectives of economic and social development (UNDP 2005; World Bank 2005).

For some time, a growing number of researchers, policy planners and educational administrators have put forth their analysis and recommendations for greater efficiency and effectiveness in the outcomes of the education and training institutions (see, for instance, ILO 2008, Lee 2002, Ashton & Green 1996). One of the major studies in this area carried out by the World Bank (Middleton, Ziderman & Van Adams 1993) had reviewed the research and experience on the cost-effectiveness of skills training under different economic circumstances across the developing world.

Although carried out more than a decade and a half ago, the above World Bank study stands out as one of the more comprehensive studies on the theme of efficiency of pre-employment training programs conducted by vocational and technical schools. The study showed that in some cases the expectations regarding the outcomes of these programs, especially those that are aimed at young people moving from education to work, have been unrealistic, largely due to low growth of wage employment. Some of the other factors identified in the study included inefficient administration and limited involvement of the private sector in the provision of training. The study also found that the national capacity to develop skills needed is not of the same order in different countries (Middleton, Ziderman & Van Adams 1993). The implication that emerges is that ‘there is room for improvement’ in the planning and delivery of education and training.

The basic ingredient for ensuring an improved access and equity status in the education and training system is a supportive regulatory environment which is also capable of generating the necessary resources required for the purpose. The human element is the other crucial element in the process. While lack of resources can be a serious constraint in the successful implementation of any well-thought out action plan, the responses of the persons who are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the system works in accordance with the pre-determined parameters can also affect the achievement of the desired outcomes. This implies that issues concerned with access and equity issues in the vocational education and training system have to be viewed in a perspective which is in sync with the vision and expectation of the policy planners.

From the foregoing perspective, if issues concerning access and equity in vocational education and training are seen to be persisting it can be reflective either of lack necessary resources required to meet the identified needs or a lack of understanding and appreciation of the relevant policy guidelines. It could also be reflective of a combination of these two factors in different proportions. The net result in such circumstances, however, is that access and equity issues in vocational education and training system loses the management focus that it deserves.

As noted earlier, enhanced participation in the education and training system remains one of the important strategies for economic development and growth (see, for instance, ILO 2008, Rahman 2005, Lee 2002). Efforts are, therefore, made by the policy planners to ensure that access and equity outcomes in vocational education and training are optimized. The results, however, may not always be on the expected lines. One of the factors affecting the desired outcome in this context is the quality of education imparted in the institutions (Rahman 2005).

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 indicates that the cause and effects of the prevailing situation of women moving into vocational courses broadly conform to the stereotypical characterization of women's role in the society and households. The literature reviewed demonstrates that most of these women move into occupations which require low levels of skills (Yonah & Saporta, 2006). The pattern is largely similar in Bangladesh (Rahman 2005) although the vocational education and training system in the country has provisions covering the entire gamut of the educational process, that is, from orientation for entry in to a vocational education institution to job placement after completion of vocational training.

The vocational training programs provide an opportunity for social and economic mobility. Viewed in this light, addressing access and equity concerns in the vocational training institutions assumes importance. Addressing these concerns assists in ensuring

optimum outcome from the resources deployed in the training institutions, an important consideration from the cost-benefit perspective in a resource-constrained situation. Despite the foregoing, and as documented in Chapter 2, there appears little substantial research on access and equity concerns at the vocational training centre level in a developing country context. This scenario provided the incentive for the research to explore the perceptions of the policy planners and educational administrators, as well as those of the students of a training centre on access and equity issues as they are seen to manifest at the training centre level from their respective perspectives.

The basic consideration that guides the research questions as indicated in the following section is the premise that while the policy guidelines in-force indicate the measures that need to be in place for ensuring access and equity at the training centre level, the situation on the ground may not always match the outcomes expected from the measures employed. One of the reasons which contribute towards such a situation is the apparent absence of a common understanding amongst the various players as to what constitutes an access or equity issue at the training centre level. This research involves exploring access and equity issues from three different perspectives. The first perspective is that of the BMET, the agency which is responsible for policy planning and overall management of technical training centres. The second perspective is that of the training centre management. And, the third perspective comes from the students enrolled at the training centre.

#### **1.4 Scope and Aim of the Research**

Given the imperative of an improved vocational education and training system where the concerns relating to access and equity are appropriately addressed, this research explores the perceptions regarding the status of access and equity at a technical training centre. This exploration has been considered with a view to assist in enhancing the status of access and equity at the training centre level. The general aim of this research, therefore, is to identify issues of access and equity at the technical training centre level.



## **1.5 Research Questions**

The following research questions are addressed in order to examine access and equity related issues in vocational education and training as experienced at the level of a technical training centre:

Research Question 1: How do the educational administrators, training centre management and the students of the training centre perceive manifestation of access and equity issues at the training centre?

Research Question 2: What are the gaps that exist in the perceptions of the above three stakeholders and how can the identification of these gaps assist in improving the status of access and equity at the training centre level?

These two research questions have been framed keeping in view the consideration that the status of access and equity at a training centre level is best revealed by the views and perceptions of the stakeholders of the training centre. The BMET and the training centre management, two of the primary stakeholders of the training centre, are largely responsible for the prevailing situation at the training centre level so far as access and equity issues are concerned. In this process, the BMET and the training centre management are guided by their understanding and appreciation of the access and equity issues in the light of the policy guidelines in force.

The students of the TTC, the third primary stakeholder of the TTC, are the ones whose views and perceptions on access and equity issues are indicative of the effect that the measures adopted by the BMET and the training centre management are able to create. As and when additional measures are put in place for improving the status of access and equity at the training centre level, it has to be this stakeholder, the students of the training centre, who should be able to perceive the impact, be it positive or negative, as a result of the additional measures initiated.

Apart from the above three primary stakeholders, the feasibility of including the employers' representatives as one of the primary stakeholders in this research undertaking was also considered. As brought out in Chapters 2 and 3, the employers are concerned with the output of the training institutions since they are the ones who offer employment opportunities to the training graduates keeping in view the level of skills and competencies acquired by them during the training. The vital role of the employers in vocational training, especially in relation to training curricula, training delivery, and training outcomes has been recognized long back. Germany, for instance, has an organization called German Employers' Organization for Vocational Training and Further Education which was established in 1970 (Retrieved August 12, 2009 from [http://docs.google.com/gview?a=v&q=cache:DiHkgSnIJ80J:www.kwb-berufsbildung.de/fileadmin/pdf/0\\_KWB\\_Kurzinfo\\_englisch.pdf+Role+of+employers+in+vocational+training&hl=en&gl=in](http://docs.google.com/gview?a=v&q=cache:DiHkgSnIJ80J:www.kwb-berufsbildung.de/fileadmin/pdf/0_KWB_Kurzinfo_englisch.pdf+Role+of+employers+in+vocational+training&hl=en&gl=in)). This organization, as the name suggests, represents the interests of its members in vocational and further education. The organization also reviews government regulations on education and training and develops new occupations.

The role that the employers and their organizations play in supporting education and training systems has been well documented (see, for instance, ILO 2008, 2004). In this context, the importance attached to an effective industry-training centre linkage, the device for channeling the employer inputs in optimizing the efficiency and effectiveness of the training institutions in collaboration with the training centre management is also recognized. The employers' role in vocational education and training gained in prominence with the increasing recognition that they can also be involved in vocational training by way of direct financing, and through provision of facilities and trainers (Supersad 2009).

Over the years, with the adoption of rapidly changing technologies in the industry, the employers have been seeking to find candidates who have developed soft skills which

include effective communication, team-work, creativity, and problem solving skills rather than specific skills required by different sectors of the industry (see, for instance, ILO 2008, 2004). This has resulted in greater focus of the employers on the training of middle level managers and on enterprise training ([http://www.cinterfor.org.uy/public/english/region/ampro/cinterfor/publ/sala/moder\\_in/iii\\_b.htm](http://www.cinterfor.org.uy/public/english/region/ampro/cinterfor/publ/sala/moder_in/iii_b.htm), retrieved August 12, 2009). This scenario points to a differentiated focus of the employers' contribution so far as the training imparted in vocational institutions is concerned. Furthermore, the issues of access and equity have other important dimensions, for instance, those relating to policy planning and implementation, with which the employers and their representatives may not be directly involved in any significant manner at the training centre level. Therefore, although the contribution of the employers and their organizations is well recognized in ensuring improved outcomes of vocational training institutions, the employers were not included as one of the primary stake holders in the instant research undertaking.

## **1.6 Research Objectives**

The following objectives have been generated to address the two research questions described in the previous section:

### **1.6.1 Research Question 1**

- Undertake a literature review to identify
  - a. the usage and meanings of key phrases which provide the underpinnings of this research on access and equity in vocational education; these include usage and meaning of social justice; education market and user choice; vocational training policy; and gender and disadvantage,
  - b. the research which addresses access and equity concerns in education, including vocational education, so as to provide a basis for assessment of the prevailing situation at the technical training centre level within the framework of the research undertaking.
- Use a case study approach to

- a. explore the perceptions of policy planners/educational administrators and the staff of the selected technical training centre (the research site) with regard to access and equity issues in vocational education and training and their understanding of the manner in which these issue are manifested at the ground level at the training centre,
  - b. explore the perceptions of students of the selected training centre with regard to access and equity issues in vocational education and training and the manner in which they see these issues in operation at the ground level at the training centre.
- Identify the policies and programs in place at the technical training centre level which address the access and equity related concerns at the training centre.
  - Analyze the prevailing situation in the light of the policy guidelines aimed at addressing access and equity concerns at the training centres.
  - Use the findings of the research, as informed by the literature, to propose a set of guidelines for improved access and equity at the TTC level.

## **1.7 Rationale for the Research**

The broad rationale of this research is to highlight the gaps that are believed to exist amongst the primary stakeholders of the technical training centre in understanding and appreciation of the policy on access and equity in vocational education, and its effects on the ground level at the TTC. It is argued that the prevailing practices directed at addressing access and equity concerns at the TTC level may not be fully in conformity with the intent of the policy planners. It is further argued that the gap between the policy and ground situation arise out of the differences in the appreciation and understanding of the relevant policy at the implementation level. In this context, it is recognized that in some cases resource constraints may be a contributory factor for less-than-adequate attention to the access and equity concerns at the training centre level.

While some of the access and equity issues at the vocational training centre level may affect both male and female students almost in equal measure, there are some issues, which may affect the female students more than their male counterparts. There may be still some other such issues, which may concern only the female students. In specific cultural settings some of the female students may be generally less assertive of their rights and, therefore, may hesitate in voicing even their more serious concerns. This may give rise to a situation in which an illusion is created that there are no special concerns for these students which merit attention although in reality the opposite may be true. In such circumstances, the issues arising on account of the socio-cultural settings may need to be addressed through especially targeted measures.

As has been noted by the ILO (2008), priority in improving the quality and availability of education and training implies bringing about the required changes in the system so as to ensure availability of skills and competencies required for promoting employment growth and development in countries. The linkage between availability of skills and employment and growth underlines the importance of addressing issues of access and equity in vocational education. The growing concern of the policy planners with creating employment opportunities for the increasing number of persons who enter the labour market on a regular basis is one of the reasons for focusing more sharply on an improved system of education and training with due attention to the access and equity concerns. Since vocational education system is seen as a vehicle for promoting the objective of growth and employment as shown in Chapter 2, efforts are directed towards making the vocational education system more effective and efficient (ILO 2008). The findings from the research are expected to provide useful insights for addressing the relevant concerns at the technical training centre level.

## **1.8 Significance**

As will be shown in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, there is a substantial body of research relating to equity and access concerns in education, especially in higher education. On the other hand, the research on these issues in the context of vocational education and training is relatively limited. And when it comes to research on these

issues in relation to developing countries, the availability of such literature is far more meager. This highlights the need for research on these issues in a developing country context. This research is therefore significant in that it contributes towards bridging the current gap in knowledge and research on access and equity issues in vocational education and training in a south-Asian country context.

Although the research is expected to directly contribute to a better appreciation of access and equity concerns at the technical training centres in Bangladesh, the findings of the research are expected to provide useful insights for planning and delivery of vocational training programs in other south-Asian countries where the education and training systems function in almost similar environment. From a broader perspective, it is expected that the research findings will lead to academic publications thereby assisting in generating a keener interest in the vocational education systems of south-Asian countries.

## **1.9 Limitations associated with the Research**

The following limitations can be identified that apply to this research:

- The site for the research was selected in consultation and agreement with the national authorities. In this situation, there was an apprehension that the findings might indicate overly positive results if it were assumed that in suggesting a particular training centre as the research site, the authorities were likely to suggest a TTC, which in their assessment, demonstrated relatively fewer ‘deficiencies’. Although this assumption has some merit yet the possible impact on this count on the research was likely to be minimal on account of the nature of the research. It is recognized that many of the issues concerning access and equity in vocational education and training are more in the nature of systemic issues. The training centre-specific issues may also impact the access and equity concerns at the TTC level but since the management of the TTCs broadly function under a centrally administered model, BMET is responsible for management and supervision of all technical training centres, the training centre-

specific issues will also be reflective of a broad management pattern which, in turn, may be considered to be in the nature of a systemic issue.

- It can be assumed that the suggestion of the BMET to select a particular training centre as the research site had been guided by their desire to facilitate the research undertaking. A research site with easier (geographical) access and which can boast of relatively better qualified staff and facilities, is expected to create fewer impediments in the interactions between the researcher and the research participants, and hence, in the data collection process. This may, thus, provide the justification for not suggesting a training centre which does not have the same advantages, as the research site. Notwithstanding the obvious advantages of the above arrangement, the selection of the research site on this basis may be a pointer to the existence of different environment in different training institutions. On this basis, the selected training site cannot be considered to be typically representative site.

The differences in the training centres may either be in terms of physical facilities or in terms of the quality of staff available in the centres. The fact that most of the training centres are located in (different) district headquarters indicates that if one of the training centres located in a district headquarters were to be selected as the research site, it could have conveyed greater validity in terms of being a representative training centre. This aspect has been kept in view in drawing generalizations from the research findings.

- The small size of the sample is a limitation of this research. It would have been beneficial if the research had the involvement of a larger number of research participants. This was not feasible in view of the limited resources available to the researcher, including the time required for managing the research process. The negative consequences of the limited sample size though have been considerably mitigated by careful selection of the research participants keeping in view their roles and responsibilities in the context of access and equity issues

at the TTC, as discussed in Chapter 4. The selection of the research participants was undertaken solely by the researcher; the training centre management had no role in selection of the staff and students participating in the research.

- Non-participation of the former and the prospective students is a limitation for the research. The perspectives of these students, especially of the former students, on access and equity concerns would have been useful in further validation, or otherwise, of the views expressed by the current students participating in the research. The participation by the former students in the research would have also provided a longer time frame for the research, thereby lending greater credibility to the research findings.
- Data collection was primarily dependent on interviews and, therefore, was dependant on the willingness of the participants to share relevant information in a candid and forthright manner. The possible bias arising out of this situation was addressed by devoting extra time in establishing a degree of rapport with the participants. This was helpful in creating an atmosphere of mutual trust and faith which facilitated free exchange of views during the interactions.
- The fact that the data sets used were not the latest could also be seen as a limitation although it was recognized that its impact was not likely to be very pronounced. The data used in the research was used primarily for demonstrating the importance of the labour market information in planning and delivery of vocational training programs. However, in practice the training centres have to be in possession of up to date labour market information so that the training programs could be realistically planned keeping in view the changing demands of the labour market. As noted in Chapter 6, the situation necessitates putting in place a system which allows for collection, analysis and dissemination of reliable labour market information on a continual basis.



- International organizations working in developing countries some time provide technical support in bringing about certain identified changes in existing systems and institutions. Such support involves consultation and agreement between the concerned parties on the nature and scope of activities to be undertaken. There was a possibility that on account of the researcher's association with an international organization during the research phase, a possible bias in the participants towards exaggerated depiction of the 'deficiencies' could have arisen so as to better the chances of receiving technical support for the training centre. This concern was managed through detailed discussions about the objective of the research and the possible follow up action on the findings of the research with the participants. It was explained that the research undertaking was not aimed at securing any technical support.

The impact of the limitations on the research is addressed in Chapter 6.

## 1.10 Definitions and Terminology

This section describes some of the terms and expressions commonly used in this dissertation. Some of the words and phrases are used synonymously also. Such terms and expressions have been defined in the following section so as to minimize ambiguity associated with the use of the terms in the dissertation.

**Vocational education** and **vocational education and training (VET)** have been used interchangeably in the dissertation. As defined by the NCVER, Australia, "vocational education provides people with occupational or work-related knowledge and skills. VET also includes programs which provide the basis for subsequent vocational programs. Alternative terms used internationally include technical and vocational education and training (TVET); vocational and technical education and training (VTET); technical and vocational education (TVE); vocational and technical education (VTE); further education and training (FET); and career and technical education (CTE)." (<http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/glossary>) (Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/>).

**Developing countries** is a term often used to describe “a nation with a low level of material well being. Despite this definition, the levels of development may vary, with some developing countries having higher average standards of living” (Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/>). The countries in south-Asia are generally categorized as developing countries.

Countries other than developing countries may be assumed to be **developed countries**.

**Efficiency of the vocational training system** is reflected in the optimal utilization of resources, including the financial resources, available to it. For comparative purposes, the efficiency of a training system may be denoted by the cost of training incurred per trainee. The terms **internal efficiency** and **efficiency** are generally used interchangeably.

**Effectiveness** of the training system reflects the outcome of the training programs in terms of its success in meeting the industry demand. If the trainees of a training program are able to secure more employment on completion of the training program relative to trainees of another training program, the former would be considered more effective.

**Labour market information** is the “description of the interaction between occupations and employers. It is information that describes and interprets how a labor market is functioning, and identifies available labor resources and employment opportunities” (ERIC Digests: <http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9211/labor.htm>). The labour force survey periodically carried out by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, for instance, is a rich source of labour market information.

**Minimum wage** is “the lowest wage that an employer is allowed to pay; determined by contract or by law” (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/minimum+wage>)

A **case study** can be described as in-depth study of organization in a field setting using a variety of techniques to gain insights into the aspects of the organization under investigation (Yin 2003, Robson 2002).

### **1.11 Dissertation Structure**

The chapter structure of the dissertation is as follows:

#### **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

This chapter has presented an overall introduction to this research. It has described the background of the research and its aims, objectives and the research questions. It has also described the structure of the dissertation.

#### **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

A review of the literature concerning the concept of social justice, access and equity in education, including vocational education, and the education market model is presented to position this dissertation in the educational context. The chapter details the way in which the literature has informed this research.

#### **Chapter 3 – Framing the Inquiry**

This chapter describes the context in which the planning and delivery of vocational education and training programs is undertaken in Bangladesh. The infrastructure available for vocational education and training is also described in the chapter.

#### **Chapter 4 – Research Methodology**

This chapter documents how the research was undertaken. The chapter provides a rationale for using the qualitative approach and for adoption of the case study approach in the research. The techniques for data collection and analysis are discussed. Details of ethical considerations in the research are also explored.

## **Chapter 5 – Findings and Discussion of Results**

An analysis of the data is documented in this chapter along with its links to Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. Findings based on the data are considered in this chapter.

## **Chapter 6 – Conclusions, Guidelines and Further Research**

The chapter draws together the research, literature and the findings to provide a set of guidelines aimed at enhancing access and equity at the training centre level.

## **Chapter 2**

# **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This research investigates the access and equity issues which are manifested at a Technical Training Centre in Dhaka through the perceptions of the three primary stakeholders of the TTC- the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, the TTC management, and the students of the TTC. This chapter reviews the literature on access and equity concerns in education, including vocational education and training, with a view to contextualize this research in the broader framework of research undertaken in the field of education and training. The review of the literature is aimed at exploring the changing nature of vocational education and training system in the recent years, especially so far as addressing access and equity related issues are concerned. This review also assists in identifying factors which have been noted by previous researchers as having an impact on access and equity concerns at the training centre level, either in a positive manner or in a negative manner so as to inform the outcome of this research.

A preliminary review of the literature reveals that while substantial research has been undertaken on access and equity in higher education, the research findings in respect of vocational education and training system in a developing country context is relatively less documented. Furthermore, the preliminary review of the literature indicated that although multilateral organizations like the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank have looked into various facets of the vocational education and training system (see, for instance, ILO 2008, UNESCO 2007, Dahlman, Zeng & Wang 2007), these studies generally tend to be more in the nature of assessments based on multi-country comparisons of the vocational education and training systems.

Specifically, the availability of studies on vocational education and training system focusing on one single developing country is somewhat limited. In the circumstances, the literature reviewed in this chapter on vocational education and training is reflective more of the research undertaken in developed countries, and those undertaken by the multi-lateral organizations, some of which, no doubt, can be classified as seminal works.

## **2.2 Vocational Education in the Education System**

Vocational education and training is generally seen as one of the important elements in the education system. The debate on general and vocational education on the grounds of respective costs and benefits notwithstanding, the importance of vocational education arises from its contribution in making available a skilled, and a more productive work force, which is essential for the growth and development of an economy (ILO 2008, Tilak 2002). Vocational education now is an integral part of the education system in many countries (Tilak 2002). Over the years, this integration between the general education and vocational education has become almost organic so that a review of the education system generally includes the review of the vocational system as well (see, Ministry of Education 2004). Accordingly, provision of funds is also made appropriately for the VET system to enable the vocational education and training system to respond better to the needs of the stakeholders.

Given the importance of the stakeholders in the outcome of the vocational education and training system, it is useful to consider the perceptions of the stakeholders on different facets of the vocational education and training system, and the situation which actually exists at the ground level in the training centres so far as those facets are concerned. The literature reviewed in this chapter investigates the rationale for providing for vocational education and training system by the policy planners, and the outcome of the system in different settings. This is intended to be helpful in providing for a basis for assessing the status of access and equity in a technical training centre in Dhaka, the subject matter of this research.

Secondary education in different forms, including vocational education, is gaining increasing attention, and this is also the case in developing countries (ILO 2008, Tilak 2002). There are two main reasons for this. The first is the increasing rate of universalisation of primary education which has resulted in a much larger number of students seeking admission at the secondary stages. The second factor contributing to such a situation is the perception that increasing pace of globalization can open the door to employment opportunities, but only for those who possess appropriate education and training (ILO 2008). In the circumstances, the increasing pace of globalization is seen as an opportunity by the youth and the older workers, particularly those who have suitable skills. The situation with regard to both these factors, as well as the impact of these factors on the enrolment situation in secondary education, is no different in Bangladesh (see, for instance, Ministry of Education 2004).

The process of globalization is a compelling reason for a much closer attention on the part of policy planners to the issues of competitiveness and productivity in the national economies. It is also seen that there is a growing awareness that knowledge and skills need to be upgraded on a continuous basis so as to keep pace with the changes in the economic and technological spheres (UNESCO 2002). In this changing scenario, the impact of skill acquisition is being viewed from the perspective of national economy as also the contribution that it can make beyond the national frontiers. This is manifest in the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and the ILO (International Labour Organization) joint recommendations on “technical and vocational education for the twenty first century” which stresses the importance of the technical vocational education and training not only for responding to the national objectives but also for “the regional, social and economic requirements of the present and the future” (UNESCO 2002: 13).

While the economic rationale is the predominant argument for the planning and implementation of education and training, the importance of attaining a certain level of general education as a preparation for going into the vocational education has not been

lost sight of by the educational policy planners. This is an important factor since the vocational curricula has to cater for the soft skills also that go with the technical skills imparted, and unless the students possess some general education the transfer of knowledge cannot be done effectively (see, for instance, Dahlman, Zeng & Wang 2007). The vocational education and training system in catering to students with different level of competencies aims to harness the wider range of talents that the community possesses, and not merely those possessed by its upper strata, both in economic terms and in terms of level of competencies. This reflects the recognition that vocational education and training acts one of the important instruments for promoting social justice.

### **2.3 Social Justice and Access and Equity in Education**

Access and equity in educational settings are concepts which are closely related to social justice. The notion of social justice as understood in the current literature is explored in this section.

#### **2.3.1 Concept of Social Justice**

The emphasis on importance of removal of inequalities with a view to promoting social justice is not a recent phenomenon. As early as in the fifth century BC, Plato had pointed out the threat arising out of extreme inequality emphasizing that extreme poverty and excessive inequality are ‘productive of great evil’ (cited in UNDP 2005: 51). It is noted that the ILO in its annual general conference held in Philadelphia in 1946 had unequivocally stressed, and what is now more commonly known as the Declaration of Philadelphia, that ‘poverty anywhere constitutes threat to prosperity everywhere’. This has also been enshrined in the constitution of the ILO. The Declaration demonstrates that the criticality of eradication of inequality not only in achieving optimum results in terms of human development but also in preventing the pernicious effects arising out of inequality in the society in general, has been recognized for a long time now. The empirical evidence in support of this proposition is not far to seek. For instance, a UNDP (2005) study shows that the data from a large number of countries indicate that the



poorest 20 per cent of the population lag behind the others in terms of various indicators of progress, a clear sign of fruits of unequal distribution of resources.

As noted above, the UNDP (2005) supports addressing inequality from the social justice perspective. The above UNDP report points out that all religions advocate looking after the needs of the deprived and although some level of inequality is considered acceptable, extreme inequality is reflective of a social order which needs to be addressed. There are other arguments for eradication of inequality in the society which reinforce the social justice argument (UNDP 2005). There is the economic argument which justifies addressing inequality as a means to paying more attention to the needs of the poor even if it results in lowering the overall rate of growth of the economy. The corollary is equally valid in that unless efforts are made to address inequality, and thereby empowering a much larger population of the society, the growth of the economy cannot be optimal. The section of the population which does not have equal access to resources and opportunities, including opportunities for education and training, cannot contribute effectively towards the nation's economic and social growth.

Inequality needs to be addressed for 'political' reasons as well (see, Tilak 2002). Persons who have unequal access to resources and opportunities cannot have a strong political voice and those who do not have strong political voice are likely to have lesser capacity to fight their disadvantages. Inequality, thus, adversely affects the political system. Finally, since removal of inequality along with the removal of poverty is seen as one of the important goals of public policy, existence of too much disparity in the society can be reflective of policy failure. Thus, there exist sufficient justification for removal of inequality and promotion of social justice.

While there seems to be an agreement that from the perspective of social justice inequalities have to be redressed, the identification of what constitutes social justice is not that straightforward (see, Sen 2008, Beilharz 1989). Social justice means a range of different things to different people. The combination of the words 'social' with the word 'justice' seems to be one reason for this situation. While justice has certain meanings in

the context of crime and punishment, its interpretation is potentially quite different when prefaced with the word social.

The (UK) Commission on Social Justice (UKCSJ) (1998) has identified certain elements which taken together contribute to social justice. The first of these is the notion of the equal worth of every citizen. According to UKCSJ, treating people equally implies, at a minimum, political and civil liberties, equal rights before the law, equal protection against arbitrary arrest. The second element relates to meeting the basic needs. As a practical implication of the notion that everyone is of equal worth, it is necessary that they should have access, at least, to what they basically need. This would imply, for instance, addressing their poverty concerns, their educational concerns and concerns relating to their health. The third element, according to the UKCSJ, relates to opportunities and life chances that are central to the personal freedom and autonomy of citizens. “Social justice requires that structures should be adapted and influenced in ways that can give more people a better chance in the first place” (UKCSJ 1998: 43-44). The final element identified by the UKCSJ is the notion of unjustified inequalities. That is, inequality *per se* is not unjust. This approach to social justice is reflected in the market model of the economy where certain inequalities are inherent in the system.

Rawls’ (1971) seminal work, *A Theory of Justice*, provides a basis for exploring the concept of justice. According to Rawls, justice connotes fairness in the distribution of resources. He defines the conception of justice “as providing in the first instance a standard whereby the distributive aspects of the basic structure of the society are to be assessed” (1971: 9). Rawls extends the scope of distributive justice even to non-material goods, to include “the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties” (1971: 7). He argues that no one has a right to something simply because it is the product of his/her talents. Rather, society has a right to redistribute that product in accordance with the demands of social justice. In short, the social justice involves two main elements: “liberty or individual freedom (to the extent that this is compatible with the freedoms of others); and the equal distribution of material and social

goods (except where an unequal distribution would contribute to the well-being of those who have unfavourable starting positions). (Gale 2000: 254)

The term justice has also been discussed by some researchers as a question of fairness in distribution, normally discussed in terms of equality, with the caveat to avoid too narrow a meaning being attributed to the term equality as a matter of individual rights (Connell 1993). Connell has stressed that “Individual equality is the condition, not the goal, of a just social order. The quality of our collective life is central to the argument.” (Connell 1993:16). In this discussion on quality of life and just social order there are two elements that need to be brought in; these are ‘domination’ and ‘oppression’. If the objective is attainment of social justice then concerns relating to domination and oppression need to be addressed (Young 1990).

These various understandings of social justice illustrate how important it is to recognize that the concept of social justice and equality are complex constructs. Although equality is seen as one of the more important aspects of social justice, “equality of what” becomes an important consideration (UKCSJ 1998: 40). A carefully thought-through answer to this question is important since, as noted above, certain circumstances may well justify unequal treatment, the rationale on which the notion of affirmative action is based. As observed by UKCSJ, “formal equalities have consequences. Perhaps the most basic question about the nature of social justice in a modern society is what those substantive consequences are” (1998: 41). These consequences may be in terms of meeting basic needs or, going further, in terms of opportunities and life chances, issues which are of vital importance, particularly for the participants in the vocational education system since for most of them securing employment on completion of the program is one of the immediate objectives of joining the vocational program.

### **2.3.2 Equality of Opportunity for Social Justice**

Since the instant research examines the access and equity concerns at a TTC level, it is appropriate to explore the concept of equality of opportunity in the educational context.

The emphasis on equality of opportunity in any environment, including in an educational setting, may not really be reflective of social justice since providing an opportunity by itself may not necessarily translate into ensuring social justice in all circumstances. As is evident, equality of opportunity in education and equality of opportunity for social justice do not connote the same thing. While justice in the common parlance implies due process and just results, equality of opportunity in education is concerned with the inputs and processes. In this connection it is pertinent to note that the 'demand' for education has gone beyond being only a means of promoting social justice. Presently, there seems to be growing recognition of education as a 'human right'. Documents and articles in the UNESCO website <http://portal.unesco.org/education/> makes this clear. According to the information made available in the UNESCO website, the right to education is one of the fundamental rights proclaimed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26). However, existence or otherwise of a legal framework which is expected to provide sustenance to this right is one of the main elements in determining the pace and modalities for ensuring enjoyment of this right by the populace. In Bangladesh the right to education has been indicated as a guiding principle in the constitution, and not as a fundamental right. In practical terms though the legal status of the right to education may not be a serious impediment in any effort in pushing for education and training for all assuming there is a political will, and the government together with non-government organizations and the civil society is prepared to continually strive for creating a supportive environment for achieving the objective of education for all.

In the present day situation, especially in the developing countries, the policy planners are seeking to establish an educational system which ensures effective participation of all those who are eligible, including the vulnerable and the excluded (see, Ministry of Education 2004). This is in consonance with the educational philosophy reflected in the social justice education, which is identified as an education committed to equity and social change. The key objectives of social justice education, social responsibility, student empowerment, equitable distribution of resources, resonate with the objectives of promoting equity and social change. According to some researchers, even if social justice education has been conceived in the context of fighting different forms of oppression in

the class rooms including those arising from disability, race, class and gender, the outcome in terms of empowerment and accessible education for all students do not suffer (see, Young 1990). In this context, vocational education programs may be seen as supporting national efforts in promoting social justice by making education more inclusive. Vocational education brings in its fold even those who are discouraged from pursuing the liberal arts stream of education due to variety of reasons, including their inability to cope with the requirement of ‘mastering’ theoretical constructs.

### **2.3.3 Education and Training for Social Justice**

Most of the literature reviewed sees education and training as a vehicle for promoting social justice although the pathway for doing so varies depending upon the notion of social justice, and the stress on different facets of social justice laid by the concerned researcher. However, some researchers find inherent contradiction in provision of education and training and promotion of social justice. This contradiction stems from the fact that while education and training is seen as an instrument for addressing concerns relating to economic growth and social stability, and as a measure for addressing social exclusion, it also has the potential to create tumult in the society due to the fact that the beneficiaries of the system are not equally endowed and this difference in individual endowment is further accentuated by various disparities (see, Richardson & Teese 2008). It has also been argued that vocational schools may be seen to be creating a sense of second class citizenship among both teachers and taught and this impedes effective learning (Tilak 2002, Blaug 1973). In the circumstances, unless the negative perception associated with the vocational education and training, wherever it exists, is set right, the objective of social justice cannot be achieved.

The above discussion shows that the debate on the degree of usefulness of vocational education and training in economic terms in the current environment where the labour market appears to be favouring more and more highly skilled workers is not likely to be concluded any time soon. However, the utility of vocational education as a vehicle for promoting social justice, especially for the vulnerable and the excluded, is less contested. This is reflected in the attention that is continually bestowed on vocational education and

training, both in the developing and the developed world (Richardson & Teese 2008, Ministry of Education 2004, ILO 1998).

#### **2.3.4 Credentialism**

In any discussion of social justice in the context of education and training, the issue of ‘credentialism’ assumes significance (Brint 1998). This is particularly true in this day and age of ‘information societies’ and ‘global labour market’. Credentialism has been described as “the monopolization of access to the more rewarding jobs and economic opportunities by the holders of educational degrees and certificates” (Brint 1998: 176). Thus, students of the vocational education and training system except those who manage to join the tertiary education system because of special dispensations available to some of them, for instance, as in case of some of the students of the TTC being considered eligible to join polytechnics, may be disadvantaged on account of credentialism.

At the societal level, the opposition to credentialism arises on account of the fact that it gives “education a new weight in the production of economic inequality” (Connell 1993: 26). Furthermore, as a large proportion of students joining the vocational stream comprise students coming from relatively lower socio-economic status, the effect of credentialism impacts relatively severely on them as noted by Jonathan (1990):

...when a highly developed and diverse society is maintained by a credentialising system of education, the outcome for each individual has currency only in relation to the outcomes of individuals across that society. That being the case, when the prizes are necessarily unequal, to weight the scales in favour of the already relatively advantaged is to clearly introduce an added element of procedural injustice into a situation in which simple misfortune may indeed be unavoidable.

(Jonathan 1990: 122-23)

## **2.4 Equal Opportunity in Education**

It is evident from the literature reviewed that the issues of access and equity in education is receiving so much attention on account of the important role of the education and training in promoting a just and economically prosperous society (ILO 2008). Promotion of equity in educational opportunities is also being viewed as an instrument for promoting social equity, for maintaining international competitiveness and in creation of a tolerant society. This is particularly true for higher education (ILO 2008, ADB 2002, Ramsay et. al 1998).

The literature reviewed reveals the fact that large proportion of students does not make it to the higher education institutions. This situation was the reason behind the Australian government decision to consider promoting equity objectives in higher education as an integral part of institutional planning (see Ramsay et. al 1998). This particular approach to addressing the equity concerns in higher education has also since changed, a change which has been described by Ramsay et al. as a change from the deficit model to an institutional model in the following terms:

... the beginnings of a changing approach to the issue of disadvantage in relation to higher education with a shift from the deficit model, where the student is seen to be missing the requirements for entry and success at university, towards a more institutional model, where institutions are expected to cater more effectively for a diverse community.

(Ramsay et al. 1998: 16).

In this alternative approach it is the responsibility of the educational institutions to ensure that equity strategies are not only implemented but also done so in a manner which ensures that the results of the steps taken are there for others to see. In this context, the reporting system in the educational institutions on the outcomes has implications since any deficiency in implementation of the requisite strategies or in the achievement of the expected outcomes may need to be satisfactorily explained to the concerned authorities.

This review of literature has also revealed that access and equity issues are not seen as necessarily two separate sets of concerns. More often than not, addressing equity concerns is also expected to take care of the access issues since access related concerns are seen to be subsumed under the equity concerns (see for instance, Lee 2002). This has resulted in a situation wherein the equity issues become the primary focus. The primacy accorded to equity concerns has resulted in deeper exploration of its cause and effects and of the strategies necessary to address the identified issues. These include the access-related issues which impact as equity issues in the education system.

The equity concerns in education can arise from different circumstances. It would be useful to look in to these circumstances so as to have a better appreciation of the equity concerns in the educational context. Lee (2002) has categorized equity concerns in education under four broad heads: gender-related equity, income-related equity, region-related equity, and socio-cultural-related equity. Gender-related equity concerns disadvantages faced by women in accessing education. Income-related equity concerns disadvantages in education which arise as a consequence of poor income. Region-based equity concerns people who live in disadvantaged locations; these may be the rural areas or the economically backward areas (even in the urban areas). And finally, the socio-cultural-based equity concerns the socio-culturally disadvantaged groups, for example the minority groups. Lee (2002) believes that improving access and equity in education requires political will and commitment. A clear endorsement of Lee's observations may be seen in the measures expressly initiated by the national authorities for addressing access and equity concerns for the disadvantaged groups like the ethnic or religious minorities so as to enhance their life chances.

In dealing with the equity issues, the students from low socio-economic status are one of the priority groups which merit special attention. One of the factors which necessitate particular attention to this group lies in the heterogeneity of the group. For instance, although rural and isolated areas may be a source of larger number of such students ((Ramsay et. al 1998), the requirements to address access and equity concerns for each of



the sub set under one group may be different and hence no remedy conforming to ‘one size fits all’ can then be expected to deliver satisfactory outcomes.

The vocational education has been recognized as more effective investment and therefore deserving of more support (Tilak 2002, Marks 1999). This is seen to be providing one of the more important justifications for the national authorities to continue investing in, and even expand, facilities for vocational education which allows bringing in an increasing number of students under the education and training system, including those from the poorer socio-economic background. The disadvantaged and the vulnerable groups, however, may find it more difficult to make use of the available opportunities in vocational education system relative to those who come with a richer cultural capital notwithstanding the perception that vocational education is meant for those who are less academically gifted and are unable to pursue higher education (Tilak 2002, Marks 1999). The resultant situation may have equity dimensions on two planes. Firstly, from the equity perspective, the life chances of those who enter the vocational stream relative to those who join the liberal arts education, assuming that the option of joining either of the stream is available and there are no circumstances, explicit or implicit, impeding exercise of that option, become an issue. Secondly, the type of vocational course one enters into, and the manner of doing so, is also an issue which may have an equity dimension. For instance, some of the vocational courses may be in greater demand in view of their higher perceived potential for securing employment. If a candidate is deprived of admission in such a course because of a process followed which is not transparent, and the student is instead offered a place in a training program which is viewed as one with lesser employment potential, then the equity concerns are called into question.

The aspects of access and equality of opportunities and life chances are important considerations for students of the vocational education stream. As noted above, the usual expectation of a student of a vocational education institution is that s/he will obtain ‘some’ employment immediately on completion of the training program, and “having a job, at least as the world is now, is closely connected with self-respect and hence with equality of citizens” (UKCSJ 1998: 43). Moreover, since “tackling unemployment is, of

course, central to the realization of social justice” (UKCSJ 1998: 43) the processes that concerns a student’s access into and opportunities within a vocational education institution merit careful scrutiny.

Vocational education in most of the countries has become a part of the national strategies to enhance learning outcomes of the young population and there is a conscientious effort to increase the number of students who are able to access these programs (see, for instance, Ministry of Education 2004). Such a measure is seen to provide the advantage of better utilization of available human resources with reduced mismatch between the skills demanded by the labour market and those available to meet such demands. The aim is also to secure greater employment opportunities for those who participate in the vocational training programs. The fact that the vocational education provides an alternative choice to pursue for students not inclined or able to continue with general education stream helps such students to remain longer in the education system (Tilak 2002).

Although there exists a labour market for early school leavers in the sense that that some job opportunities may be available for such persons, especially in developing countries where some of the employers may see this as a cost-saving arrangement, there is evidence to confirm the economic loss that is faced by students who leave the education system early. The data collected by the US Bureau of Labour Statistics (2006) revealed a positive correlation between education and earnings. And this correlation was valid not only for degree or diploma holders, it was valid even for those who had undergone apprenticeships and other training such as machinist and electrician (US Bureau of Labour Statistics 2006).

In dealing with access and equity issues in education, the approach generally is to pay special attention to the needs of groups which are identified as disadvantaged and the vulnerable. These may include women, persons in remote areas, ethnic minorities, the excluded and the vulnerable (Ministry of Education 2004). As noted above, there may be variations even within each of these groups and therefore it may not be in order to treat

any one such category as a homogenous group. Writing primarily in the context of schooling, Connell (1993) has pointed to the persistence of the false assumption that while educational inequality is a problem for a disadvantaged minority, the remaining population is not affected. This ignores the existence of different levels of disadvantage that need to be addressed and relies on the assumption that the poorest groups in society are culturally different from the more affluent, even though much evidence points to the contrary.

In this context, Connell (1993) proposes the concept of 'curricular justice' which has three principles. The first is the interests of the least advantaged - economic issues, for example, should be viewed from the perspective of the disadvantaged, not that of the advantaged; the second is the notion of participation and common schooling including "ungraded and cooperative learning practices" (p.46); and, the third concerns the historical production of equality, that is, 'equality' is not static - it is always being produced whether in greater or lesser degrees. The implication of the notion of the curricular justice is that while it may be difficult to ensure equity at all stages in society at all points in time, efforts should be made to reduce the inequity and the greater the success achieved in that regard, the better will be the outcome for the society.

But does the continuance of vocational education stream itself become an equity issue in the sphere of planning and delivery of education? Tracking, or grouping students with similar abilities or interests, is considered by some to be one of the strategies to improve students' performance in schools and, at the same time, to promote equity. Some of the well-recognized tracks include ability grouping, the general education or vocational education track, and the basic and the honours track. The question that needs to be explored is how effective is tracking in promoting equity in education.

One of the commonly used arguments in support of ability-based tracking is that it benefits both the students and the teachers. When students with similar abilities and interests are grouped, the motivation for learning is enhanced. The students in lower tracks are also expected to benefit since they suffer less stress in trying to cope with the

‘better’ students. Brint (1998) supports the view that tracking affects life-chances and that the differences between the tracks that are considered high-prestige vis-à-vis those considered to be of ‘low-prestige’, may contribute to widening social inequality:

Early branching systems, rigid ability grouping in secondary schools, and vocational tracks in secondary and higher education, are among the most likely to reinforce and accentuate social inequalities

(Brint 1998: 237)

The literature reviewed also point to the importance of paying serious attention to socio-cultural issues in addressing access and equity concerns in vocational education and training. For instance, in her research undertaken in Bangladesh, Rahman (2005) concludes that males have mainly benefited from the increase in employment opportunities. This, according to Rahman’s findings is attributed to the fact that the employers tend to prefer males even when suitable female workers are available and even if women were willing to work for lower wages. Such an attitude was attributed to the “traditions and values prevailing in Bangladesh society (which) support such practices” (Rahman 2005: 32). Efforts directed towards modifying such traditions and values are being made so as to ensure greater participation of females in the vocational education and training programs with positive outcomes from the access and equity perspective.

## **2.5 The Education Market Model**

Efforts aimed at enhancing access to vocational education and training can have limited impact unless the stakeholders have a choice in the matter. This leads in to the domain of the education market model, an aspect which is of relevance to this research investigation.

One of the more widely accepted arguments which support existence of an education market model, including the one that covers vocational education, is that it serves the needs of a diverse client base. Educational attainment is often recognized as the route for upward social mobility, especially for those considered “disadvantaged”. As Brint (1998:

202) succinctly puts it, “all other factors being equal, it is more important to have high-level education credentials than to have good looks or charming personality”. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the concept of an education market appears to be such an attraction to many, at least in the first flush. The situation described by Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe (1995) reflects what seems to be the commonly held perception in this regard:

If we have faith in the market and its order, we also know (that is, supposed to believe) that things will turn out all right in the end, even if there is a degree of creative destruction along the way. The forces of the market will win out, the good will survive, the weak will go to the wall, and every one will be better off than before (if not equally well off – an absence of inequality in the market place means an absence of striving and competition). (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe 1995: 1)

A long-held view that supports the market model in education is informed by the general perception that the public education system, by and large, is less effective as compared to the education system which is run by private enterprise. In this perspective, the bureaucratic approach followed in public schools has not been able to contribute to creating an environment conducive for learning. The public education systems are generally seen to be not providing parents with choices that would ensure that their children’s needs are best met. This feeling has persisted over time. More than a decade ago, Chubb & Moe (1990), for example, had made a strong case in support of education markets, the principle arguments being that the owners of private schools had a strong motivation to be responsive to the needs of parents and their wards, that such a system provided users with choice, and that the process ensured that only the schools that are preferred by parents/students survive.

However, there are others who are opposed to the concept of education markets as a vehicle for promoting efficiency and equity. Ranson (1993: 334) finds the concept of education markets “intrinsically flawed as a vehicle for improving educational opportunities: it can only radically contract them”. Education markets, according to

Ranson, reinforce the class-divide in society. Markets assume free choice and choice in the true sense may not be available to all. Similarly, resources are necessary for ensuring effective choice, which may not be available to all. Ranson's concern is that "Under the guise of neutrality, the institution of the market actively confirms and reinforces the pre-existing social class and order of wealth and privilege. (1993: 337)

Somewhat similar views are held by Davies, Williams & Webb (1997). They refer to the "silences and the hidden agenda" (1997: 34) of an ideal market blueprint and point to the varying capacity of members of a stratified society in accessing the available educational opportunities in an education market:

The notion of the student both as educational consumer and investor needs careful unpackaging. There are social class, age and gender elements implicit within these labels which confer differential power. The poor may have neither the material nor cultural capital available to study. (Davies, Williams & Webb 1997: 34)

Education market is also seen as antithesis to social justice (Jonathan 1990) and therefore impacts equity related concerns. Jonathan argues against the introduction of an internal market into the public education system on account of the fact that increased opportunities for some entail decreased opportunities for others. According to Jonathan (1990), the fact that market inefficiencies militate not only against social justice but also against economic efficiency, should be a matter of concern to all. The criticism of an education market is also leveled against what is seen as its inability to plan and implement programs in a comprehensive manner. The market mechanism connotes 'riding the tide', every one trying to do what is currently in vogue and, therefore, most marketable. Henry & Taylor (1995) found this tendency in the education market to be an impediment to rational planning in the higher education system:

Certainly the market logic driving education reform generally has prevented this kind of rational planning and delivery occurring at the university level where the

tendency now is for all institutions to try to offer every thing (Henry & Taylor 1995: 96)

This view indicates that such a situation cannot be seen to be promoting access and equity in the education system.

The notion of 'wider choice', one of the expected outcomes of an education market, has also come under attack from a number of researchers. As reported by Oakes (1985) if the school is restricting access to certain types of education for some students, something that is unavoidable under the market mechanism, then the school cannot be said to be providing equal education or even equal opportunity. According to Angus (1992), such an arrangement favours the higher income families and fosters racial, ethnic and social class differences. In this situation, the much talked about wider choice will be available to the affluent but not to the less-privileged. A similar point is made Robert Reich, the former US Labour Secretary under Clinton Administration. According to Reich (2004), this difference in capacity in accessing the available facilities that exists between the affluent and the poor pervades all levels, from early childhood education to higher education, and even to job trainings, and causes inequality in the society to grow. Reich believes that such a situation carries with it the potentially damaging consequences and therefore needs to be seriously addressed.

The implications of a situation with visible signs of inequality in opportunities are much graver when viewed in this context of the notion of 'legitimation of inequality' developed by Bowles and Gintis (1976). According to Bowles and Gintis, the school relationships of students imitate their social relationships and students accept the unequal features of society as natural. For instance, while students at the top of the social strata view elite positions as their due, students at the bottom see limited futures for themselves in society. This argument, which also follows the contours of the social reproduction theory of inequality (see, for instance, Brint 1998), is explained by Oakes as follows:

Students are trained to view as legitimate the principles that govern the existing social order (the unequal distribution of power and material goods) and to see themselves as largely responsible for their own places in it.

(Oakes 1985: 144-45)

Oakes (1985) argues that one of the crucial questions to be addressed is which students choose to enroll in the courses they take and, if there is a choice available, to what extent that is a genuine choice. Are the choices made on the basis of complete and thorough information? If, instead of the parents and students making the choice, it is the school that makes the choice, could it be said that a choice was available? A related issue is the flexibility available to students in switching courses. If students are not allowed to move from one program to another, obviously such programs cannot be considered to be promoting choice.

While in her appraisal of equity issues Oakes (1985) treats choices made by students and their parents on par, the findings of Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe (1995) are more nuanced. They argue that not all parents are able to exercise choices, when available, judiciously and/or in the best interests of their wards. In terms of parental inclination to engage with the market and in their capacity to exploit the market, parents can be categorized as privileged/skilled choosers, semi-skilled choosers, and disconnected choosers. Only the privileged/skilled choosers, by virtue of their educational background, are in a position to evaluate what is on offer and to seek out the best. Semi-skilled choosers, on the other hand, though inclined to engage with the market do not have appropriate skills to exploit this market and to maximize their children's advantage. The third category of disconnected choosers, tend not to be inclined to participate.

As is the case for other educational institutions, parents' roles in making choices can be expected to be important for students of vocational institutions as well. And, in this case too, the impact is likely to vary depending upon the category to which the parents belong in terms of the categorization developed by Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe (1995). Only a 'privileged/skilled' parent may be in a position to consider aspects like reputation of the institution and that of the different programs offered by it, duration of specific programs



and its attendant financial implications, and relevance of the training imparted in the context of their personal expectations before deciding on a particular institution, or on a specific program of that institution, for his/her ward. It is not difficult to imagine that ‘semi-skilled’ and ‘disconnected’ parents may find it difficult to weigh all these aspects appropriately before making a decision. Thus, the latter categories of parents will not be able to exercise the choice effectively even when a choice is available.

Viewed in the above context, it is not surprising that children from higher income families outnumber those from the lower income families in private schools although the assumption here is that private schools are ‘better’ than public schools, an assumption which may not always be true. Yet, the overall impact of this situation in a long-term perspective may mean the public schools receiving a much larger proportion of students who are relatively less academically inclined.

The education market model, including in vocational education, exists in developing countries also. As expected in a market situation, the education market flourishes where consumers, who are willing to pay for the product/services, are available. The education markets in developing countries are accordingly more visible in bigger cities and towns. The education market, including the vocational education market, is, however, gradually finding its place in other locations too in view of the gradual rise in disposable income of the populace.

The inference that can be drawn from the above review on the education market model is that it may not be wise to leave the education system to follow the market model totally bereft of any monitoring and intervention by the public authorities. As noted by Corry (1998), there is a need for the state to undertake mediation of at least some degree in the education market, as and when considered necessary.

## **2.6 Access and Equity in Vocational Education and Training**

As noted earlier, since tackling employment is important to the realization of social justice, it may not be possible to aim at achievement of social justice in any substantive

manner in circumstances where employment is a concern. The declining trend in employment generation globally was forecast by ILO (1998) more than a decade ago.

...the promotion of full, productive and freely chosen employment is the most effective means of ensuring sustainable and equitable growth at both the national and the global level. Yet given the persistently high levels of unemployment, there has been a growing anxiety that the goal of full employment has become elusive while the rapid pace of globalization and technological advance appears to further disrupt job creation.

(ILO 1998: v).

The rapid pace of technological changes coupled with the impact of globalization on national economies have brought about major changes in the world of work and, thus, on employment. Broadly, these changes in the workplace are of three types (UKCSJ 1998). First, business enterprises are doing away with the middle-management tier, especially in functions relating to personnel, finance and corporate planning. Secondly, they are ‘downsizing’, or doing more with less. Enterprises are striving for enhanced productivity with a reduced workforce. And finally, the culture of “networking, i.e. joining chains of cooperation and coordination to maximize efficiencies of organization” (UKCSJ 1998: 21) is being promoted. The situation clearly points to the imperative of the need for acquisition of appropriate skills if securing employment is the objective.

The critical role of a high-quality educated and skilled labour force in meeting the challenges of full, productive, and decent employment, while at the same time increasing growth and competitiveness, has been emphasized by many (see, ILO 2008). Vocational education and training is recognized as one of the useful vehicles for promoting employability of the work force and, thus, in contributing towards promotion of equality in society. Since the link between vocational training and employment is strong and the labour market is one of the vital players in determining the nature and the quantum of skills required at any given point in time, the national authorities are striving to ensure a national training system that is capable of meeting the rapidly changing needs of the

labour market (ILO 1998). It has long been recognized that skill formation of people should no longer be treated as a stratified educational process, but should be planned as integral components within a progressive, relevant and performance objective led culture (Goodlet 1990).

While the extent to which the education and training system fails to prepare individuals to participate fully in the economy continues to be a matter of debate for the policy makers and scholars, there seems to be consensus that improvements are needed for ensuring efficiency and effectiveness of the system. This issue has been taken cognizance of both in developed and developing countries alike (Richardson & Teese 2008, Ministry of Education 2004). The following extract from a policy paper titled *Towards a Fairer Australia* which was formulated almost two decades back shows the basic approach followed by Australia in the matter:

The government's fundamental objective is to develop a fairer, more prosperous and more just society in which every Australian receives a share of the growing wealth. The four key elements of a just society are: equity in the distribution of economic resources; equality of civil, legal and industrial rights; fair and equal access to essential services such as housing, health and education; and the opportunity for participation by all in personal development, community life and decision making. (1988: overview)

As noted above, acquiring a vocational qualification in some cases is also one of the pathways for accessing higher education and, to that extent, goes further in promoting equity in the society by supporting efforts aimed at upward mobility of individuals. Support for this route to higher education, however, has received a mixed response. While some favour this approach there are others who are opposed to it. Davies, Williams & Webb (1997) point out that while on one hand the 1986 (UK) White Paper emphasized that there should be recognition of the National Vocational Qualification at appropriate levels in entry procedures and regulations for degree courses and for entry to the professions, a number of critics viewed this as a move aimed at undermining

academic merit. One of the factors that may account for this situation, according to the Davies et al. (1997) is that the mass system (in this case, likely to be resulting from unregulated entry in to the higher education system through the vocational route) is perceived to undermine the integrity, value and excellence of the output; “mass production cannot be quality production” (Davies, Williams & Webb 1997: 31).

### **2.6.1 Barriers in Accessing Vocational Education and Training**

It will be useful to examine the barriers that may exist in accessing vocational education and training so that while considering strategies for enhancing access and equity at a TTC level, the identified concerns may be appropriately addressed

There are a number of research studies which have examined the barriers in vocational education in Australia (see, for instance, Miralles 2004, Anderson 1998). Anderson (1998: 66-67) in his research findings has highlighted a number of barriers to vocational (TAFE) training which were identified by the concerned students themselves. In summary, these barriers include:

- a. proliferation and escalation of fees and charges that, combined with a lack of adequate financial support (e.g. subsidies, loans), disadvantages those in financial need;
- b. competency-based training that, due to its emphasis on skills valued in the (segregated) workplace, tends to exclude women and disadvantaged groups from equitable participation in learning processes;
- c. flexible delivery and self-paced learning that tend to favour educationally advantaged students;
- d. increasing emphasis on work-based learning that ignores the needs of the unemployed and reduces access to support services for disadvantaged learners in the workplace;
- e. reductions in the range, level and quality of student services in TAFE that deprive disadvantaged students of access to essential education and social support; and

- f. linguistic and financial barriers associated with RPL (recognition of prior learning) that discriminates against particular groups such as students from non-English speaking backgrounds, students with low literacy levels, and the unemployed.

Some of the barriers listed above were still seen to persist as indicated in the research findings of Miralles (2004) which was carried out in Australia. These include the cost consideration, linguistic impediments, absence of a clearer understanding regarding the competencies needed for completing of the program and the potential for ‘immediate’ employment, and the cultural, language and settlement issues. Miralles (2004) stresses the choice of proper mode of information channel in providing information on the range of programs, providers, and pathways in enhancing access to vocational education institutions. She also highlights the importance of using a combination of traditional and community media, taking cognizance of the local context, and the use of the traditional print and radio media for enhancing access to vocational education (p. 39).

As noted by Miralles (2004), even within the same disadvantaged group, different subsets may suffer from different disadvantages in terms of equity and access. It is therefore essential to keep that distinction in view while attempting to provide the requisite relief. Existence of an effective system of dissemination of information which ensures that appropriate and relevant information regarding the training programs are available to the target group can be useful to the aspiring applicants with different disadvantages in determining their choices. An information system which explains in some details as to what the training program entails in terms of inputs required from the students, both financial and academic, and the potential utility of the study program over a period of time, may be useful to the aspiring students who may be harbouring unrealistic expectations about the training program and its potential outcomes.

The barriers described above point in general to the barriers faced in accessing education and training by the vulnerable groups of the society, irrespective of their location. In the case of Bangladesh, almost the same concerns have been identified for initiating

necessary remedial measures as evident from the recommendations of the NEC (Ministry of Education 2004). More specifically, some of the difficulties faced by the women in Bangladesh in securing employment, and accessing vocational training program have been indicated by Rahman (2005). Access to schooling and skill development institutions is one of the major barriers faced by Bangladeshi women as noted by Rahman. According to Rahman (2005), while the proportion of female students is gradually increasing in educational institutions, the issue is not merely in terms of securing admission but also the quality of education that is imparted. The types of skills acquired by these women in the training institutions is also a matter of concern since the women tend to join more of the courses which conform to the stereotypical description of women in developing societies. For instance, a much larger number of women join the dress making and food processing courses which are basically women's skills related to domestic work. This, according to Rahman (2005), is also reflective of the socio-cultural setting of the society in which men play a pre-dominant role. The gender concerns such as these which impact on access and equity related issues in TTCs are considered in detail in the following section.

## **2.7 Gender Concerns**

As seen in the above section, while women may face the same disadvantages as men in accessing vocational training, there may be other impediments which are faced only by women and which are attributable to the gender dimensions.

Women, who in some countries form more than 50 per cent of the population, have traditionally been considered a disadvantaged group so far as their access to, and utilization of, available employment and training opportunities are concerned. The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in 1995 recommended equality of access in education for women. Although more than a decade has elapsed since then, the following extract from the resolution of the conference bears reiteration:

Education is a human right and essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys, and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications are necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to empowering women to participate in decision-making in society. Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic returns, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable. (United Nations 1996: 46-47)

As noted in the case of Bangladesh (Rahman 2005), while women's participation in the labour force has been increasing in many countries, it is the quality of their jobs that has been a matter of concern. These jobs have been at the lower ends of the labour market, with low skill-content and in poor working conditions. According to Kenway and Willis (1995), this is attributable partially to the fact that women are normally not provided enough opportunities to undergo training. So far as Bangladesh is concerned, the increased employment opportunities in the economy do not automatically translate into increased jobs for women (Rahman 2005). Apart from lower levels of skills possessed by the women which is reflective of the challenges that the women have to continually face, the situation is also reflective of an attitudinal issue. The employers prefer male workers to female workers and in this preference productivity level of the workers, apparently, is of not much consequence (Rahman 2005).

In assessing the employment situation, it is useful to recognize that the notion of training is central in the definition of work as 'skilled' or 'unskilled'. The nature and extent of the training associated with the work is often used as criterion for judging the skill level of both the work, and the worker. Measured against this criterion, women in developing economies are especially disadvantaged because of the limited opportunities available to them for training. The situation does not appear to be much different even in developed

countries. Although dated, the following statistics provided by Taylor & Henry (1994) in the Australian context are important pointers to the gravity of the situation.

In 1992 only 14.6% of apprentices in Australia were women, and of those 61% were training in hairdressing (Office of the Status of Women 1992:9). Even in the food trade group of occupations there were less than 9% of female apprentices in 1990 (Women's Bureau 1990). On the other hand, close to 70% of traineeships have gone to women though the majority of these have been in the clerical area. For example, in June 1990, 20,819 out of 44,428 traineeships taken up by women were in the clerical area (Women's Bureau 1990), reinforcing the concentration of women in a narrow range of occupations.

(Taylor & Henry 1994: 108-109)

The statistics cited by Butler & Ferrier (2006) present relatively more recent picture in which around two-thirds of women aged 15-64 are in the labour force and almost half of them are in part-time work, compared to OECD average of 26 per cent. According to these researchers, despite the increase in number of women studying in vocational education and training (VET) institutions, they are still located mainly in feminized study areas. Butler & Ferrier (2006) point to the danger of falling into a misplaced sense of complacency if the growing number of enrollment of females in VET is assumed to represent a situation in which women's concerns in the VET ceases to be a matter of serious concern. The situation in Bangladesh is similar to what has been described by Butler & Ferrier (2006). The analysis of Rahman (2005) indicates that young educated women are facing rising levels of unemployment. As discussed in earlier, apart from lack of appropriate vocational skills, the socio-cultural environment contributes to this kind of situation.

Given the large proportion of women in a country's population, any indifference to their concerns, including in the field of education and training, can only be at the cost of national development. In the circumstances, if the objective of policy planners is to ensure that social and economic development go hand in hand, then it is essential to



address access and equity concerns in education and training systems, paying particular attention to its gendered dimensions. This implies removing barriers to women's skill development so that they are able to contribute optimally to national development efforts as a part of the skilled workforce. What lends urgency to this task is the fact that education and training can provide a number of different mechanisms for overcoming the barriers of discrimination and occupational segregation that women face. As pointed out by the ILO (1998), education and training can serve as:

- a route to non-traditional jobs and out of low-paid female occupations;
- a means of competing on the basis of objective criteria for recruitment and promotion;
- a means of commanding higher earnings;
- a means of maintaining continuity of employment while meeting family responsibilities; and
- a form of protection against occupational downgrading of women returning to the labour market.

While efforts are continually being made to ensure increased access of women in to vocational programs, the data reveals that still much remains to be done. The challenge lies not only in ensuring larger enrolment of women in vocational programs but also to ensure that women gain access to different kinds of training programs, including those which are some times categorized as non-traditional trades.

It is pertinent to note that at times it may not appear to be easy to reconcile the imperative of promoting gender equity in the training context with the logic of economic rationality, especially if the objective of acquiring skills through vocational training is to secure employment. These two objectives may be pulling in opposite directions. The prevailing economic rationale assumes a 'level playing field' and, therefore, any additional costs, even those incurred on promoting gender equality in education and training, may be perceived as avoidable costs (Taylor & Henry 1994). Deliberate interventions are, therefore, required to be initiated for promoting women's access to training, especially

those which address these seemingly opposing concerns. However, the argument that removing barriers to women's skill development is important as part of any effort to build a competitive labour force of the future, should be able to provide a strong enough justification, if justification were needed. Affirmative action and properly planned and implemented equal opportunity programs in skills training can greatly facilitate increased participation of women in the vocational education and training programs. Special attention to the issues which may arise in dealing with women-sensitive issues assumes added significance in this context (Butler & Ferrier 2006).

## **2.8 Conclusion**

Educational researchers have made repeated forays in to the domain of access and equity concerns in education, especially so far as they relate to higher education where these concerns surface more prominently. This review has found that the work done in this sphere in respect of vocational education and training remains somewhat limited. More specifically, there are limited definitive literature sources that address the topic being researched, that is, access and equity at a training centre level, from a developing country perspective. In the Bangladesh context, the literature available on the subject seems to address the issues largely from the gender perspective. As a consequence, for the purpose of research it has been necessary to draw upon wider literature that has included both developing and developed countries.

The literature review provides a useful road-map for undertaking research in what appears to be a relatively less-frequented terrain of access and equity concerns at the training centre level. The review has demonstrated that

- the notion of social justice needs to be better appreciated in the broader context in considering the issues of access and equity in the education and training.
- promotion of equity is aimed at achieving social justice. Put simply, promotion of equity implies ensuring that the disadvantages suffered by the vulnerable and the excluded are appropriately addressed so that an environment is created which assists an improved quality of life for those affected. Ensuring access and equity

in making use of the available opportunities, including those in the field of education and training, is one of the important vehicles for achieving social justice. This is one of the reasons for substantive involvement of the governments, both in developed and developing countries alike, in promoting access and equity in education and training programs. If the expected outcomes are not being achieved, the factors impeding the process need looking into.

Drawing upon the available literature, the next phase in exploration of access and equity issues in vocational education and training may be conceived as the stage of exploring options for addressing the identified concerns which, in the larger perspective, impact upon social justice. Since, as the review reveals, the initiatives in this regard need to encompass many facets of the issue, the proposed interventions, necessarily, have to be targeted. The literature reviewed also indicates that a heightened awareness of the importance of promoting social justice and, consequently, promulgation of relevant rules and regulations, for instance, aimed at promoting access and equity in vocational education, by itself, may not be sufficient to create the necessary opportunities. Ensuring effective implementation of the relevant rules and regulations right up to the level of a training centre is important for the purpose. In line with the above view, the hypothesis at work in this research is that although there is recognition that vocational education is one of the vehicles for achieving the objectives of social justice, the current status of access and equity at the vocational training centre level provides room for improvement.

Finally, it is evident from the literature reviewed that any analysis that does not consider the gender dimensions of the issues under consideration loses much of its relevance. Research in the education sector, including those concerning vocational education, are no exception. The literature reviewed points to the hiatus between the stated objectives and achieved outcomes in addressing gender concerns in vocational education. Gender concerns, therefore, are an important aspect and merit careful attention in any research undertaking on access and equity in VET. The present research has been informed by the findings of the literature reviewed.

## **Chapter 3**

### **FRAMING THE INQUIRY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This research concerns the issues of access and equity in vocational education at the training centre level. For any meaningful review of the vocational education and training (VET) system, whether on its systemic aspect or on the aspects of its efficiency and effectiveness, it is necessary to anchor the study in context-specific moorings. An analysis of the VET system in an African setting, for instance, if carried out in the light of conditions prevailing in one of the Nordic countries, is not likely to prove very useful. Each such research has to have a country-specific context to be able to serve any useful purpose.

As is evident from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, one of the important objectives of vocational education and training is seen to be enhancing employability of those who participate in these programs (ILO 2008). On this basis, it is useful to have an overview of the Bangladesh labour market, which is expected to provide critical inputs to the policy planners in planning and implementation of vocational training programs. Given the centrality of work (employment) in planning and implementation of vocational training programs, this chapter begins with an elaboration of the concept of ‘decent work’, a concept propounded by the ILO (2004). This is followed by a review of the labour market in Bangladesh and its implications for the vocational education and training system. The chapter ends with a description of the infrastructure available in the country for planning and delivery of vocational training programs so as to facilitate a better appreciation of the rationale for the research and the usefulness of its findings.

## **3.2 Work and Work Skills**

The development of skills of the national human resource is one of the priorities of the policy planners in all countries, both developed and developing. This has become a more pressing issue when the countries are trying to develop strategies for optimizing the multifaceted impact of globalization at the country level (ILO 2004). Human resource development policies aimed at enhancing skill levels of the workforce for the long-term and sustained growth and development of the national economy in this era of intensely competitive environment brought about by globalization is being recognized as one of the major issues by the stakeholders of the training system. Singapore, for instance, provides one of the examples of a country where education and skills of the workforce has been instrumental in generating substantial national wealth (Islam 2003).

### **3.2.1 Decent Work**

As seen in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, while the issue of employability is critical in the context of education and training, the employability aspect has to be viewed within the notion of decent work, as opposed to any type of work (ILO 2002). The International Labour Organization (ILO), which supports its tripartite constituents, i.e., governments, employers, and workers, in promoting decent work – not just any work – elaborates the notion of the decent work in following terms:

It (decent work) is about personal capacity to compete in the market, to keep up to date with new technological skills and stay healthy. It is about developing business skills and receiving a fair share of the wealth they have helped to create and not to be the victim of discrimination. It is about getting a voice in the workplace and the community. In the most extreme situations, it is about graduating from subsistence to living. For many, it is the basic way of escaping poverty. For many others, it is about achieving personal ambitions in daily life and expressing solidarity with others. And, everywhere and for everyone, *decent work* is a way of ensuring human dignity, which for

many sectors of the population is not at present the case  
(emphasis in original).

(ILO 2002: 19)

A decent work, according to ILO (2002), is freely-chosen, productive and remunerative job in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity. This can be achieved through four inter-related strategic objectives of promotion of employment, promotion of fundamental rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue, amongst the stake holders. Decent work, therefore, implies at the very basic level certain conditions which should form the basis for sustaining employment.

The decent work is, therefore, not only about income generation; it also encompasses dignity and security at work place. It implies the freedom to choose an employment (for instance, freely chosen work as opposed to forced labour), enjoyment of basic rights at work including absence of discrimination, and availability of social protection. In this context, while employment promotion is one of the vehicles for poverty alleviation, it is being recognized that jobs *per se* may not be the desired objective of the policy planners. Instead, what is being sought to be generated is decent work. The notion of decent work, thus, encompasses the qualitative aspects of the employment as well.

In order to tackle the issue of employment, factors affecting the demand for employment and those which affect its supply need to be addressed appropriately (Somavia 2004), and to the extent possible, matched. While the labour market information reflects the demand situation in this context, the supply side entails ensuring availability of appropriately trained and skilled human resources for filling the available job vacancies.

In common parlance, the term job also subsumes in it the aspects of suitable conditions of work, voice representation (freedom to voice opinion on matters relevant to the employee), and adequate remuneration. While the concept of 'minimum wage' is seen as a guarantee of reasonably adequate remuneration, economists stress the importance of linking wage with productivity (Khondekar and Mujeri, 2006). In this situation, the

worker has to possess appropriate skills so that s/he may be able to effectively carry out the assigned tasks and achieve the desired outcomes in terms of productivity. Then only s/he would be able to be counted as a useful factor of production. In the normal circumstances, the skill level of a worker is one of the principle determinants of her/his wages. This is supported by a study on wages carried out by Khondekar and Mujeri (2006) which found that wages of skilled labour in Bangladesh have increased at a faster rate than the wages of the unskilled workers in the last decade.

### **3.2.2 Work Skills**

A nation requires an educated and skilled workforce for sustained growth and development (ILO 2008). Provision of suitably skilled human resources demands appropriate policy environment and requisite infrastructural support for ensuring optimal education and training outcomes. The effectiveness of vocational training programs is judged by the success of its outcomes even in cases where these programs are supply-driven (ADB 2004). The solution, according to the ADB (2004), is to initiate measures that would enable the training institutions to respond to the needs of the labour market (ADB 2004).

According to ILO, “effective skill development system – which connect education to technical training, technical training to labour market entry, and labour market entry to workplace and lifelong learning –can help countries sustain productivity growth and translate that growth into more and better jobs” (ILO 2008; p. v). It is to be noted that this formulation depends upon the success of the training providers to meet the objectives for which the training is being provided. In a situation of supply-driven training programs, the virtuous cycle of productivity-improved living standards –growth – productivity referred to by the ILO may not occur. Nor can it occur if the outputs from the training centres fall short of the requirements expected by the labour market. The formula to meet the challenge, therefore, is to ensure a sustainable training system which is able to respond to the needs of the labour market.

In broad terms, the work skills can be acquired either formally or informally. The formal mode includes acquisition of skills in training institutions including the vocational training institutions, the apprenticeship schemes, and through structured on-the-job training programs. The certification of skills acquired (after following a pre-determined process of testing) is a distinctive characteristic of a formal training program. The informal mode of skill acquisition, on the other hand, includes the traditional methods of learning skills from some one who has a certain level of skills and is prepared to teach that to others. The informal training programs are not expected to provide any certification after the learning process is completed. Under this categorization, the instant research on access and equity in a technical training centre is the review of one of the aspects of a formal mode of vocational education and training.

ILO (2003, p.19) has identified the following as essential elements of an institutional framework for human resource development and training:

- a. a structured framework for interactions with the stakeholders
- b. a range of public and private training providers with appropriate mechanism for ensuring quality and relevance of training imparted
- c. a decentralized structure for decision-making, including in relation to resources,
- d. integration of the concept of life-long learning within the training system
- e. a mechanism for collection and dissemination of information relevant for planning and delivery of training programs.

Most of the above elements have been found to be relevant in this research on access and equity issues in TTC as indicated in the dissertation in Chapter 5. The issues related to life long learning have not been considered in this research keeping in view the scope of the research. The elements indicated above are discussed in broad terms in the country specific context in the following sections.



### **3.3 The Labour Market and the Vocational Training Programs**

A number of studies have been carried out reviewing the employment and unemployment situation in Bangladesh (see, for instance, Rahman 2005, Muqtada 2003). The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the national statistical organization of Bangladesh, periodically carries out the Labour Force Surveys (LFS) and the data collected and its analysis is made available for appropriate use. Some of the important characteristics of the labour market in the country as revealed by the BBS Labour Force Survey (2004) are considered in the following sections so as to provide an overview of the country's labour market situation in the context of the existing national vocational education and training system.

#### **3.3.1 The Labour Force**

The last Labour Force Survey carried out by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) was in 2002-2003. According to this BBS survey report (2004), the labour force, i.e. population in the working age (15 years and above) in the country is nearly 80.8 million as shown in Table 3.1. This Table also shows that the rural areas are more densely populated; the population in the rural areas is more than three times when compared to the population in the urban areas (61 million and 19.9 million respectively). The number of persons engaged in household work is 28.4 million, out of which 2.3 million are males and 26.0 million are females. Those in labour force number 46.3 million while those who are not in the labour force number 34.5 million.

The data in Table 3.1 reveals an interesting aspect so far as the number of persons engaged in household work is concerned. According to this data, the proportion of males and females engaged in household work is almost the same in the urban and rural areas.

**Table 3.1****Population 15 Years and Over Engaged in Household Work by Gender**

Gender	Bangladesh			Urban			Rural		
	Population 15+ (000)	Engaged in household work (000)	Percent in household work	Population 15+ (000)	Engaged in household work (000)	Percent in household work	Population 15+ (000)	Engaged in household work (000)	Percent in household work
Both Genders	80843	28416	35.1	31209	6723	21.5	102204	21694	21.2
Male	41172	2355	5.7	16004	524	3.3	52328	1830	3.5
Female	39672	26062	65.7	15205	6199	40.8	49876	19863	39.8

Source: BBS 2004: Report on Labour Force Survey 2002-2003.

**Table 3.2**

**Population aged 15 years and over by economic category and gender**

Economic category	Percent								
	Bangladesh			Urban			Rural		
	Both Genders	Male	Female	Both Genders	Male	Female	Both Genders	Male	Female
<b>Total labour force</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Employed	95.7	95.8	95.1	95.0	95.4	93.8	95.9	96.0	95.6
Unemployed	4.3	4.2	4.9	5.0	4.6	6.2	4.1	4.0	4.4
<b>Not in labour force</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Household work	72.3	10.2	83.3	66.9	6.6	79.7	74.1	11.7	84.5
Students	18.4	66.0	10.0	24.6	73.7	14.2	16.4	62.8	8.7
Others	9.2	23.9	6.6	8.5	19.7	6.1	9.5	25.5	6.8

Source: BBS 2004: Report on Labour Force Survey 2002-2003.

Table 3.2 considers the population of Bangladesh in terms of persons in and out of labour force. It is seen from this Table that the country has a relatively low level of unemployed - 4.3 per cent of its total labour force. The reported rate of unemployment may, thus, be considered to be pretty close to the unemployment rate prevailing in some of the more developed countries. This data, however, may need to be interpreted with some caution since in a developing economy not many people can afford to remain unemployed. Given the prevailing status of the poverty level in a developing economy, for any person looking for work the offer of 'any job' is better than the alternative of a 'no job' option. In this situation, the fact that a job allows a person to earn some wages, however meager, may be incentive enough for an unemployed person to accept the available job irrespective of its merits.

This kind of situation may not be peculiar to Bangladesh. As noted above, the labour force in a developing economy at any given point in time is more inclined to accept any work irrespective of its suitability rather than sitting at home with the expectation of securing a more suitable employment at a later date. Such a situation results in large-scale underemployment, or what is commonly called the disguised-unemployment. This indicates that at any given point in time more people are doing the work that can be done by a lesser number of people, if the deployment of the human resources were to be made keeping in view the actual requirement. This gives rise to the disguised unemployment.

**Table 3.3**  
**Employed Person 15 Years and Over by Gender and Broad Economic Sectors**

Broad economic sector	Both Gender		Male		Female	
	Number (million)	Percent (%)	Number (million)	Percent (%)	Number (million)	Percent (%)
Total	44322	100.0	34478	100.0	9844	100.0
Agriculture	22931	51.7	17159	49.8	5771	58.6
Non-agriculture	21392	48.3	17319	50.2	4073	41.4
Services	15328	34.6	13067	37.9	2261	23.0
Industry	6064	13.7	4252	12.3	1812	18.4

Source: BBS 2004: Report on Labour Force Survey 2002-2003.

The details of the broad economic sectors in which the workforce in the country are employed are indicated in Table 3.3. It can be seen from this Table that agriculture is the one of the major sources of employment with more than half of the workforce (51.7 per cent) engaged in that sector (this sector includes agriculture, forestry and fisheries). The next two sectors which provide substantial employment are the services and industry sectors which engage 34.6 per cent and 13.7 per cent workers, respectively.

Further breakdown of employment data as indicated in Table 3.4 reveals that 21.9 per cent workers are employed in production, transport and others category, while the sales workers constitute 14.8 per cent of the labour force. The proportion of workforce in other occupation groups is rather small: 3.9 per cent as professional and technical workers, 0.2 per cent as managerial workers, 3.4 per cent as clerical workers, and 4.5 per cent as service workers.

It is noted that employment as production, transport and other workers was the highest (30 per cent) in the urban areas as revealed by the above BBS data. This was followed by agriculture, forestry and fisheries (26.6 percent), and sales workers (22.4 per cent). In the rural areas, however, the proportion of workers in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries was the highest (59.2 per cent) followed by production and transport sector (19.3 per cent), and then the sales workers (12.4 per cent).

Table 3.4 shows that females are predominant in the agriculture with 58.6 per cent of them being employed in that sector. The rest of female workers (41.4 per cent) are employed in the non-agriculture sector. In broad terms, the services sector provides employment to nearly one fourth of the female workers. Further breakdown of workers by major occupation as reflected in Table 3.5 indicates that more than fifty per cent (55.43 per cent).of the workers in the community, personal service and household sector are females. The percentage of female workers in some of the other sector is also substantial. This includes the manufacturing sector where a little less than 40 per cent of

**Table 3.4**  
**Employed Persons 15 Years and Over by Major Occupations**  
(Percentage)

Major occupation	Bangladesh			Urban			Rural		
	Both Gender	Male	Female	Both Gender	Male	Female	Both Gender	Male	Female
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Professional/ Technical	3.9	3.8	4.1	6.4	6.0	8.0	3.1	3.2	2.8
Admin. managerial	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.6	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0
Clerical workers	3.4	3.9	1.9	7.2	8.2	3.8	2.2	2.5	1.2
Sales workers	14.8	18.2	2.9	22.4	28.0	3.8	12.4	15.1	2.6
Service workers	4.5	3.0	9.7	6.7	5.2	11.7	3.7	2.3	9.0
Agriculture, forest & fisheries	51.4	49.3	58.6	26.6	21.8	42.6	59.2	57.9	64.1
Production, transport labourers & others	21.9	21.6	22.8	30.0	30.0	30.0	19.3	19.0	20.3

Source: BBS 2004: Report on Labour Force Survey 2002-2003.

**Table 3.5**  
**Average Annual Growth Rate by Industry and Gender**  
**1999-2000 to 2002-03**

(Number in '000')

Major Industry	1999-2000			2002-03			Average growth rate		
	Both gender	Male	Female	Both gender	Male	Female	Both gender	Male	Female
Total	38979	31088	7891	44322	34478	9844	4.4	3.5	7.7
Agri. forestry & related works	19379	15684	3695	21887	16132	5754	4.1	0.9	15.9
Fishing	618	549	69	1044	1027	17	19.1	23.2	-37.3
Mining and quarrying	104	40	64	82	80	1	-7.7	26.2	-72.9
Manufacturing	3731	2317	1414	4343	2637	1706	5.2	4.4	6.5
Electricity, gas, water	136	118	18	98	90	8	-10.4	-8.6	-24.5
Construction	1136	1045	91	1541	1445	97	10.7	11.4	2.0
Wholesale and retail trade	5635	5181	454	6108	5894	214	2.7	4.4	-22.2
Hotel and restaurant	515	473	42	563	530	33	3.0	3.9	-7.9
Transport, storage, communication service	2412	2361	51	3015	2989	25	7.7	8.2	-20.7
Bank, insurance & finance	228	209	19	223	204	19	-0.7	-0.8	0.6
Real estate, rent, business activities	129	110	19	194	186	7	14.5	19.2	-26.9
Public administration	767	695	72	988	903	85	8.8	9.1	5.5
Education services	1051	791	260	1185	867	318	4.1	3.1	7.0
Health & social work	300	232	68	504	357	146	18.9	15.5	29.1
Community, personal service, household sector & other	2838	1283	1555	2549	1136	1413	-3.5	-4.0	-3.1

Source: BBS 2004: Report on Labour Force Survey 2002-2003.

the workers are females and the education services sector where one fourth of the workers are females.

It is also seen from Table 3.5 that during 1999-2000 and 2002-03, the highest employment growth was recorded in the fishing sector (19.1 per cent). This was closely followed by the growth in the health and social work sector (18.9 per cent). The other sectors which showed a positive growth trend included the real estate, rental and business activities sector (14.5 per cent), and the construction sector (10.7 per cent). The three sectors which recorded negative growth in the same period were electricity, gas, and water (-10.4 per cent), mining and quarrying (-7.7 per cent), and bank, insurance and finance (-0.7 per cent).

Table 3.5 indicates that the overall growth rate in female employment had exceeded the growth rate in male employment during the period of survey (i.e. 1999-2000 to 2002-03). While for the former it was 7.7 per cent, for the latter it was 3.5 per cent during the period surveyed. The sectors which demonstrated notable growth rate in female employment were health and social work sector (29.1 per cent), education services (7 per cent), manufacturing (6.5 per cent), and public administration (5.5 per cent). The pattern of growth of employment in different sectors as revealed by the BBS data in Table 3.5, provides useful insights from the perspective of planning and delivery of vocational education and training programs, at the macro level

So far as the skill profile of the work force is concerned, Table 3.6 reveals that there is considerable variation in education levels of the employed and the unemployed youths. The data in Table 3.6 indicates that 42.7 per cent of the employed youths had no schooling whereas 26.4 per cent of the unemployed fell into that category. This data suggests that a significant proportion of jobs demanded low levels of skills. It is also noted that youths with secondary level education had a higher rate of unemployment; while about 9 per cent of such youths were employed, about one fifth of the youths with this qualification were amongst the unemployed. The same pattern, but in a more pronounced manner, was visible for those with Degree level education. In this case 3 per cent and 12.8 per cent respectively were the figures for the employed and the unemployed youth who were in possession of degree level qualifications. This situation may be indicative of the fact that youth with higher level



of education tended to be choosy with regard to the jobs that they wished to accept rather than going in for any kind of employment that became available.

**Table 3.6**

**Youth Labour Force by Level of Education, Sex and Residence**

Locality & level of education	Percent					
	Employed			Unemployed		
	Both gender	Male	Female	Both gender	Male	Female
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No schooling	42.7	40.7	47.8	26.4	25.8	28.0
Class I-V	19.9	20.7	17.8	13.6	13.2	14.6
Class VI-VIII	14.5	14.7	14.0	11.6	12.2	9.9
Class IX-X	10.6	10.6	10.6	14.0	15.3	10.6
SSC/HSC & equivalent	9.0	9.7	7.4	20.9	20.7	21.4
Degree and above	3.0	3.2	2.4	12.8	12.1	14.8
Others	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.8	0.8	0.7

Source: BBS 2004: Report on Labour Force Survey 2002-2003.

Apart from the information relating to employment and unemployment situation and skills in demand and those available, the labour market information includes information and data relating to wages, worker turnover, hours of work, and productivity per person (see, BBS 2004, Islam 2003). As noted above, the BBS is the principle agency for collecting such information in Bangladesh. Some of the other agencies, for instance, the Planning Commission, different Ministries such as the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Ministry of Overseas Employment and Expatriates' Welfare, Ministry of Industry, and Ministry of Agriculture also collect this kind of information from time to time, as relevant in the context of the tasks mandated for them.

### **3.4 Implications of Employment Trends for Vocational Education and Training**

The labour market information as revealed by the labour force survey provides valuable information which can be of use to the policy planners in planning and

delivery of vocational education and training appropriately. For instance, the following inferences may be drawn from the BBS (2004) data referred to in the previous section:

- If one of the objectives of the vocational education and training programs is to enhance employability of the segment of the population which is in the 15-29 age-group, then special attention has to be paid to planning and implementation of technical and vocational education geared to the meet the needs of the rural areas. This would be necessary since according to the trends revealed by the BBS data, and assuming that nothing happens in the short to medium term perspective to drastically alter that trend, the agriculture sector has the potential of providing a large number of jobs.
- Women need to be specially targeted for skills training. Presently a high proportion of women are engaged in household work. Although the household work rendered by the women provide economic and social benefits to the families and the society, the productivity of these women can be optimized by equipping them with appropriate vocational skills which in turn would enhance their contribution to the society and be helpful to them in moving up the social ladder on account of the additional income received by them.
- The nature of employment available in the urban and rural areas needs to be factored in planning and delivery of technical and vocational education and training. As the BBS data reveals, the maximum employment opportunities in the urban areas are for production and transport workers while agriculture, forest and fisheries provide the maximum employment opportunities in the rural areas. These trends need to be kept in view in the planning and delivery of vocational education and training programs.
- The gender dimensions of employment and unemployment as revealed in the BBS survey needs to be an overriding concern in planning and implementation of the TVET programs. The objective, apart from optimizing the productivity

of the women, one of the two pillars of the society, should also be to initiate measures for their empowerment.

The above broad inferences, however, need to be tempered with the understanding that human resource planning aimed at matching demands of labour market and the available skills is quite a complex task and requires specialized skills. It involves taking into consideration a number of variables before the possible growth rates in employment in different sectors of the economy can be assessed with any degree of accuracy. For instance, at the national level the developments with regard to trade and commerce on account of policy changes may affect the prevailing employment trends. Similarly, in this era of globalized economy any development in one country can have repercussions on other countries affecting the employment situation in those countries. The extent and intensity of this impact will depend upon the nature of economic, trade and political relations that exist between the concerned economies.

It needs to be recognized that even if the current trends were likely to continue for some period of time, the planning for vocational education programs may require examination of the relevant inputs taking into account the actual picture obtaining at the micro level. For instance, if it is assumed that the agriculture sector would continue to provide employment to a vast number of workers, the workers might have to possess different kinds and different levels of skills keeping in view the location specific contexts so as to optimize their productivity within a given sector.

Thus, although the projection of human resource planning requires a detailed examination of the available data on scientific lines, the labour market data from sources such as the labour force surveys are an important source of information which can assist in developing the broad parameters for planning and delivery of the vocational education and training programs. The question that needs to be addressed is the manner in which the labour market signals can be appropriately monitored for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the VET programs in the country. The ADB (2004) suggests that in view of the uncertainties associated with human resource forecasting models, a better way to ascertain the needs of the market is for the employers to articulate their demands. It also suggests that there should be sufficient expertise to analyze the market trends in terms of potential for job creation. The

industry-training centre linkage referred to earlier can be an useful devise for providing necessary assistance in this regard.

The collection and analysis of the labour market information is one of the important functions of the BMET and its Employment and Manpower Offices at the district levels. The resources available to the BMET for the purpose, however, as noted in Chapter 5 need augmentation. Unless that is done, the outputs from the Bureau and its offices may have limited utility from planning perspective.

### **3.5 Policy Environment for Vocational Education and Training**

Keeping in view the BBS data on employment and unemployment in conjunction with the education and skill levels of the workers as shown in the previous section, the task of providing requisite skills training may appear to be a mammoth task. This would especially be the case if a large number of workers who have no education or have less than primary education are involved. As seen in the previous section, according to the BBS (2004) survey referred to above, during the period surveyed more than half of the labour force had no schooling and one-sixth of the labour force had less than primary schooling. Given these numbers, the importance of an appropriate training policy which caters to need of the diverse client group assumes special significance. In the following sections, the prevailing policy environment for provision of technical and vocational education and training is explored.

The importance attached to the human resource development for growth and development in the country is clearly reflected in the material posted on the official website of the Ministry of Education. It recognizes that ‘Human resource development is at the core of Bangladesh’s development efforts and access to quality education is critical to poverty reduction and economic development’ (Retrieved March 23, 2009 from [www.moedu.gov.bd/](http://www.moedu.gov.bd/)). The Government attaches ‘highest priority to the improvement of education sector’ (ibid.) as evidenced by the fact that so far five education commissions have been appointed to review the education system and make recommendations for bringing about the desired changes in the education sector. The first education commission was constituted in 1972, and the fifth (the latest) National Education

Commission (NEC) was constituted in 2003. The fifth NEC was headed by Professor Mohammed Manuruzzaman Miah, former Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University. The recommendations of the Commission cover the entire gamut of education sector, including general education, professional education, and the education imparted by the Muslim religious institutions.

The recommendations of the NEC (Ministry of Education 2004) cover the technical and vocational education and training sector as well. These, in broad terms, relate to reducing the mismatch between the skills acquired by the graduates of the technical and vocational educational institutions and the demands of the industry, an appropriate mechanism for periodic review of the curricula, flexibility in the training programs, provision for adequate raw material for the training programs, effective arrangements for coordination amongst the training providers, and upgrading of the skills of the training centre instructors.

Another important government agency, the Planning Commission has also identified a number of concerns in the field of vocational education. These concerns have been identified by the Planning Commission in the context of the broad contours of a national strategy for alleviation of poverty in a medium-term perspective. The Planning Commission has noted the limited opportunities for organized vocational and technical skill development. It highlights the objective of substantially increasing the participation of the students in the TVET sector in the secondary stage in a pre-determined timeframe from the present participation rate of around five per cent. The importance of such programs for the students completing grades 6 and 8 has been emphasized and the need for special focus on such programs for females has been highlighted. The Planning Commission has also stressed the importance of more employment opportunities for graduates of technical and vocational institutions, both in domestic and overseas market.

The Bureau of the Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) is the agency responsible for management and supervision of the technical training centres (TTCs), one of which is the research site in the instant research undertaking. The BMET functions under the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment. Apart from management of the technical training centres, the BMET is tasked with regulating the deployment of workers in overseas job market.

So far as management of technical training centres is concerned, the BMET does not appear to have any formal training policy document for use in its administrative and management functions. The BMET currently functions on the basis of a draft training policy, and is of the view that the draft training policy in use is sufficiently comprehensive so as to be able to provide necessary direction and guidance in the management of the training centres. The draft training policy, according to the BMET, includes, amongst others, the description of 'trades' in which training is to be imparted in the training centres, the annual intake capacity of the training centres, the target groups, the entry system, and the certification process. It also includes the issue of industrial attachment for the trainees, and for those in the apprenticeship program. The draft training policy, according to the BMET, aims to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the training centres.

### **3.6 Training Infrastructure**

A number of agencies are involved in the provision of vocational education and training in the country. These include public training institutions wherein training programs are conducted under the aegis of various government ministries and departments. Then there are training institutions run by the NGOs, and those which are managed by private training providers. A number of different government ministries and departments are involved in the provision of vocational training. These include the BMET under the Ministry of Overseas Employment and Expatriate Welfare, Directorate of Technical Education under the Ministry of Education, Directorate of Youth Development under the Ministry of Youth and Sports; Directorate of Women's Affairs under the Ministry of Women's Affairs; the Textile Directorate under the Ministry of Textile, and the District Councils under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives.

The total number of technical and vocational training institutions in the country, both in the public and the private sector was 2,728 (in the year 2005). Of these, 263 institutions were exclusively for female students. The above figure did not include 23 new polytechnics, including 3 for the female students, which were still to become functional. The number of training institutions in the private sector was much higher compared to those in the public sector – 2,548 training institutions were in the private

sector compared to 180 such institutions in the public sector. The number of students enrolled in these training institutions was 241,336, including 62,562 female students. The teachers of these training institutions numbered 18,185, including 3,208 female teachers (Retrieved August 29, 2009 from [www.moedu.gov.bd/edu\\_statistics.php](http://www.moedu.gov.bd/edu_statistics.php)).

While different private training institutions, including the training institutions run by the NGOS conduct different training programs keeping in view their perception about the potential clientele and the relevant cost considerations, the training programs conducted in the public training institutions follow broadly similar model in terms of the range of programs conducted and the curricula.

The programs conducted by training institutions of the government departments generally reflected the focus of the respective Ministries and Departments. For instance, while the technical training centres and the vocational training institutes conducted post-class 8 certificate level courses in different trades, the Department of Youth Development under the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoSYA) conducted training programs varying in duration from one month to six months for a number of trades. The programs of MoSYA were primarily aimed at assisting the trainees in engaging themselves in self-employment. The training programs of the MoYSA covered diverse areas – from Computer and Electronics to training for women in dress making and block-printing. The Department also conducted mobile training program at *upzila* (sub-division) level.

The National Council for Skill Development and Training (NCSDT) is the highest level policy making and coordinating body for the technical vocational education and training. The NCSDT is headed by the Minister for Labour and Employment. Two members of parliament, representatives of different ministries engaged in vocational training programs and some of the selected NGOs active in the field of vocational education and training are amongst the members of the Council. The Director General of the BMET is the Member Secretary of the Council and the secretariat support to the Council is provided by the BMET.

### **3.6.1 The BMET and the TTCs**

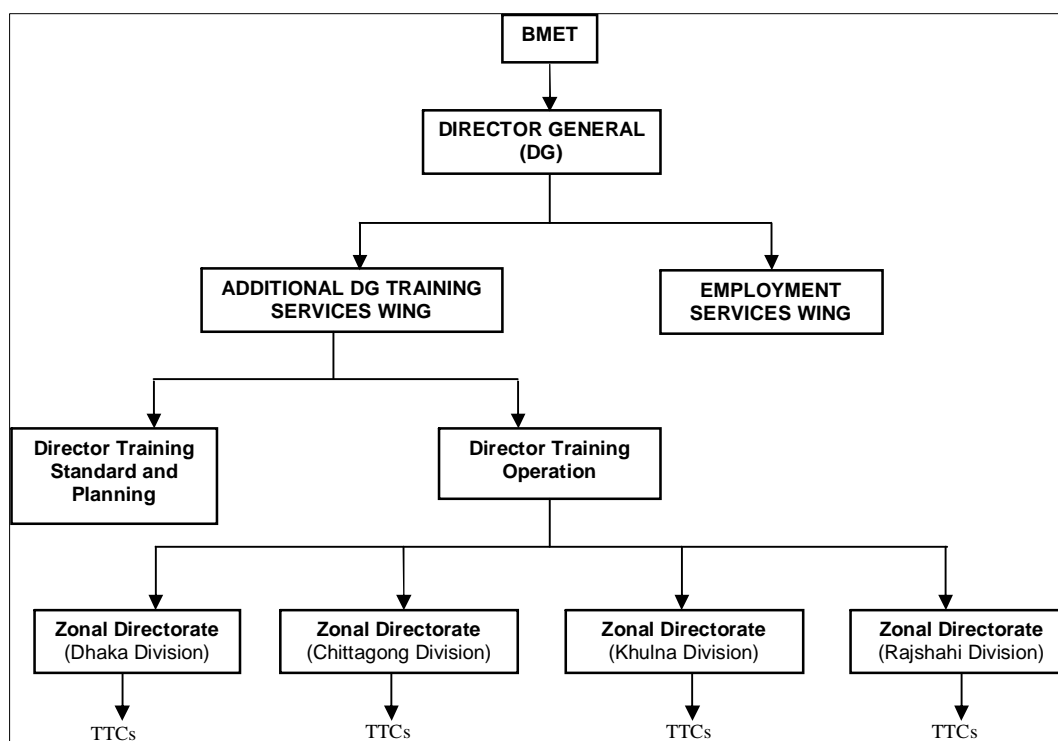
As noted earlier, the BMET is responsible for the efficient and effective functioning of the technical training centres. Apart from its training-related functions, the BMET is responsible for managing the public employment services, and for regulation of the processes relating to workers who seek employment overseas. The functions of the BMET relating to overseas employment are aimed at the semi-skilled and un-skilled workers. The BMET has an authorized strength of a little more than 2,000 including the staff authorized for the TTCs. At any point in time, about 30 per cent of the posts in the BMET are in the process of being filled up.

The description of the functions of the BMET in the following sections has been limited to its training functions since the issues relating to overseas workers are outside the scope of this research. The functions of the training wing of the BMET can be broadly divided into two categories: the functions relating to planning and delivery of training programs, and those related to the employment services. As indicated in the organogram of the Training Wing of the BMET in Figure 3.1, the BMET is headed by a Director General (DG). An Additional DG assists the DG in his training functions.

In so far as planning and delivery of training programs is concerned, the BMET has three broad focus: formulation of training policies, institution based training, and industry based training. The training wing of the BMET is responsible for the planning and implementation of training programs, including development of instructional material, and testing and certification. The operation and management of the technical training centres is overseen by the training wing of the BMET.

The BMET is responsible for the management of thirteen TTCs and the Institute of Marine Technology (IMT). The other important activity of the training wing concerns managing the apprenticeship program. It conducts a number of industry-based training programs aimed at upgrading skills of the first-line supervisors.





**Figure 3.1: Training Wing of the BMET**

The technical training centres are funded and managed by government agencies. No technical training centre had been established in the private sector. The TTCs were mostly located at the district headquarters. Dhaka, the capital city, was the exception; two technical training centres were located in the capital city. There were 359 teachers in the TTCs, of which 69 were female teachers. The number of students in these training centres was nearly 4,900. The female students constituted a little less than 10 per cent of the student population of the TTCs (Retrieved August 29, 2009 from [www.moedu.gov.bd/edu\\_statistics.php](http://www.moedu.gov.bd/edu_statistics.php)).

The TTCs offered two-year vocational courses in more than twenty different trades. The two year vocational course conducted by the training centres had two distinct parts, each year of training leading to a certificate, and hence to that extent was a terminal course. Each year's training consisted of institutional training of nine months followed by industrial attachment of three months for practical experience. The training programs conducted in the TTCs included both 'technical' and 'non-

technical' courses like Refrigeration and AC, Radio and TV, General Mechanics, Computers, Plumbing, Civil (engineering) drafting, Welding, Electrical house wiring, and Garments (dress making). The students of the TTC received a monthly stipend. The TTCs also offered short-terms courses, varying in duration from three months to six months

### **3.6.2 Private Training Providers and the NGOs**

A number of for-profit training providers conduct vocational training programs. Besides, some of the NGOs also conduct these programs. The training programs run by the NGOs generally target those who are without secondary education. The viability of such programs apparently arises from the fact that there is a demand for workers with vocational skills but there is no compulsion to have only those who have completed the secondary education. The NGOs at times exhibit a greater degree of flexibility in planning and delivery of the vocational training programs in terms of the curricula, delivery schedule, and age and educational requirements. The available data indicate that private training providers play an important role in the provision of vocational training. Nearly 80 per cent of the students in vocational training institutions are enrolled in private training institutions (in the year 2005). When the total number of enrolled in technical and vocational training programs was 241,336, the number of students in private training institutions was 192360 (Retrieved August 29, 2009 from [www.moedu.gov.bd/edu\\_statistics.php](http://www.moedu.gov.bd/edu_statistics.php)).

The training programs conducted by non-government agencies are perceived to be useful from the perspective of responding to the demands of the labour market. This is attributed to the sharper focus of these programs over a relatively shorter period. The quality of some such programs although remains a matter of debate.

It may be seen from the foregoing that a substantial infrastructure for planning and delivery of technical and vocational education and training is available at the national level. The vocational education and training system has also been receiving due attention of the policy makers for improving its efficiency and effectiveness.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

The labour market characteristics of the country clearly provide the justification, if such justification were needed, for planning for an effective and efficient system of vocational education and training system capable of responding to the demands of the labour market. The degree to which the existing training infrastructure has the capacity to achieve the expected outcomes is an issue that is continually under review by the policy planners in Bangladesh so as to be able to initiate measures, as considered necessary.

# Chapter 4

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have described the background to this research and the details of the literature reviewed on access and equity concerns in education and training setting. The context which frames the research has been indicated in Chapter 3.

This chapter describes the methodological dimensions of the research. The chapter begins with a brief review of the theoretical frameworks that underpin qualitative research. It is followed by a discussion on the choice of the case study approach for exploration of the research questions as identified in Chapter 1. The chapter then outlines the data collection and data analysis techniques that have been used in the research. This is followed by a consideration of the limitations of the research and a discussion of the ethical considerations relevant for the purpose of conducting the research. The concluding section sums up the issues discussed in the chapter.

### 4.2 Research Paradigm

This research is a study of access and equity concerns at the training centre level. The research focuses on the perceptions of the students, staff and the management of the technical training centre on access and equity concerns as they manifest at the training centre level. According to Yin (1994) the choice of methodological approach is guided by the nature of what is being researched. The methodological approach for this research will be qualitative as the main objective involves studying individuals in their natural setting so as to understand the meanings they impart to social situations (Denzin & Lincoln 2000).

Guba & Lincoln (1994) have explained a paradigm as “a world view that defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world’, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that of world and its parts” (p. 107). The paradigm choice of a researcher, according to Denzin & Lincoln (1994) is determined on the basis of the

answers to the ontological question (“what is the form and nature of reality and what can be known about it?”), the epistemological question (“what is the nature of relationship between the knower and would-be-knower and what can be known?”), and the methodological question (“how can the inquirer go about finding what can be known?”) (p. 108).

On this basis, the alternative paradigms in qualitative research have been classified as positivism, post-positivism which is also known as interpretivism, and critical theory (Guba & Lincoln 1994). While the positivist paradigm is usually associated with quantitative research, the interpretive paradigm is associated with qualitative research. The distinction between the two paradigms has also been explained in terms of the process followed for the research undertaking. According to Bogdan & Taylor (1975), positivist paradigm seeks facts or causes of social phenomena and in this process there is no consideration of the subjective state of the individuals while interpretative paradigm is concerned with actors’ own frame of reference (p. 2).

The underlying philosophical assumptions guiding this study include the general assumptions relating to interpretative research. The emphasis in this study is on empathic understanding of human behaviour. The objective of the research is to gain an insight, develop meanings, in respect of the on-going developments in the context of access and equity concerns at the technical training centre. This understanding is developed from the perspectives of the research participants. This research is not concerned so much with the explanations as with gaining an understanding of the participants’ experiences in relation to the issues raised in research questions in Chapter 1.

### **4.3 Ontology and Epistemology**

One of the basic assumptions in the study of manifestation of access and equity concerns at the training centre level is that each person’s perception of what is real may differ from those of others (Lincoln & Guba 1985). The ontology informing this research is that of critical social theory (a reality that is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors) and the epistemological approach

taken is interpretative (the investigator and investigated object are assumed to be interactively linked with the values of the investigator influencing the inquiry).

The interpretive research assumes that knowledge of reality is gained only through social constructions (Klein & Myers 1999). Since our knowledge of reality is a social product, it cannot be understood independent of the social actors who create this reality (Orlikowski & Baroudi 1991). In this sense, our interpretations are formed against the backdrop of shared understanding (see, Schwandt 2003).

For interpretivist research, knowledge building is an inductive process. It starts with observations and ends with contextual knowledge. This research on access and equity concerns at the TTC level, thus, falls in the interpretive category.

In epistemological terms, the interpretative research seeks explanations in reasoning. This research did not start with a hypothesis with the objective of proving or disproving the hypothesis. The research is an exploratory study seeking to obtain ‘in-depth understanding and meanings’ in so far as the perceptions of the research participants on access and equity issues at the training centre are concerned. The research questions in Chapter 1, which contain ‘how’ and ‘what’, seek description of what is going on and require an inductive approach.

The above ontological and epistemological considerations suggest that the interpretative paradigm is best suited for this research.

#### **4.4 Choice of Research Method**

A number of research methods were considered as possible options for exploring the research questions. However, the case study method was chosen in line with the views of Merriam (1988) that “the decision to focus on qualitative case studies stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam 1988: 29). Although, in some sense the methodology adopted is also a field study, preference for case study methodology arises from the fact that a field study requires much more time, something which was not available to the researcher. The

ethnographic research also suffers from the same ‘handicap’ (requires relatively more time with attendant cost implications) and hence was not preferred. Although, the researcher does nurture the hope that the findings of the research will influence the policy makers, yet action research approach has not been adopted since in the absence of a formal sponsorship of the research undertaking, it is not easy to ensure appropriate follow up on the findings of the research. The use of Grounded Theory method was not preferred since the study does not aim to develop theoretical frameworks to explain the available data.

The objective of this research is to explore access and equity concerns at the TTC from the perspectives of the participants and develop a set of guidelines to improve the status of access and equity at the training centre. From this perspective, the case study method as documented by Yin (1994) has been used to gain an understanding as to how the research participants constructed their view points on the identified issues.

#### **4.4.1 Case Study Methodology**

As alluded to above, the case study methodology is adopted in this research. It has been noted in various works on research methodology (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, Yin 1994, Patton 1990) that a case study is a useful method when in-depth investigation is required. Stake (1994) provides a succinct explanation of case study method: “The name *case study* is emphasized by some of us because it draws attention to the question of what specifically can be learned from the single case” (p. 236, emphasis in original). While Yin (1994) classified case studies as exploratory, explanatory and descriptive, Stake (1994) categorized the case study as intrinsic (where the researcher has an interest in the case), instrumental (when the case is expected to facilitate understanding more than what is obvious to the observer), and collective (when a group of cases is studied). In terms of the above categorization, this research may be categorized as an explanatory and instrumental case study.

Given the boundedness of this research topic as considered in Chapter 1, the case study method is considered to be a more appropriate method for conducting the research. As noted by Yin (1994), a case study can be particularly useful in the following situations:

- policy, political science, and public administration research,
- community psychology and sociology studies,
- organizational and management studies,
- city and regional planning research, such as studies of plans, neighborhoods, or public agencies, and
- in conducting dissertations and theses in the social sciences – the academic disciplines as well as professional fields such as business administration, management science, and social work.

This research undertaking aims to gain a perspective of the management, the staff and the students of a technical training centre on access and equity concerns. This fits in with the criterion indicated by Yin (1994) for following the case study methodology in case of research undertakings which are concerned with public administration and organizational and management issues.

The methodological dimensions of the works of Stake (1994) on case study emphasizes that case studies should be so designed that understanding of the case can be optimized rather than any generalization. As noted above, the categorization of case studies indicated by Stake (1994) - intrinsic case study, instrumental case study and collective case study - is still relevant. According to Stake, while intrinsic case study is undertaken “because one wants better understanding of this particular case”, in instrumental case studies “a particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory. The case is of secondary importance; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else”. In collective case study, on the other hand, “researchers may study a number of cases jointly in order to inquire into the phenomenon, population, or general condition” (1994: pp. 236-237).

Using the above categorization of case studies, this research on access and equity concerns at the technical training centre becomes an intrinsic case study. This case study also fits with the pattern described by Stake in that “intrinsic casework regularly begins with cases pre-specified” (1994: 243). Ideally, the case chosen should be one “from which we feel we can learn the most” (Stake 1994: 243). However, in the present instance pragmatism dictated choosing the case (the TTC) in consultation with



the concerned authorities; adoption of this approach ensured a supportive environment for the research undertaking.

The researcher was aware in Stake's terms (1994: 240) that "one cannot know at the outset what the issues, perceptions, the theory will be. Case researchers enter the scene expecting, even knowing, that certain events, problems, relationships will be important, yet discover that some actually are of little consequence". In this research study too it was expected that the data generated from the "embedded unit of analysis" (Yin 1994: 24) – the TTC – and its analysis should be able provide pointers for moving towards an enhanced status of access and equity at the training centre level.

#### **4.4.2 Triangulation**

Triangulation in qualitative studies is a process followed for validation of findings by studying phenomenon from more than one stand point. Stake (1994: 241) has described triangulation in qualitative studies as a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying repeatability of an observation or interpretation.

In his seminal work, Denzin (1970) has identified six types of triangulation. Since detailed descriptions of all these six types of triangulation are not relevant for the purpose of the study, the characteristics of these six types as summarized by Cohen and Manion (1980) are indicated below.

Time triangulation attempts to take into consideration the factors of change and process by utilizing cross-sectional and longitudinal designs. Space triangulation attempts to overcome the parochialism of studies conducted in the same country or within the same structure by making use of cross-cultural techniques. Combined level of triangulation use more than one level analysis from the three principal levels used in social sciences, namely, the individual level, the interactive (group) level, and the level of the collectives (organizational, cultural, or social). Theoretical triangulation draws upon alternative or competing theories in preference to utilizing only one view point. Investigator triangulation involves engaging more than one observer. And finally, the methodological triangulation uses either the same method on different

occasions, or different methods on the same subject of the study (Cohen & Manion 1980: 211).

In this study, triangulation of data sources, that is, comparing and cross checking the consistency of information received from different sources by different means, has been utilized so as to contribute to verification and validation of the qualitative analysis (Patton 1990). In this research, comparisons were made between observational data and interview data, articulated views and the views held privately, and views of people with different perspectives - those of the BMET, the training centre management, and the students of the training centre. Implicit in undertaking the comparisons was the recognition that although different data have emerged from different sources it does not necessarily imply that only one set of data is correct.

It is recognized that it would be naïve to expect a completely consistent picture from the data generated. The note of caution sounded by Patton (1990) in this regard, although in the context of evaluation, provides useful guidance: “Triangulation is ideal. It is also very expensive. An evaluation’s limited budget, short time frame and political constraints will affect the amount of triangulation that is practical.” (Patton 1990: 187). The nature and rationale for different sets of data that have been generated, and the reasons for the divergence, thus, need to be taken into account in analyzing the data.

#### **4.5 Research Design**

The process of research design for this study commences with an initial literature review. Denzin & Lincoln (2005, 1994) and Minichiello et al. (1995), amongst others, provide elaborate details for designing the qualitative research process. The research design in this study has followed the steps identified by Denzin & Lincoln (1994) while the inputs from Minichiello et al. (1995) have been largely used in the data collection phase. The process followed in designing the research is described in the succeeding paragraphs.

The initial literature review was useful in developing the strategy for the research design. The objective of the literature review was to gain adequate knowledge of the

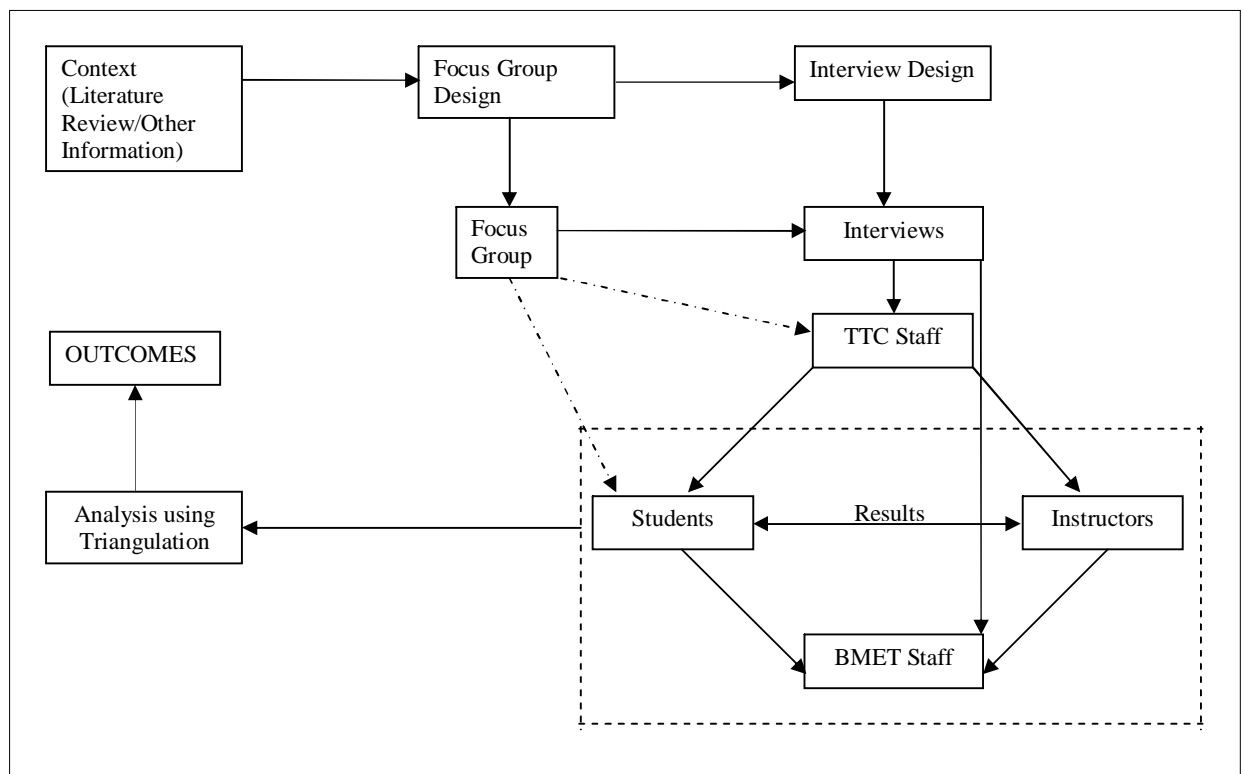
issues being researched as may be found from the available literature as well as to identify the gaps that exist and need to be addressed in this context. This also proved useful in developing questions for the interviews.

The next step was to decide on the mode of inquiry. The initial review of the literature had revealed that the available literature on issues concerning access and equity in vocational education and training in developing countries was rather limited. Furthermore, the fact that for the collected information to have sufficient credibility it needed to be gathered from the perception and views of the research participants, pointed to primacy of qualitative approach in undertaking the research.

The literature reviewed also indicated that the choice of research paradigm depends upon the researcher and that there can be nothing right or wrong about the selected paradigm so long as the researcher has sufficient justification for selecting a particular paradigm (Guba & Lincoln 1994). The interpretivist paradigm was selected for the research since the philosophical assumptions of this paradigm were in consonance with those of the researcher. Moreover, the fact that in obtaining the views of the students and the management of the technical training centre on access and equity concerns which surface at the training centre level, the researcher believed that the reality was relative, local and specific, and that there were multiple realities, also led to the adoption of interpretative paradigm in the research design.

The rationale which resulted into adoption of the case study methodology for the research study has been indicated in the preceding section. As explained by Cohen & Manion (1980), the case study researcher typically observes the unit that is being researched, which in the instant case is the selected technical training centre. The purpose of such observation in the case study, according to Cohen & Manion (1980), is to probe deeply and analyze intensively the multifarious phenomena with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider population to which that unit belongs (p. 99). In the instant research study, one of the objectives as indicated in Chapter 1 is to develop a set of guidelines so as to improve access and equity at the training centre level. This is in consonance with the purpose of a case study as described by Cohen & Manion (1980).

Figure 4.1 presents the flow chart explaining the major steps in undertaking the research. As indicated in the flow chart, the next steps in the research design comprised dealing with the issues of data collection and analysis. This entailed detailed consideration for the process to be followed for data collection and its analysis. It also implied paying due attention to the ethical considerations which needed to be kept in view while undertaking the research study.



**Figure 4.1: Major Steps in the Research Design**

The process relating to selection of the research site, the research participants, and the data collection process for the research was informed by the literature reviewed and the insights obtained during a range of discussions, which were held with the BMET and the technical training centre management. The final steps that emerged represented the synthesized outcome of these measures. The following sections

describe the research site and the sample, detail the data collection stage, and the ethical considerations that guided the research undertaking.

## **4.6 Research Site and Sample**

This section describes the research site and the process followed for selection of the research participants.

### **4.6.1 The Research Site**

The selected technical training centre, the research site, was selected in consultation with the BMET. The technical training centre selected for the case study is one of 13 training centres and all of these training centres are funded through public funds. As noted earlier, while the TTCs are mostly located at the district headquarters, two of these training centres are located in the capital city. The female teachers constitute a little less than 20 per cent of the teacher strength of the TTCs. So far as the female students of the TTC are concerned, they constitute a little less than 10 per cent of the total student population of the TTCs. (Retrieved August 29, 2009 from [http://www.moedu.gov.bd/edu\\_statistics.php](http://www.moedu.gov.bd/edu_statistics.php)). The selected TTC is housed in a building which appeared to be in good condition, with provision of space for future expansion, as and when the need arises. Training is imparted in fifteen trades (courses). As is the practice in other TTCs, training is imparted in trades which are considered technical trades, for instance, in Radio and Television, Civil Drafting, Plumbing and Pipe Fitting, as well as in the non-technical trades like Dress Making and Pattern Making. The decision regarding the courses to be conducted at the TTC is taken in consultation with the BMET.

There appeared to be a perception that the training centres in the bigger cities were better in terms of resources available and therefore the quality of training imparted in those training centres was better. The perception of being comparatively better training centres and the consequential perceived greater chances of securing employment on graduation from these centres gave rise to a large number of applications for each of the place available in these training centres. Some of the students of the training centre had completed training in one trade and on completion

of that training had sought enrolment in another program with a view to further improve their chances in the job market.

The process followed for appointment of the head of the institution as well as the teachers of the TTC is a centralized process managed by the BMET. The eligibility for appointment as a TTC staff follows a standardized recruitment criterion.

Notwithstanding this system, there were quite a few instructors at the selected training centre who possessed qualifications which were higher than the prescribed minimum. From the perspective of the TTC students, the difference in qualifications amongst the TTC teachers seemed to place the teachers with higher qualifications on a higher pedestal.

The administrative and technical supervision of the TTCs rests with the BMET. As is the case with other TTCs, the selected training centre followed the guidelines and instructions issued by the BMET. The guidelines and instructions from the BMET covered all aspects of functioning of the TTC so far as planning and delivery of training programs was concerned. The BMET monitored the functioning of the TTC through a number of reports and returns which the training centre was required to submit periodically. The number of such reports was substantial and consumed a significant amount of the TTC time in its compilation. The fact that the selected TTC was perceived to be one of the better TTCs by some appeared to be a factor which contributed towards relatively increased frequency of contacts between the BMET and the TTC, especially in relation to matters concerning administration of the TTC.

#### **4.6.2 Sample**

The BMET and the selected training centre were supportive of the research endeavour and provided the necessary assistance during the research undertaking. The possible composition and the size of the research sample were discussed with the BMET and the management of the selected training centre. The advice received from the BMET and the TTC management proved useful in selection of the research participants. The BMET had made it clear that given the heavy work schedule of the officials not many of its officials would be able to participate in the research process. The views of the

BMET were obtained through participation of one official. The possible disadvantages arising out of the limited participation of the BMET official in the research was substantially mitigated by the fact that the official who participated in the research was a senior official who had been on the staff of the BMET for many years.

The number and the kind of staff and students of the TTC who were to participate in the study were finalized taking into consideration the views of the TTC management in this regard. The TTC management, however, did not intervene in any way in the selection of the participants. The selection was made keeping in view their respective roles and responsibilities. So far as the selection of teachers was concerned, the participants for the research were identified from those who apart from their teaching responsibilities were also involved in some way either in planning, management or administration related functions at the training centre. Another consideration in selection of the teachers was the length of service of the concerned staff at the training centre. It was recognized that a relatively new staff in the TTC might have some limitation in realistically appreciating the prevailing situation on the ground. And to that extent his/her views could not be considered to be representative of the actual situation. Therefore only the staff who had at least three years of service in that training centre was considered for participation in the research undertaking.

The process of selection of the student participants was relatively simple. The criteria adopted for the selection of the student participants were primarily their age, their representative character, capacity to coherently marshal their thoughts in responding to the questions raised, and their ability to articulate the views appropriately. As detailed in subsequent section, the fact that the views expressed would be treated with complete confidentiality had been explained to the participants. The participants for the research were selected from the following groups:

- senior management with oversight functions (BMET)
- TTC management (head and the deputy head of the institution)
- TTC training staff

- TTC students

Initial discussions in the TTC had indicated the willingness of a large number of volunteers to participate in the research study. However, given the limitation of resources for the researcher, 26 participants – 6 females and 20 males - were selected for participation in the research as shown in Table 4.3 below. In selection of the research participants, it was ensured that the female participation was not lower than their proportion in the enrolment figures; the female students comprised 17 per cent of the research participants while the proportion of female students enrolled in the TTC was about 10 per cent.

## **4.7 Data Collection and Analysis**

The process of data collection, the instruments used for data collection and the data analysis process are described in this section.

### **4.7.1 Data Collection Process**

As noted earlier, the issues relating to determining the method of data collection, the research site and the participants for the research comprised literature review as well as a range of discussion with the BMET and the training centre staff. The final steps that emerged represented the synthesized outcome of these measures. The advice received in this regard from the BMET, the TTC management and some other staff of the TTC was useful for completion of the research. The fact that some of the participants could possibly have some reservations in airing their views freely was an important consideration that needed to be addressed. There was a possibility that some of the staff participants, in view of their nature of employment, could find it difficult to make comments which might appear to be critical of the system. The possibility that some similar sentiments might be displayed by some of the student participants could not also be ruled out. These issues were given serious consideration in deciding upon the choice of strategy for data collection.

In the initial discussions was held with the BMET, the research focus and the process contemplated for the research were explained. It was only after the agreement with the



BMET was reached that the TTC management was contacted. During discussions with the TTC, it became apparent that while cooperation of the TTC management would be available for the research undertaking it would be up to the researcher to create an environment which encouraged free exchange of views with the research participants.

It had become apparent that a common understanding amongst the research participants regarding the implications of the concepts of access and equity at the TTC level was as an issue that needed to be addressed. It was noted that the participants were familiar with the notion of access and equity in broad terms. For them access implied that every one should have the opportunity to seek access to training institutions and that there should be no impediment in the process. Equity, on the other hand, for them implied that every one should have equal opportunity and that there should be no discrimination on any ground. Efforts were, therefore, made to explain the broad implications of these concepts to the research participants in the TTC context.

It was recognized that in the culture that prevails in south-Asia, no participant was likely to convey any view that could even remotely carry the implication that the circumstances on the part of the parents and guardians could be one of the factors affecting the access and equity status. Keeping the above in view, it was decided that in interactions with the participants neutral questions would be used to the extent possible for eliciting the requisite information and it would be for the researcher to draw appropriate inferences from the responses received keeping in view the other relevant data collected.

The ethical considerations that would be kept in view all through the research process, including the option available to the participants to withdraw at any stage without any consequences whatsoever were discussed with the training centre management and the potential participants. During the discussions with the TTC management, it emerged that it might be prudent to start the data collection phase with the focus group discussion. This arrangement, it was felt, would allow enhancing further the rapport established with the research participants and that would prove useful during

the in-depth interviews to be held subsequently. The data collection was accordingly carried out.

#### **4.7.2 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

This section describes the methodology followed in collection and analysis of the research data.

##### ***Focus Group Participants***

According to Greenbaum (2000), the focus groups are useful in developing insights and understanding of the issues involved. Three focus groups were constituted for this research undertaking, two groups of six members and one of five members. The participants of the focus groups were students of the TTC who were dealing with the issues of access and equity as perceived by them at the TTC level. The students were, therefore, in a vantage position to identify the access and equity issues which were impacting on their learning outcome at the training centre. In establishing the focus group, care was taken to ensure that the participants constituted a homogenous group in terms of age and their apparent maturity in appreciation of the issues discussed. It was recognized that the focus group was a forum which was capable of addressing the power differential between the students and the staff (Morgan & Krueger 1998) and, therefore, the training centre staff was not included in the focus groups.

The schedule of the focus groups was finalized in consultation with the participants. The focus groups met in one of the rooms of the training centre made available by the training centre management. The focus groups sessions lasted between 75 and 90 minutes. In describing the focus group questions, the process suggested by Morgan & Krueger (1998) was followed. The questions used, the manner in which the questions were organized, and the expected functions are presented in Table 4.1.

The initial questions were more in the nature of a move to ‘break the ice’ and increase the comfort level of the participants. At the same time, the questions were directed as a part of the process of gradual initiation into the issues related to the research questions. The question as to how one reaches the TTC is a simple and straight forward question and so is the related question on difficulty faced, if any, in doing so.

The possible answers, however, were expected to touch upon issues which impact on access related concerns, if not also the equity related ones.

The next set of questions went deeper into the research issues. For the students in the TTC, the issues relating to access can surface in many ways. There could be circumstances which could point to an access related issue but may not appear to be so to the concerned TTC student on account of his/her socio-cultural background. The

**Table 4.1**  
**Focus Group Instrument Questions**

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Focus Group Instrument Question</b>
Introduction of the topic	1. How do you reach the TTC? 2. Do you face difficulties in reaching the TTC? 3. Did you consider any other TTC for enrolment?
Transition questions	4. How did you come to know about the TTC? 5. Who assisted you in selection of the TTC? 6. Did you know about the courses and the facilities available in the TTC?
Key questions which explored the Research questions	7. What major challenges did you face in enrolling at TTC? 8. What support would be useful in pursuing the training program at the TTC? 9. What issues based on your gender trouble you the most?
Closing the discussion with a Positive frame of mind	10. If you were to do one thing which would make the training program a more pleasant learning experience, what would it be?

difficulty arising out lack of residential facilities at the training centre, which might be the reason for some of the female students to seek support from the relatives in ensuring necessary lodging arrangement, fall into this category. In such cases, due

care needed to be taken so that the question did not appear to be pointing an accusatory finger towards the parents and guardians of the students for their inability to provide the requisite support close to the training centre site.

In keeping with the suggestion of Morgan & Krueger (1998), the objective of the last question was to provide a clear enough indication that the discussion had reached the end point. The last question together with the one before that (question 9 in Table 4.1) was also aimed at bringing the participants in a positive frame of mind. This formulation was aimed at generating a feeling among the participants that they were making a useful contribution towards the betterment of the training centre. This feeling, it was expected, would keep the participating students motivated so as to remain engaged with the research till the very end.

### ***Focus Group Analysis***

Notes were kept of the discussions. While taking notes, careful attention was paid to key words and phrases used in the interview. The strategy that was used was not to recall what was said in precise words but to recall the meaning of the remarks. The transcripts from the focus group were analyzed into broad themes. In doing so, it was kept in view that the participants in focus groups tend to negate the false or extreme views (Patton 1990). The themes identified by the participants, which appeared to be relevant to access and equity related concerns at the TTC were grouped as issues. The similarities and divergence of the views of the groups were noted. The variations, however, were minimal. The difference where it was noticed was on account of expressions used which were reflective not so much of the serious differences in the views expressed on the issues but of the degree of emphasis placed on different issues.

The focus group data was analyzed as follows:

- a. the data from the focus groups were grouped under each question.
- b. data from each question was reviewed to identify the themes and the issues. The common themes were identified from the recurring issues in the data. Differences in views, as when it appeared, were also noted.
- c. overall themes and issues were then compiled.

**Table 4.2**  
**Themes Identified by Focus Groups**

Theme	Focus Group Participants' Comments
1. Comprehensive Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach of newspapers</li> <li>• Cost</li> <li>• Capacity to weigh newspaper contents</li> <li>• Alternate media sources</li> <li>• Arrangements for "Open-house"</li> </ul>
2. Physical facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impediments, inconvenience caused</li> <li>• Primary and secondary requirements</li> <li>• Safety and security concerns</li> <li>• Raw materials</li> <li>• Conducive learning environment</li> </ul>
3. Gender concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serious impediments</li> <li>• Need for special consideration</li> <li>• Differentiation in treatment</li> <li>• Safety and security concerns</li> <li>• Impact on access</li> </ul>
4. Quality of teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualification</li> <li>• Industry experience</li> <li>• Attitudinal issues</li> <li>• Proportion of male &amp; female teachers</li> <li>• Teachers as role models</li> </ul>
5. Post training outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations vs. reality,</li> <li>• Perceived credibility of the TTC</li> <li>• Proportion of theory and practicum</li> <li>• Alternative pathways</li> </ul>
6. Management functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support required from the BMET</li> <li>• Authority of the TTC to take major decisions</li> <li>• Review of respective functions</li> </ul>

As indicated in Table 4.2 above, six themes were identified by the focus groups in the broad context of access and equity at the TTC level. The first related to the availability of information relating to the training centre. The concern voiced in this regard appeared to be quite straight forward. In the absence of adequate information, it would not be possible for a prospective student to consider seeking admission in a training centre with any degree of seriousness, and this would have an impact on access and equity related concerns (see Lee 2002). The second identified theme concerned the status of physical facility at the centre. If the physical infrastructure in an institution was not satisfactory, then that institution could be considered to only partially satisfy the access related concerns (see, for instance, Tilak 2002). The next identified theme referred to the gender dimension which impacted the access and equity concerns in various ways (Lee 2002) and the responses of the staff in this context, which were likely to be conditioned by the prevailing socio-cultural situation. The fourth identified theme related to quality of teachers in the centre with its impact on training outcomes, both for male and female students, and thus affecting the status of access and equity status at the training centre level (see, UKCSJ 1998). This included the issue of availability of teachers with appropriate qualification and skills and the fact that the absence of such teachers was construed as a deficiency by the students.

The fifth identified theme concerned post-training outcomes. The effectiveness of the training institution in terms of its potential for post-training employment was seen as an important factor in its ability to attract prospective students (see, ILO 2008). Any factor that impacted adversely on the effectiveness of a training institution was seen to imply reduced chances of that institution being accessed. And finally, the sixth identified theme related to the enhancing the effectiveness of the planning and management functions in the TTC (see, Ministry of Education 2004). This was in relation to the redefinition of the roles of the BMET and the training centre for more effective administrative and management efficiency at the training centre.

As noted above, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 indicated that the above aspects highlighted by the focus groups had also been identified earlier as some of the

important concerns impacting on access and equity concerns in education and training system. The themes identified by the focus group were, thus, in line with the findings of the earlier studies.

### ***Interview process***

The purpose of the interview was to:

1. verify the themes as identified in the literature as well as those which emerged from the focus group data,
2. seek further clarification on the above themes,
3. ascertain the perceptions of the research participants on access and equity related issues at the training centre, and
4. identify the concerns at the training centre which manifest as access and equity related issues at the training centre level.

Details of the persons interviewed and the purpose of the interview are indicated in Table 4.3. As discussed earlier, in selecting the interviewees care was taken to ensure

**Table 4.3**  
**Sample Used for the Interviews**

<b>Interview Group</b>	<b>No. of Persons</b>	<b>Purpose of Interview in Relation to Research Question</b>
BMET Official	1	Training policy, support to TTC, access and equity concerns, gender concerns
Principal TTC	1	Training policy, management practices, training delivery, access and equity concerns at TTC, gender concerns
Deputy Head, TTC	1	Training policy, management practices, access and equity concerns at TTC, gender concerns
Instructors, TTC	6 (2 Females; 4 Males)	Training policy, teaching practices, access and equity concerns at TTC, gender concerns
Students, TTC	17 (4 Females; 13 Males)	access and equity concerns at TTC, support system at TTC, gender concerns

that the objective of bringing out the diverse perspectives as comprehensively as possible was met. As indicated in Table 4.3, the selected interviewees from the BMET and the training centre were senior officials. It was recognized that since there was one participant from the BMET, the person selected for participation should have sufficient knowledge and experience with the organization so as to be able to provide well considered views on the issues under discussion. The BMET official who participated in the research held a responsible position in the organization and was associated with the Bureau for many years. This went a long way in ensuring that the possibility of an ill-considered BMET perspective during the discussion was minimized

So far as the training centre was concerned, the selection of the head of the institution and his deputy were natural selection. They were the persons who by virtue of the positions held by them were best qualified to provide views about different facets of the training centre, including on the administrative and instructional related issues. It was recognized that in view of their personal experiences of dealing with the issues arising out of the division of responsibilities between the BMET and the TTC, the head and the deputy-head of the training centre would be able to reflect the ground realities appropriately.

As noted earlier, the training centre management was consulted about the selection of the participants. This consultation involved discussion about the possible number of participants and the possible profile of the potential participants. The TTC management was not involved in any way in actual selection of the staff and the students as research participants. That was left solely to the discretion of the researcher and was accordingly finalized by him. The factors that were kept in view in selecting the student participants were their representative character in terms of age, gender, socio-economic background, and the kind of training programs they were enrolled in (programs which were perceived to be more or less intellectually demanding, e.g. 'Radio and TV' or 'Plumbing and pipe-fitting'). The other consideration was the apparent capacity of the students to articulate their views appropriately (as demonstrated during earlier discussions).



In accordance with the discussions held with the training centre management, the interviews were held in one of the rooms of the TTC. The management was generous enough to make necessary arrangements for the purpose. The issue that remained to be finalized in that context was the approach to be adopted for collecting data through interviews. The literature available on the subject refers to three possible approaches in designing interviews for obtaining qualitative data (see, for instance, Minichiello et al. 1995). These are structured interviews, focused or semi-structured interviews, and the unstructured interviews.

The *structured interview*, which is also known as standardized interview, according to Minichiello et al. (1995), involves following a carefully worded and sequenced set of questions recorded in a detailed *interview schedule* or *interview guide*, and this schedule is followed in terms of the sequence of the questions posed as well as its wordings, with all the respondents. Thus, in this format of interview, flexibility is limited both in terms of the issues to be raised, and the manner of raising it. The interview schedule has a predominance of *closed-ended questions* although it may contain *open-ended questions* also. This format of interview is useful when the objective is to minimize the variation in the questions posed to the respondents.

The *focused* or *semi-structured interview*, as the name suggests, adopts some of the features of the structured interview method. In this interview process too, an interview guide or schedule is developed identifying before hand a set of the issues that are to be explored with the participant. The interview guide in this case however does not imply rigid adherence to the order in which the issues have been identified or to the language used in the guide in interacting with the participants. The interview guide only serves as a check list to ensure that none of the important issues has been left out during the interaction. This implies that the interviewer has to suitably adapt the sequence of the issues raised, and the manner in which these are raised, to the on-going context of interaction.

The *unstructured interviews* adopt an informal mode of interviewing. This format dispenses with the requirement of interview schedules and gives the appearance of a normal everyday conversation. In this interview responses to spontaneous questions which arise out of the natural flow of interaction between the interviewer and the

interviewee are obtained. However, in this format also the researcher controls the interview process so as to achieve the research objectives although the control may be somewhat limited on account of the nature of the interaction.

As noted above, the structure and pace of the interview can be controlled by adopting different approaches to interviewing. Framing of questions in a particular manner is a device which is aimed at seeking specific information from the interviews. Different types of questions in the interviews may be used in moving towards different objectives. For instance, *descriptive questions* can elicit a response which apart from providing the description may also provide context specific interpretation of the respondent. *Neutral questions* expect straightforward answers (how far is the training centre from your residence?). *Contrasting questions* allow the informants to make comparison of the situations and comment on those situations. *Opinion/value questions* seek out opinion of the informants. *Knowledge questions* are used to ascertain the information that the respondent has. Then there may be *sensory questions* which attempt to find out what has been seen, heard or tasted (Minichiello et al. 1995).

In framing questions, the general trend is to avoid using *leading questions*. These are the questions which suggest the expected answers or contain information that is expected in response. Given the nature of such questions, leading questions may be answered by a yes-no response and this limits the utility of such questions in collecting data. While it may be easy for the interviewer to ask leading questions and make the interviewee conscious of the expected answer, the exercise does not further the cause of a research undertaking. It has to be kept in view that the objective of the researcher is to seek out the inner thoughts of the interviewee; the objective is not to create a situation wherein the interviewee provides an affirmative or negative response on the assumption that the interviewer is expecting that particular response. Such information can result in a bias in the deductions made.

Given the nature of the issues to be discussed, the nature of the sample, and the resource constraints of the researcher, the semi-structured interview format was considered to be an appropriate format for the research undertaking. The semi-structured mode of interview allowed focusing on the issues being researched while at the same time providing for greater flexibility in discussions of the issues under consideration. In this process, although the topic area guided the discussions during the interviews, the interview process followed for seeking responses adopted a somewhat unstructured approach (Minichiello et al. 1995). The interviews were conducted over a period of six weeks.

The awareness of the research participants that the management was supportive of the research undertaking resulted in positive response from the research participants. The discussions with the training centre management had indicated that the student participants were not likely to feel very comfortable in one-to-one interviews in the very first instance. It was felt that the female student participants in particular might find it a little difficult to be very frank in sharing their views on issues under discussion in an interview setting unless sufficient degree of faith and trust was established before hand. It was suggested that the focus group discussion would be a more appropriate choice for eliciting information from the student participants in the first instance. According to the training centre management, that kind of arrangement was, however, not necessary for the interviews with the staff members. The data collection process was accordingly organized.

The interviews were held after the focus group discussion. The use of the semi-structured interview format allowed a gradual but persistent shift of focus from the peripheral to the core issues of the research during the course of the interview. The three core questions were as follows:

- a. What were perceived as access and equity issues at the training centre level?
- b. What, if any, were the access and equity-related issues at the training centre level which could be considered to have a gendered

dimension? If there were such issues, what could be done to address those issues?

- c. If the TTC management were to improve the status of access and equity at the training centre level, what kind of changes in the management practices, if any, would assist in achieving the desired result?

### ***Bias in recording data***

In a research undertaking the possible sources of bias that can affect the recording of data and its interpretation need to be taken note of. One of the more common sources of bias has its roots in the insider-outsider debate (Minichiello et al. 1995). Simply put, the issue in the debate is who is better placed to undertake the research – an insider who is part of the unit that is being researched or an outsider who has no direct link with the unit that is being researched. The arguments for and against the respective parties are well known. An insider-researcher (the insider concept may also encompass other constituents, e.g. members of the same minority group) has the advantage of advance knowledge of the organization and its people and, therefore, is in a better position to appreciate and interpret the information received from the participants, with attendant positive impact on the outcome. The disadvantage of this situation is that there may be a possibility of the researcher bringing in his pre-conceived notions in the interpretations of various responses received. The ‘I-know-it-all’ attitude of an insider-researcher may also act as a barrier for the informants in providing sufficiently detailed and insightful accounts which may ultimately affect the research outcome.

The situation for the outsider researcher, on the other hand, may be just the reverse. S/he may not be personally involved either with the concerned persons or the developments in the unit, and therefore may be in a position to assess the situation without any filters based solely on the information that has been received. This enhances the objectivity in data collection and its interpretation. The disadvantage, however, is that the researcher may have to decipher all that is said and seen with whatever knowledge and understanding s/he has been able to develop in the given circumstances. In this situation the possibility of an inappropriate appreciation or a

flawed inference cannot be ruled out. The mitigating circumstances however lie in adoption of the process of triangulation which goes a long way in validating the observations and findings.

Another possible source of bias may lie in the interviewer-informant relationship. The background of both the interviewer and informant play an important role in this respect. If the informant wants to portray himself/herself in a favourable light before the interviewer then the data obtained may be suspect. The informant some times may also provide only partial information or provide misleading information and that may affect the researcher's appreciation of the situation.

As noted above, the research has to be aware of the possible sources of bias in data collection and interpretation. Irrespective of the root cause of the bias, the information received in such circumstances needs to be validated by cross-checking with the information received from other sources (triangulation) (Minichiello et al. 1990).

### ***Interview data analysis***

Recording data is a critical part of the qualitative research endeavour and the method of recording can, in some circumstances, influence the data, and thus the research outcome. Therefore, note taking has to be done in a thorough manner. It is important to gather actual quotes, especially when something insightful has been said. The quality of note taking assumes added significance since the notes taken provide the basis for further interview questions either to validate what was said earlier or to seek further information on the point made. As noted by Patton (1990), in recording data, the quality of the data gets enhanced with familiarity with data and attention to details.

As noted earlier, written notes were kept for each interview with emphasis on "recalling the meanings of remarks" (Minichiello et al. 1995: 100) rather than trying to reproduce what was said all through the interview in exactly the same words. In analyzing the data, the following steps suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1965) as highlighted by Minichiello et al. (1995: 248) provided useful guidance:

- a) developing a general statement about topics;

- b) collecting data to gain a better understanding of the topics;
- c) modifying, revising and expanding the statement as data are collected;
- d) searching for cases which provide the opportunity to revise the level of understanding reached by the researcher;
- e) developing satisfactory explanation.

In undertaking data analysis, the unit of analysis considered for coding were concepts (group of words in clusters conveying particular ideas), sentences (concept and themes find their value in terms of their location in sentence in the discourses), and the themes (Minichiello et al. 1995). The collected data was examined to identify themes and recurring issues. A recurring issue identified a number of times in the data was considered a theme. The fact that some of the issues did not come forth in some of the data was noted. Similarly, the divergence in the views which surfaced was also taken note of. The overall themes and issues were then put together. The themes with interview comments for each theme are presented in Table 4.4.

The data gathered from the interviews provided substantial relevant information as evident from the themes indicated in Table 4.4. The identified themes and issues and the results from the data analysis are discussed in Chapter 5 of the dissertation.

## **4.8 Ethical Consideration**

The ethical concerns relating to the research were addressed in accordance with the approval granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Central Queensland University. The stipulations laid down in the University's approval letter (number H04/06-76) were observed while undertaking the research. This included the following measures:

- providing sufficient information about the project to the participants so that the aim, objectives and the process is clear to them (refer Appendix A);
- assisting the participants in providing informed consent (refer Appendix B);
- allowing the participants the right to withdraw at any time without assigning any reason (before the commencement of the interviews this position was reiterated);

- ensuring organizational and individual confidentiality at the stage of

**Table 4.4**

**Themes Identified in Interviews**

Theme	Interview Comments
Comprehensive Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are some areas where news papers do not reach</li> <li>• Some of the parents do not subscribe to newspapers</li> <li>• Unless it is known in advance that advertisements would be released in newspapers, the advertisement issued may be missed.</li> <li>• Relatives and friends close to the TTC may be in better position to provide requisite information.</li> <li>• Radio and TV which reach even remote areas may serve the purpose better</li> <li>• Open-house system provide opportunity for first-hand experience and exposure to the TTC</li> </ul>
Physical facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannot be expected to learn in an effective manner in an institution where the physical facilities are not adequate</li> <li>• Students do not expect first rate physical facilities</li> <li>• Boundary walls affect security; parents do not like institutions where security arrangements are perceived to be lax, this is especially the case in respect of females</li> <li>• Canteen and prayer rooms are basic requirements</li> <li>• Availability of raw material on as required basis is important.</li> <li>• Residential facilities for females provide increased opportunities to the females to join an institution; parents may have limited resources; lodging arrangements with relatives may not be satisfactory arrangements.</li> </ul>
Gender concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female students may have to contend with issues which may be considered non-issues for male students.</li> <li>• In certain matters female students may not be allowed the latitude allowed to male students.</li> <li>• In certain matters males may be treated more harshly than females, e.g. in punishments.</li> <li>• Some restrictions on female students from safety and security concerns.</li> <li>• Parents may not allow female children to join an institution if safety and security are perceived to be concerns.</li> <li>• More female teachers can be motivating factors for female candidates.</li> </ul>
Quality of teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students have lower preference for an institution where the teachers are known to possess lower qualification.</li> <li>• Arrangement for teachers training improves the standing of the training centre as well; more students are attracted.</li> <li>• Teachers with industry experience are preferred since such teachers are expected to facilitate post-training employment.</li> <li>• Teacher behaviour as the role model.</li> <li>• Appropriate mix of male and female teachers improves learning environment.</li> </ul>
Post training outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every one expects post-training employment but the result may be different for different student.</li> <li>• Reputation of training centre affects employment prospects.</li> <li>• Higher proportion of theory or of practicum?</li> <li>• More avenues for further education after completion of the training program.</li> </ul>
Management functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited resources with the TTC.</li> <li>• Limited capacity within the TTC to raise resources.</li> <li>• Extent of involvement of BMET in the administration of the training centre.</li> </ul>

reporting, and subsequently too, if need be;

- ensuring that the participants are not exposed to any harm on account of their participation, including offence to their cultural and religious views; and
- ensuring that interactions with the participants took place in a setting so that that they could be watched by some persons.

Almost all major books on research methodology deal with ethical concerns in some detail and most identify the three important ethical considerations as informed consent, avoidance of harm, and confidentiality (see, for example, Denzin & Lincoln 2000, Flinders 1992). In the discussions held with the training centre management before the commencement of the data collection process, these issues were discussed. In practical terms, informed consent implies that participants understand the research process and they participate voluntarily with that understanding and appreciation. Avoidance of harm implies that the research is conducted in such a way that notwithstanding the informed consent of the participants, no harm should come to the participants. The aim of protecting confidentiality is also to protect the participants from any harm, which, for instance, could result from stress, embarrassment or unwanted publicity.

It was explained to the training centre management that the ethical considerations would be appropriately addressed. The provision for withdrawing from the project at any time with no consequence for the participants was reiterated so that the participants fully understood the position.

## **4.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has detailed the methodology and the underlying assumptions of this research study. Informed by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, a research methodology involving interpretive assumptions was adopted for gaining an understanding of access and equity concerns at the training centre level.

In designing the study, it was clear that effective management of ethical considerations relating to the study was important for the successful outcome of the



study. This involved more than detailed explanation about the nature of the research undertaking or a consent which included the freedom for the participants to withdraw at any time without any penalties. The prime requirement in this regard was a degree of trust which the participants had to feel towards the researcher in relation to the research undertaken. Unhindered access to the training centre staff and students after following a consultative process, the readiness of the management all through to extend necessary assistance in conducting the study, and the candidness of the participants in sharing their views, were sign enough reflective of the trust that the research undertaking had been able to generate amongst the participants.

The next chapter presents the various types of data collected in accordance with the methodology indicated in this chapter. Chapter 5 presents the analysis and findings emerging from the collected data.

# Chapter 5

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 considered the context of this research against the backdrop of prevailing labour market conditions since employment opportunities in the labour market provide an important rationale for the vocational education and training. The chapter also considered the existing policy environment as well the infrastructure that was available for the delivery of the planned training programs. The basis for the adoption of the case study methodology for undertaking the research and the processes followed for it were elaborated in Chapter 4. This chapter examines the qualitative data collected in this research.

The examination of the data in this chapter has been informed by the theoretical perspectives of some of the earlier research on the theme of access and equity in vocational education and training. Given the nature of the study, there was no procedural compulsion to follow a particular sequence of analysis for the presentation of the findings. In the circumstances, the criterion followed for presenting the findings was to ensure a degree of coherence in the dissertation which facilitates a better understanding of the findings. Notwithstanding the limitations in undertaking the research, the findings have been presented in a manner so that an integrated picture may be constructed. In analyzing the data care has been taken to appropriately provide for the perspectives of the research participants in their own terms to enable appreciation of these perspectives without any filters.

This chapter commences with a review of access and equity concerns as reflected in the training policy documents. This is followed by an analysis of the observations of the three primary stake holders, the BMET, training centre management and the students of the training centre, on access and equity concerns as seen from their respective perspectives. These perspectives are examined with a view to assess the

status of access and equity at the training centre level. The chapter concludes by highlighting the salient features of the findings.

## **5.2 Access and Equity Concerns in Training**

### **Policy Documents**

The BEMT uses a draft training policy document which provides guidance in its administrative and management functions relating to ‘training’. There are two other documents which may be considered to contain the basic policy guidelines for the education sector as a whole, including the technical vocational education and training sector. The first is the report of the 2003 National Education Commission (NEC), which came out in 2004. The other document is the report of the Planning Commission which in dealing with the strategy for alleviation of poverty in a medium-term perspective refers to the education and training related issues in that context.

The recommendations of the NEC cover the entire gamut of activities under education sector including the TVET sector. The recommendations relating to the TVET sector address a number of important concerns. The recommendations have been grouped under different categories: target envisaged for the year 2020; selection process; selection of teachers and teachers’ training; linkages with the industry; curriculum and pedagogy; research and revision of curriculum; continuing education and opportunities for further learning; standardization and national recognition; administrative infrastructure and overall management; funding; and other miscellaneous issues. The report contains 45 recommendations for the TVET sector. It also includes a set of recommendations provided by the Director General of Technical Education (DGTE) for the TVET sector. The recommendations of the DGTE are numbered sequentially with the other recommendations of the NEC. This indicates that the recommendations of the DGTE are treated as part of the NEC recommendations.

While the NEC recommendations aimed at improving the technical and vocational education and training sector are quite extensive in scope, two of its recommendations (Recommendation No. 11.2 & 11.10 in the section dealing with engineering and

technician education) are explicit in its objective of enhancing access and equity in vocational and technical education. The first recommendation (Recommendation No. 11.2) concerns financial incentives to attract talented students and to encourage more females to participate in these programs while the second recommendation (Recommendation No. 11.10) relates to provision of increased opportunities for vocational education and training to the vulnerable sections of the society, to the housewives, and to older persons through flexible mode of training delivery.

The recommendations of the DGTE incorporated in the report of the NEC contain provisions which are clearly aimed at addressing access and equity concerns. It recommends comprehensive and inclusive programs; in-campus and off-campus programs; programs for the elderly and the vulnerable; and appropriate arrangements for training of the physically challenged and those who have remained outside the mainstream education process. These recommendations although quite broad in contours highlight some of the important concerns relating to access and equity in vocational education and training, which merit serious attention.

The report of the Planning Commission on the strategy for alleviation of poverty is a document which may be considered to be reflective of the government policy for addressing poverty concerns in the medium term perspective. In this context, the report deals with issues which are of relevance to the education sector also. So far as the TVET sector is concerned, the report emphasizes the need for increasing women's enrolment in the TVET sector substantially within a predetermined time frame. It recognizes the access and equity concerns in this sector and points to the need for greater attention to the underprivileged groups, including the poor, the adolescents, and women, in addressing these concerns.

There are, thus, sufficient formal guidelines emanating from the some of the highest authoritative levels which can be used in planning and implementation of vocational training programs with due consideration to access and equity concerns. The research explores the perception in the BMET with regard to the training policy guidelines and its impact at the operational level.

## **5.3 BMET Perspective of Access and Equity in the TTC**

### **5.3.1 Overview of the Data**

The data collected revealed that the BMET as an organization believed that planning and implementation of its activities, including management and administration of the technical training centres with due attention to access and equity concerns at the training centre level were in accordance with the policy of the Government. As the interviewee stated:

*Although there is no document titled as training policy as such with us, but there are other documents which provide us sufficient guidance for carrying out our work in the BMET and the TTCs. We have a training policy document in draft form which we use.*

(BM 1)

The views of the BMET indicated that although there was nothing explicitly incorporated in that draft training policy document in use in the BMET on access and equity related concerns that by itself was not seen to be resulting in any serious impediment in the functioning of the BMET. When asked if the presence of a formal training policy could have facilitated the work of the BMET, the proposition was found acceptable. The advantage of a formal policy document, however, was being seen more in the fact that existence of such a document led to consistency in decision making. It was recognized that for bringing about any change in a formal training policy document it would be necessary to follow a laid down process and that no short cut in the process was likely to be resorted to.

*A written document is always good. The advantage is that any change to be made to the policy has to undergo a fixed (pre-determined) process. It is generally a long process. It may have to go to the DG (of the BMET) and then, if necessary, (to) the Ministry (for approval). But it's (the policy document's) absence is not creating any difficulty for us. We have instructions that are being followed. When someone from the BMET goes to the TTC for inspection or supervision, checking (carrying out of supervisory functions) is done*

*according to these instructions. Therefore, it is not that we don't have any policy for management of the TTCs. (So) There is no difficulty.*

(BM 1)

In the absence of a policy document, how does the BMET deal with issues which may have long-term impact? For instance, the issues which relate to the enrolment process?

*Whenever we handle sensitive matters, we consider taking approval of the higher authorities. Sometimes even the Ministry's approval may be taken, if the situation so demands. Enrolment in some cases may be seen as a sensitive matter. We seek guidance of higher officials in making decisions when necessary. Sometimes we may just keep them informed.*

(BM 1)

In the scenario described above, it is apparent that in the absence of a written policy document any issue considered sensitive enough to be brought to the notice of higher authorities is acted upon accordingly and thereafter action is taken according to the directions/guidance received from the superior authorities. In this situation, the decision taken on each such case is likely to assume the shape of a policy directive till a similar issue is raised again for advice and which could give rise to another set of policy directive. The process thus followed has implications for effectiveness of the system. Apart from avoidable delay in disposal of cases in which guidance/direction have been sought, the procedure followed has the potential for different set of directions emanating at different times, even when the facts of the case may be similar. The BMET, however, did not consider the situation serious enough to be a matter of undue concern since such cases were not common.

When asked, the interviewee was not prepared to hazard a guess about the likely time required for the BMET to acquire a formal training policy.

*(The matter may have to be finalized in the Ministry) The Ministry has its own rules and procedures to follow. It is difficult for Departments outside the*

*Ministry to forecast the time required at the level of the Ministry to finalize any matter.*

(BM 1)

As seen above, the BMET did not view the absence of a formal training policy document as a serious impediment in discharging its training related functions, including those relating to the training centres. The instructions and guidelines framed in-house were considered sufficiently effective as policy directions so far as administration and management of the training centres was concerned.

The interview data indicated that the BMET management believed that access and equity issues had been given sufficient consideration in its policy planning and implementation of vocational training programs.

*As a public agency we are expected to ensure that access to the training centres is available to all and there is no difficulty in this regard. We ensure it. When we visit the training centres during the admission period we keep a watch on this issue. The government is also establishing a number of TTCs for females so that the female students have more opportunities to join the TTCs.*

(BM 1)

In response to the question as to whether the BMET would consider that there was no impediment in accessing the TTCs, the view expressed was as follows:

*The number of applicants in most of the TTCs is much larger than the number of places available. At times, the number of applications received is almost ten times the number of seats (available). Therefore access cannot be considered to be an issue. Still some people may hold the view that access (to the TTC) is not easy. They may not realize that admission may have been secured by better (more eligible) candidates.*

(BM 1)

Under this hypothesis, the rationale appears to be that if an aspiring candidate is not able to secure admission in a TTC, the reason for that can not be attributed solely to

access related concerns. There may be other factors at work in such cases, for instance, availability of more suitable candidates. The logic has merit but only if it is assumed that reasonably adequate number of places is available in the TTCs for the aspiring candidates. If the number of available places in TTCs is much less in relation to what is actually required, then the above argument loses its force.

The BMET was aware that in considering access and equity issues in their planning exercises relating to the TTC, a country-wide perspective had to be kept in view. And in this scenario, the resource position had to be carefully considered.

*What we (the BMET) plan and implement is based on the resources available to us. As a government department we have to be realistic in asking for resources. Even if we ask for too much (funds) at one go, it may not be possible to get every thing that we ask for. (We know) There are limits to what can be made available to every Department. .*

(BM 1)

Referring to the plans for expanding the vocational education and training facilities for the groups which required added support - the informal sector was cited as an example – the response received pointed to the linkage between what can be planned and the availability of resources.

*We have training programs for persons in informal sector although a higher capacity can also be used. We conduct special courses for women in the rural areas but these are not regular courses. We have to keep in view the funds that are available for such programs. There are private (non-government) agencies also working in this area and these are additional facilities available to the members of public.*

(BM 1)

In response to the query if the TTC at its own level could take the initiative to raise resources, the importance of the oversight functions of the BMET was pointed out.



*TTCs conduct some training programs outside the regular programs. These programs are conducted in the evenings. We (BMET) have to approve these programs. We have to know what different TTCs are doing so as to ensure coordination. It is useful to have some kind of supervision in what is being done at the training centre level.*

(BM 1)

Given the limited capacity of the TTCs and the large number of candidates competing for each place, it was not unlikely that there would be requests for admission of candidates beyond the sanctioned strength. The response from the BMET suggested that the prevailing situation in this regard was not very alarming:

*There may be requests (for admission) but such cases may be only a few. If these cases are considered, then admission may be allowed outside the authorized strength so that the authorized strength is not affected.*

(BM 1)

The response indicated that the number of places for admission in different trades could vary, although only in a minimal way depending upon the circumstances. The standard procedure followed for admission through was through the entry tests. In response to a pointed query, it was clarified that the practice of requests for a place in the TTC outside the normal channel was not a regular occurrence. The research has not attempted to identify the criteria adopted for out of turn admissions. Instead, the focus of the research has been on considering measures which represent the optimal use of the places available in the TTC.

### **5.3.2 The BMET and the Gender-related Access and Equity Issues**

According to the BMET, there were no significant gender-related access and equity issues which needed priority attention from the Bureau. It was recognized that in Bangladesh women, in general, have done well in the economic, social and cultural fields. In response to the query about limited participation of females in the TTCs, the view held in the BMET was that the prevailing situation was reflective more of personal choices of the applicants although in some cases these choices might have

been conditioned somewhat by the prevailing socio-cultural norms. The interviewee stated

*The girls are free to choose the courses they wish to apply for. In doing so, they consult their parents and guardians. When they approach us we give them advice. But the important element is the advice of their parents and guardians.*

(BM 1)

It was not clear if that was the only reason for limited participation of the girls in the TTC programs as a whole. The clarification provided was as follows:

*The advice of parents is a major factor on matters related to admission in a training institution. Another factor is the nature of jobs available in the labour market. The garment industry prefers female workers. So the female students wish to join the courses which are useful in the garment industry. The choice of courses also depends upon the educational background and career choices of the female students. Some of female students prefer training programs which allow them to work inside (indoors). Where the work is to be done outdoors or the nature of the job requires a lot of physical activity, then some of the girls may not prefer such jobs. In the IMT (Institute of Marine Technology) we did not get even one female applicant in the last about 20 years. But many girls want to join the TTCs because it provides them the skills required for securing employment of the kind they wish to have.*

(BM 1)

It was seen that the BMET was not considering any special measures for attracting more female students to the TTC programs. For instance, increasing the number of female instructors who could serve as role model for the aspiring female applicants, thereby motivating more female students to join the TTC did not seem to merit special consideration as one of the strategies. The BMET official felt that the open advertisements issued for recruitment of instructors for the training centres served the necessary purpose.

*We follow government instructions. When we advertise the available vacancies for instructors, it is open for all. We cannot discard male candidates if they are otherwise qualified. The same is true for female candidates. If female candidates apply and they are found more suitable, they are appointed. The opening of additional TTCs exclusively for women is a major step by the Government for increasing enrolment of female candidates in the TTCs.*

(BM 1)

The data revealed that safety and security-related concerns was seen as an issue at the training centre level and this was particularly the case for female students. It was indicated that one of the considerations for parents and guardians in deciding upon an institution for their wards was the safety and security status in the particular institution. So far as the research site was concerned, the BMET did not consider that there were any safety and security concerns. There seemed to be a perception that if a training centre did not have any functioning hostel attached to it, then the security environment, especially for the female students, became better.

It was recognized in the BMET that the present capacity of the TTCs was not sufficient to meet the demand for training places and the situation affected both the male and the female candidates. The short-fall, according to the BMET, needed to be viewed in the context of overall availability of resources with the Bureau. It was felt in the BMET that in the prevailing circumstances no additional measures to especially encourage increased participation of female students in the technical training centres were necessary at their end.

## **5.4 Access and Equity from the TTC Management Perspective**

### **5.4.1 Overview**

The views of the TTC-management on access and equity-related issues in the TTC were explored in the context of the existing policy documents. The TTC-management believed that any thing to do with what was perceived to be a policy-related issue was primarily within the domain of the BMET and, therefore, had to be acted upon by the

BMET. The TTC management was clear that they were implementing the policies conveyed to them by the higher echelons.

The data revealed that the TTC-management did not believe that existence or otherwise of a formal training policy document was having any impact on the effectiveness of the training centre. For the TTC, the guidelines and instructions received from the BMET carried the same authority as any policy directive and, therefore, were implemented with due diligence. That the TTC management harboured no ambiguity in this regard was seen from the following response:

*The TTC is not directly involved with the policy. The BMET deals with the policy matters. The BMET issues instructions for implementation (of the policy) and we implement the instructions.*

(TC 1)

It was clear that the TTC was cognizant of the importance of the training policy but believed that its role was limited to implementing the policy directives. Following up further with regard to providing inputs in the training policy formulation process so that the policy framed reflected the ground realities, the response of the TTC was

*We provide our views to the BMET whenever we are asked. The senior officers of the BMET also know what works and what does not work in the TTC. The BMET looks after (oversees) so many TTCs, not only this one. So they know the issues to be included in the policy (document).*

(TC 1)

The TTC did not appear very sure about the utility of a training policy document at the training centre level. When pointed out that in some sensitive matters, decisions could be taken at the TTC level on the basis of the policy document, the response was

*In the case of sensitive matters, if required we refer the matter to the higher authorities and obtain their guidance.*

(TC 2)

It is seen from the collected data that the TTC management could not consider starting any thing new at the training centre level without first obtaining concurrence of the BMET. The role of the BMET in this process appeared quite clear to the TTC.

*It will not be proper to start any thing new without the approval of the BMET.  
We have to follow the instructions from the HQ (BMET).*

(TC 1 & TC 2)

The above indicated a deep rooted understanding in the TTC that whatever was to be done at the training centre level had to be in accordance with the explicit instructions and advice of the BMET.

As seen from the data, the views of the TTC management on access and equity-related concerns at the TTC were similar to those held by the BMET. The view was that there were no serious concerns on these issues at the centre level and whatever was necessary was being done in that regard.

*Access is not a concern here (in the TTC). We receive many applications for one seat (place). This shows that those who wish to apply for admission to the TTC are doing so. There is no discrimination here, neither during the admission nor during the training.*

(TC 1 & TC 2)

#### **5.4.2 The Operational Issues**

The procedure followed for admission in the TTC is one of the operational issues which impact both access and equity concerns. The training centre management was cognizant of the importance of proper management of admission related processes. The importance of labour market demand as one of the factors influencing the choices during the admission was noted by the training centre instructors. The example cited was that of the well-known case of the garment industry - the garment industry in Bangladesh employed nearly 2 million workers and nearly 85 per cent of the workers were females. As one of the instructors explained:

*Girls come in large numbers to join the garment trades (dress making). Even if they are qualified for other courses, they want to join the garment trade because they think they can get a job immediately on completion of the training program.*

(TC 5)

The TTC seemed clear that the system in vogue for regulating admissions had to be kept under continual watch with a view to ensure proper access.

*We have to be careful during the admission time. If admission is based on marks obtained in Grade 8, we have to be sure about the mark-sheets (transcripts) produced by the applicants. If admission is on the basis of admission tests then it has to be ensured that no applicant uses unfair means (during the admission tests).*

(TC 6)

The factors responsible for large scale applications for admission in the TTC also appeared to be clear to the TTC management.

*Parents know that the children who are not good (enough) for general education have to be sent to a technical training centres so that they are able to secure some kind of employment in the future. There are private vocational institutions but the expenses there are much more in comparison to a government training centre. That is why this rush (for admission to the TTC). The students also receive monthly stipend. This makes the TTC more attractive.*

(TC 4)

To a query if it meant that only the less talented students came to the TTC, the response was as follows:

*The first choice (for a student) is the general education stream. But even in this situation we (the TTCs) can get a much better lot (of students) if there is wider publicity of the training programs of the TTC. There should be enough*

*publicity about the stipend also. If we have a better batch (of students) then the TTC will become a (qualitatively) different institution.*

(TC 4)

On the query regarding the impact of the stipend paid to the students on enrolment, it was indicated that

*Some of the students may be seeking admission in the TTC for the stipend but such students may be a few. But for most of the students earning a certificate (which indicates that the training program has been successfully completed) is the main reason.*

(TC 7)

When asked if there were requests for admission even after all the places a training program have been filled, it was indicated that there could be a few such cases. When asked about the system followed for processing such requests, the response revealed that the process adopted aimed to ensure that other applicants did not suffer any disadvantage on account of such admissions, if at all such admissions took place.

*When such cases are considered, then admission is provided outside the authorized number. The authorized strength for the general candidates is not affected.*

(TC 1)

Some of the TTC staff was of the view that the curriculum followed in the TTC impacted on the choices made by the students and, therefore, acted as an access issue. Apart from the course itself, the course curriculum was seen as an important consideration for the students. Some of the interviewees expressed the view that a higher proportion of theoretical (academic) subjects in the curriculum could act as a deterrent for some of the prospective students from seeking admission in the TTC. The opposite perspective was also indicated by some other interviewees who felt that the TTC students should also have appropriate theoretical knowledge.

From the data collected it was seen that there was no consensus on what was considered to be the right mix between the theoretical subjects and the practical skills imparted at the training centre. As explained by one of the interviewees

*The students who come here believe that they may not be able to find a place in general education (system). They come here to learn some skills so that they can get a job once they complete the vocational course. If it is known that we spend too much time on theoretical subjects and that the practical training imparted here is not sufficient, then we (the TTC) may be getting only the students who are unable to secure admission in other training centres where more practical training is imparted.*

(TC 8)

Although there does not appear to be any empirical evidence to support the above hypothesis, common sense logic may give some credence to the logic of the above argument. Given the number of students who seek admission in vocational courses on the basis of their assessment of the current demand in the labour market, perceptions about the level of practical skills acquired in the TTC can have impact on access related concerns of the prospective students.

#### **5.4.3 Gender-based Access and Equity Issues**

It was gathered from the interviews that the TTC management did not believe that there were gender-based access and equity concerns at the training centre level which needed special attention. According to the management, there was no discrimination even at the entrance level processes and all eligible candidates were free to seek admission. As was the case with the BMET, the view held in the TTC was that the large number of applications for each of the place available in the TTC was a clear indication that neither access nor equity was an issue at the training centre level. The number of female students, especially in the garment trades, was cited as an example to support this contention:

*We do not discriminate against any applicant on any ground. They have to qualify on the basis of the marks obtained in the admission test. If they*



*succeed, they are in (admitted). We have so many female students in the garment trade.*

(TC 2)

It was pointed out to the centre management that generally students in south-Asia, especially the female students, at times, might be reluctant to highlight their grievances to those who were senior in age or in position, and that it was a cultural factor. If something similar were the case at the training centre level, then the TTC management would not come to know of the access and equity concerns arising out of the gender dimensions. This would be particularly the case if the concerned staff were not equipped in terms of skills required to watch out for the possible signs in that regard. The TTC management was of the view that it was unlikely to be the case at the TTC. One of the typical comments was

*The female students of the TTC are not like that (shy or reserved, and therefore unable to state their case). This may be the situation in some very remote areas and even there the situation is changing very rapidly. If the female students of the TTC want something, they will not hesitate in asking for it.*

(TC 7)

Some of the training centre staff, however, felt that there might be some issues with gender overtones which needed to be taken note of. As one of the female instructors explained

*Some of the (relatively) older staff may feel that girls may not be suited for training in all types of trades (vocational skills). At times, female students may need extra encouragement to join non-traditional courses. If the TTC have more female staff, it would encourage more female students to join different courses.*

(TC 6)

The above statement, if it refers to an existing situation, may be a pointer to an attitudinal issue, and also carries with it a suggestion for addressing the same. The

training centre management, as noted earlier, however supports the policy of appointment of teachers based on the criterion of suitability irrespective of the gender consideration.

The importance of having the latest equipment for training purposes and availability of raw material required for practical training was highlighted by the interviewees. According to one of the female interviewees, if the TTC graduates on account of their inadequate practical training were unable to meet the requirements of the industry in terms of skills required, then not many students would consider enrolling in the training centre. As the interviewee explained:

*Girls come in large numbers to join the garment trade (dress-making) (in the TTC). Even if they are qualified for other courses, they believe that on completion of the garment course they can get jobs easily. Some of these students are very good (academically bright). If they are trained on obsolete machines, they cannot learn much. If the raw material (required for training) is not sufficient then also the training will not be useful. This may discourage female students.*

(TC 5)

As the above comments indicated, the interviewee appeared to be concerned at the prospect of the students losing out in the labour market even after completion of the training at the TTC, if the skills acquired in the TTC were not appropriate to meet the demands of the industry. Comments about the importance of ensuring adequate availability of raw material were noted in other data as well.

## **5.5 Access and Equity from the TTC Students' Perspective**

The students of the TTC who participated in the project were sufficiently articulate and displayed adequate understanding in responding to the issues which were discussed. Their forthrightness in responding to the questions, particularly by the female students, was helpful in clearer understanding and appreciation of the issues involved at the training centre level from the students' perspective.

### 5.5.1 The Information Gap

It was found from the interviews that the student participants did not consider that the information disseminated about the TTC and its programs through news paper advertisement was sufficient for them to guide them appropriately in the selection of either the training centre or a particular training program conducted at the centre. It was noted that although some of the students had heard that advertisements were being issued, they had not actually seen any such advertisement. According to some of the interviewees, whatever information they had been able to obtain was obtained from their close relatives and friends. One typical response in this context was as follows:

*We did not know much about the programs in the TTC before applying for admission in the TTC. Whatever we came to know was from our close relatives or neighbours who had been students of one of the TTCs in the past, or somehow knew about the TTCs. We have to rely on these information in making decisions regarding the courses and the training centre.*

(TC 21)

Another interviewee had this to say:

*The decisions are generally made by our parents and guardians. Some of the parents who are not well educated may not have sufficient knowledge to obtain the required information. Such parents and guardians may find it difficult to advise their wards regarding selection of the TTC or the right courses.*

(TC 24)

It was noted that the views about inadequacy of information about the training centre and the programs conducted by it appeared to be shared by a number of participants. The students believed that if the information about the vocational programs were announced with due attention to the target population, the quality of students applying for different training programs would become better. A number of them had come to join the training centre because one or more of their close relatives or acquaintances had studied in one of the TTCs. In some cases, the siblings had joined the same TTC, although in different training programs.

### 5.5.2 Physical Facilities

The student participants felt that the status of physical facilities in the training centres needed to be reviewed regularly. According to the interviewees, availability of a canteen was one of the important requirements. The following comment of a female student participant was a somewhat of a typical response:

*There is no canteen in the TTC. The boys (male students) find some ways to go to the nearby canteen. We are not allowed. We have to ask the boys to get the food for us. Since by the time we get the food the lunch-break may be over, we are able to eat only in- between the two sessions.*

(TC 12)

Absence of a hostel for the female students was cited as an issue, which according to the some of the interviewees, deterred a large number of female students from joining the TTCs:

*Admission in a TTC located in Dhaka is possible for female students from Dhaka. The students from outside Dhaka have to find some relatives with whom they can live for the duration of the training (if they are enrolled in a TTC located in Dhaka). Sometimes, some of the students live with one relative for some time and then they have to shift to another relative. I don't blame the relatives. Keeping outsiders (allowing a non-family member to live with the family) is not easy. This is also not good for the students. Some of the parents cannot think of this arrangement because they don't have relatives who can keep the children. If a hostel for girls is available it will help many female students who wish to come from distant places.*

(TC 10)

According to the interview data, the students believed that if there were TTCs at the *upzila* (sub-district) level, then this situation could be addressed although even then there would be students who would like to join a TTC located in the bigger towns.

*The facilities are better in training centres located in places like Dhaka. It may not be the same in a training centre in a distant district. The employers*

*like students from training centres like the ones in Dhaka since these centres have better facilities.*

(TC 19)

When asked why the particular TTC (the research site) was selected by the students, the information provided earlier was reiterated.

*This TTC is considered better TTC. We may have better chances of getting a job after completion of a vocational course here.*

(TC 20)

Some of the female students expressed the view that an appropriate place for them to offer *namaz* (prayers) and the provision of a separate ‘common-room’ exclusively for the female students would further improve the learning environment for the female students.

### **5.5.3 The Administrative Issues**

The concerns with regard to the admission process impacting on access and equity concerns were explored. The importance of the admission tests in joining a particular training program was well recognized. As a female student explained

*Some of the supervisors may not be strict during the admission test. Then it may not be difficult for some one to use unfair means and score high marks. Those who take the test fairly may not be able to get the courses they want. Mostly, it is the boys who use unfair means. Since they score high marks in the admission test, they can secure admission in good courses like RTV (Radio & TV) and computers.*

(TC 12)

A somewhat more balanced view was expressed by another student.

*There may be a few students, whether boys or girls, who may try to cheat in the admission tests but it is not easy to do that when so many persons are watching. The supervision is strict during these tests.* (TC 23)

As noted earlier, the views on the theory-practical content debate provided a mixed response. A number of students, mostly males, felt that since they have joined a vocational course, too much emphasis on theory should not be insisted upon. And what is 'too much'? According to some of the students who were interviewed, any thing more than the bare minimum required to obtain the 'TTC certificate' should be regarded as 'too much'. It was seen that most of the students favouring minimal theoretical contents were in vocational courses which were perceived to intellectually less demanding like the 'automotive' (auto repair) and 'plumbing'.

Some of the students expressed the view that although it was known that they had joined the TTC because their performance was not up to the required standard for the general education stream, it was not clear why too much emphasis on the theoretical contents was being considered. There seemed to be a perception that the prospective employers' were not so much concerned with the theoretical portions taught during the training as they were with the practical portion.

*I want to do the 'practicals' (practical training). I want to learn things which will give me a job. Why waste time on theory? When I go for employment, they want to see my practical skills. My knowledge of theory is not going to be tested.*

(TC 23)

The female student participants generally, however, seemed to hold the opposite view. They felt that the theoretical contents should be increased. In this context, the importance of the quality of the teachers was also emphasized.

*I want to join a diploma course in a Polytechnic after completing the vocational course here. If my theory is weak, then I shall not be able to complete the course there (in the Polytechnic). The teachers who teach the theory papers in the TTCs should be (professionally) very good.*

(TC 11)

For a number of students, especially the female students, joining a polytechnic after completing the vocational course seemed to be the preferred choice. One of the

factors which fueled this desire was the reservation in the polytechnics provided for students graduating from the TTCs. Nevertheless, it was recognized that only some of the students completing their vocational courses would be able to find a place in polytechnic, not all. In response to the question as to what would happen to those who were not able to secure admission in a polytechnic after graduating from the TTC, a typical response was

*All of us cannot get admission in to the Polytechnics. Even if we are not able to go to a Polytechnic, we have a good chance of securing some employment. We learn some skills here and therefore we have better chances of finding a job.*

(TC 12)

Although, the fact that not all students completing the training courses would be able to secure employment was recognized, no student was willing to hazard a guess about the proportion of students who would actually manage to secure employment. Yet, the students were optimistic because they believed that for the kind of job that they were aspiring, they would have a better chance as compared to students from the general education stream on account of the practical skills acquired in the TTC.

The female students were also of the view that the instructors treated the male students differently and in a more lax manner. When asked to elaborate, a typical comment was

*The instructors are more lenient towards male students. Sometimes male students go out and do not return after lunch. If the female students come late, they are asked many questions. If an outsider comes and asks for one of the male students, that student will be allowed to go out. The female students are not allowed to go out like that. Female students find it difficult even to go to the canteen to buy food.*

(TC 9)

Responding to the query whether it was a good thing that the female students did not have to go to the canteen to buy food and instead the male students brought the food from the canteen for them, the typical response received appeared emphatic.

*It is not a good thing. We have to ask many students before some one agrees (to get the food). I keep waiting till I get the food. I don't know when I can eat. I want to have my food during the lunch-break.*

(TC 10)

#### **5.5.4 Safety and Security Concerns**

Both, the male and the female student participants, had views on the safety and security related aspects. One of the male students felt that the instructors at times could be quite harsh with the male students. The view expressed was that although such a practice could not be treated as a serious concern, it was not conducive to establishing a learning environment.

So far as the general security in the campus was concerned, the prevailing situation was described as follows:

*Any body can enter the training centre at any time. Some times, even complete strangers appear to roam around in the compound. There is no checking. Wearing of uniform is not strictly followed and therefore it is difficult to find out who is an insider (a member of the institution) and who is not.*

(TC 25)

Some of the female students, on the other hand, considered the prevailing situation as nothing unusual and felt that it was up to the individuals take necessary remedial measures.

The views of the TTC students indicate their concerns relating to issues which apparently impact access and equity considerations at the training centre level. In the following section, an analysis has been made of the data gathered and the findings that emerge have been indicated.



## **5.6 The Findings**

In arriving at the findings, firstly access and equity concerns have been reviewed in the context of the attention paid to these issues in the national policy documents on vocational education and training. Thereafter, the manifestation of access and equity issues at the training centre level is examined from the perspectives of the BMET, the training centre management and the students of the training centre. The section concludes with the inferences that can be drawn from the analysis.

### **5.6.1 Access and Equity Concerns in the Training Policy**

The BMET has indicated that presently there is no formal document available with it which is titled ‘training policy’. The perception of the BMET that the absence of the document by itself cannot connote absence of a training policy for the BMET appears valid on the basis of the literature reviewed.

Gale (2000) has explored the issue of public policy production in a comprehensive manner. Briefly stated, Gale has suggested consideration of policy in three ways: ‘policy as disposition, intervention and allocation; policy as intention, documentation, and in-use; and policy as text, discourse, and ideology’ (Gale 2000, p. 14). What is seen originating in public bureaucracies is policy as disposition, intervention and allocation and this is true for educational policy as well. The implication is that the concerned authorities dealing with the policy are also responsible for ensuring adherence to it in order to reach the desired objectives. Gale points out that while “the state is very involved in policy production ...such production is rarely uniform and the state’s control over the policy process is seldom exclusive” (Gale 2000, p. 16).

The second category, i.e. policy as text, discourse and ideology, implies that understanding of policy is not just about the “product but also process” (Gale 2000, p. 19). Therefore, in understanding policy as text, one has to have an appreciation of the interactions involved in the production of policy as well as that of its interpretation. The third category, i.e. policy as intention, documentation, and in-use, would be reflected in implementation of government decisions which are then taken as policies. Policy in-use may therefore be reflected in programs under implementation.

In the above context, the programs and activities under BMET can be categorized as policy under the third category, i.e. policy in-use, even if there is no formal document labeled as the training policy. Since a set of rules, regulations and guidelines framed by the BMET are applied consistently across all the training centres, these can be construed to form the policy in use for the BMET.

The two government documents, the report of the national Education Commission 2003 and the Planning Commission document (2005) referred to in Chapter 3 highlight issues relating to access and equity in the education and training sector and the way forward in addressing them. These documents set out the broad policy directions for the TVET sector in general at the macro level and, therefore, can be considered policy documents. The documents recommend enhanced output of the TVET institutions, which is an important measure for enhancing access and equity and, when implemented, its impact is likely to be visible at the earliest.

In the circumstances, the BMET's contention that they have a training policy which provides directions and guidelines for policy planning and program implementation, including on enhancing access and equity at the TTC level, can be considered valid.

### **5.6.2 Access and Equity Concerns at the TTC Level**

It is seen that the BMET does not see access and equity concerns at the training centre level as issues requiring any special attention. As pointed out by the BMET, the fact that there are more than ten applicants for every place available in the TTC is indeed reflective of the fact that a sufficiently large section of the relevant population and/or their parents/guardians are aware of the existence of the TTC and the different programs conducted by it. However, this situation by itself may not be indicative of appropriate attention to access and equity concerns at the training centre level. In a developing country vocational courses are seen as one of the more effective pathways to gain a foothold in the labour market (see, for instance, Ministry of Education 2004). In the circumstances, even if a substantial proportion of the relevant population in these countries decides to opt for the vocational training path to enhance employability, the number of applicants seeking admission in to technical training centres in aggregate number is likely to be much higher than what the training providers may have catered for. Therefore, the hypothesis that there was no access

related issue at the training centre level may need to be considered from a holistic perspective before any firm conclusion can be drawn.

### **5.6.3 Dissemination of Information**

The absence of adequate information regarding the TTC and the programs conducted by it, as noted in the data, appear to be one of the important issues in the context of improved access. The prospective students may wish to have information in advance regarding the location of the TTC as well as the physical and other facilities available at the TTC to enable them to consider the issue of admission in a proper manner. The relevant information, for instance, may include the broad details of different courses conducted by the training centre, admission criteria, the period when applications for enrollment are required to be submitted, mode of selection, linkage with industry, some information on practical training imparted in the courses, financial assistance, if any, provided to the students and, to the extent possible, some information regarding the potential career profile of the graduates. Absence of any of the above details may result in a situation in which the students have to consider the possibility of seeking admission in to the training centre without appreciating fully the pros and cons of their chosen course of action.

If the parents and guardians of the prospective students have the requisite information about the training centres and the courses conducted by it, and thereafter advise their wards about the courses to be enrolled in, then it will be reflective of a well informed decision. The students may not have the optimal benefit of informed decision making if the decision has been made on the basis of limited information. There may be two contributory factors for such a situation. Firstly, it may be due to the fact that parents of some of the students may not be in a position to access sufficient relevant information. Secondly, even to the extent the information is made available to these parents, they may not be in a position to appropriately weigh the pros and cons of the available alternatives on account of their inadequate cultural capital.

It may not be difficult to imagine that even if an advertisement giving out the details of the courses and the admission process is issued in the newspapers by the TTC well before the commencement of the session, the reach of this information may be limited to those who have access to the newspapers. If the advertisement is seen only by the

relatively well off people (assuming a positive correlation between the economic status and newspaper readership), then the advantage is derived only by that section of the population. This may put the students from the lower socio-economic background whose parents are not able to access newspapers regularly into a disadvantageous position. The fact that not one student participating in the research had seen such an advertisement may be reflective of the ground situation in the community at large. In the absence of complete information, some of the students, especially those belonging to the lower socio economic strata, by default could go into courses which are neither suitable for short-term benefits in terms of availability of immediate employment, nor for any other benefit from the perspective of long-term career planning. This situation, thus, might lead to some of the prospective students joining courses which are perceived to be less important and with lesser possibilities in the future as compared to other vocational courses (Ainsworth and Roscigno 2005; Oakes 1985).

The research suggests that the BMET and the TTC may consider taking measures to ensure that the relevant information is disseminated in a targeted manner. This would be an important step towards removing potential access-related disadvantages, if any, arising out of lack of information for the target groups. It would ensure that all students who are eligible and willing to take part in the prescribed admission process have a fair opportunity to do so. The process may, however, result in a much larger number of applications being received for each of the place in the TTC and, possibly, necessitate putting in place a system so that additional resources required for processing the increased number of applications thus received are made available to the training centre.

The data revealed that the process of screening adopted for deciding on the admissions out of the large number of applicants applying for each place may have some impact on access and equity concerns. As noted earlier, if the process of screening adopted for deciding on the admissions is not flawless then access as well as equity issues are likely to surface. If an entry examination system allows unfair advantage to some of the applicants, and on the basis of the (higher) marks secured through such an examination system the applicants are able to secure admission into courses which are much in demand depriving some others who can legitimately claim

admission to these places on merit, access and equity considerations have clearly been affected. This points to the imperative of following a fair and transparent admission process consistently which does not allow undue advantage to any one.

#### **5.6.4 Capacity Consideration**

As discussed in the earlier section, the practice of allowing admission into courses to some candidates beyond the established capacity, irrespective of the numbers involved, is an issue that may need consideration. The argument that such admissions, if made, do not affect the authorized strength does not validate the process followed. Even if the practice is neither widespread nor the number involved is of any significance, the process goes against the notion of ensuring access and equity. If increasing the number of places in a particular program is considered to be a feasible proposition, then the contemplated increase could be taken into account at the beginning of the session and the resultant increased number of places could be filled through the regular mode of admission as applicable for the general admission system.

In considering access and equity issues at the training centre level, the BMET has to keep in perspective the overall requirement of training places at the macro level. This implies that the BMET has to consider the total number of potential candidates country-wide who are likely to opt for TTC path, as also the requirement of the labour market for a given time frame, in formulating its plans and programs. The fact that the available capacity in the education and training sector at present needs augmentation is recognized by the policy planners (see Ministry of Education 2004). In the circumstances, it would not be surprising if access and equity concerns are seen to surface from time to time and this situation may continue till appropriate provisions are made. There are a number of players in the field of vocational education and training, both in the public and private sector. A coordinated approach may be helpful in ensuring optimum utilization of the available resources.

#### **5.6.5. Quality Consideration**

The quality of training imparted can have some impact on access and equity concerns, as revealed by the data collected. The quality of teachers in a training institution is an important factor for successful training delivery. As noted earlier, when some of the

teachers in a training institution possess higher qualifications than the prescribed minimum, it is viewed positively by the students.

A training institution which is known to boast of a large number appropriately skilled staff may be able to attract a much larger number of students compared to one which does not have that kind of staff. Furthermore, staffing a training institution with staff members whose skills need to be upgraded implies putting the students of that institution to some degree of disadvantage vis-à-vis the students in another training institution where the staff possess necessary qualification and skills. The issue, thus, has equity overtones.

Such a situation calls for a structured arrangement for periodically assessing the training needs of the staff so that appropriate arrangement for upgrading the skills of the teachers on as required basis could be initiated. The absence of appropriately trained staff can adversely affect not only the quality of training imparted in the training centre but also the morale and motivation of other staff members, with attendant impact on the training outcomes.

The data revealed that the extent of availability of raw materials required for imparting practical skills may have an impact on access related concerns. As observed by some of the interviewees, if the students do not possess the expected level of skills on completion of the training on account of shortage of raw material during the period of training, to that extent the utility of the training received gets impacted and the credibility of the institution suffers. In this situation, the training institution cannot be considered to meet the access objectives optimally.

The issue of the modalities adopted for the management of the TTCs impacting on access and equity considerations gets reflected in the collected data. There is a view that a more decentralized system of management with increased delegation of authority to the training centre, may improve the training centre's effectiveness with attendant positive impact on its access and equity status. The BMET, on the other hand, recognizes the importance of oversight functions in ensuring a degree of harmony and coordination amongst the different training centres. A balanced approach thus becomes necessary with a view to arrive at the broad parameters of

delegation of authority to the training centres with a clear understanding of the expected outcomes.

The increased delegation of authority to the TTC may enable it become more innovative and enterprising in training delivery. This may enable the training centre to take appropriate decisions without having to wait for the approval of the BMET at every stage. Such an arrangement is likely to bring down the frequency and the periodicity of various reports which are submitted by a training centre to the BMET, with attendant savings in the TTC resources. As a consequence, the training centre management may be able to devote more time to attend to the basic function of ensuring that training delivery becomes more efficient and effective with due attention to access and equity concerns.

The increased delegation of authority to the training centre, however, does not imply that the BMET may have to completely abandon its oversight functions with respect to the TTCs. In fact, having divested itself of some of the responsibilities relating to day-to-day administration and management of the training centres, the BMET may be in a position to devote more time and resources to its major task of policy planning, advice and guidance, as well as coordination of the activities of the VET sector in conjunction with other providers of VET, both in the public and the private sector.

#### **5.6.6 Access and Equity at the TTC in the Macro Context**

Presently, the major function of the TTCs is geared towards providing skills required in the formal sector. Some of the training centres are engaged in providing skills training for the informal sector also but as the data reveals, these measures are yet to attain the desired scale. In this context, the findings of the BBS survey (2004) with regard to the current trends of employment as indicated in Chapter 3 provide important insights for planning and delivery of TVET with a macro perspective. The fact that the rural and urban sectors have the employment potential on the same scale reinforces the imperative of appropriate dispersal of training institutions in the rural and urban areas. Similarly, the fact that agriculture, forest and fisheries sector indicate the highest employment opportunities in the rural areas points to the need of adequate training programs for these sectors keeping in view the location-specific demand for the production and manufacturing activities undertaken in those locations. The current

employment trends point towards a reduced level of employment in the formal sector. This implies the need for the TTC to focus more on developing training programs which cater to the skills required in the rural areas, and in the informal sector. Such training programs may include, for instance, training for micro and small enterprises, self-employment in the agriculture sector, and those relating to the needs of the extension workers. Action taken in this regard may result in improved availability of vocational training programs which are in demand in the labour market.

As noted in Chapter 3, the policy planners have stressed the need for making provision for vocational training for the excluded and the vulnerable sections of the society. This implies developing training programs focused on the target groups. The findings reveal that a training system which delivers vocational training with fixed number of training programs, fixed number of places, and fixed entry and exit schedules is not likely to be successful in addressing the training needs of the vulnerable sections of the society in any significant manner. Simply put, the training programs have to demand driven. As brought out by the NEC (Ministry of Education 2004), flexible modes of training delivery may need to be considered for selected target groups to enable them to derive optimum advantage of the available vocational training programs.

The BBS survey (2004) also points to the potential demand for lower levels of skills. As noted in Chapter 3, if most of the employment opportunities are likely to be available in the informal sector, then the requirement of persons with lower levels of skills is likely to be significant till such time the operators in the informal sector are able to develop their capacity and competence, and are able to move into the formal sector. It would, therefore, be necessary to have an effective system of training need assessment so that the training programs of the TTC can also cater to the needs of the identified target groups. The enhanced delegation of authority to the TTC is likely to have a beneficial impact on greater motivation and experimentation in this context.

#### **5.6.7 Optimum Utilization of Resources**

The data reveals that there is a perception among the students that that the training centres located in the bigger cities are better resourced and hence students graduating from the TTCs located in these places are considered better trained. If this perception



has some validity, then the issue may need to be considered from access and equity perspective. The notion of access cannot be considered to imply opportunities for accessing only those facilities which are perceived to be inferior in some respects.

It is recognized that some of the private training providers may, at times, be in a position to provide improved training facilities, for instance, by providing some of the more recent equipment for training purposes. The improved training facilities available in such training centres may be the distinguishing features of these training institutions. This may be one of the considerations for some of the prospective students to seek admission in private training centres, notwithstanding the comparatively higher cost of training which may have to be borne by the students of these centres.

The difference in the facilities available in different technical training centres, on the other hand, is not likely to be significant. The allocation of resources amongst the various training institutions managed through public funding is generally on the basis of pre-determined norms which are determined in the context of overall availability of resources. Yet there may be some difference in the status of physical facilities and equipment between two public training institutions. This could be the case if one of the training institutions has been established with some additional support and assistance. The differences in such a case, at times, may be significant and may continue till specifically addressed.

In the context of availability of resources, the stipend paid to the students of the TTC is an important element. A monthly stipend is paid to the students admitted to the technical training centres. The objective of providing financial support to the students is laudable. The process followed, however, may also act as a pull-factor for students who in reality may not be keen on learning vocational skills but may wish to join the TTCs only to receive the monthly stipend. The need for optimum utilization of financial resources in the education sector has been commented upon (see, for instance, Ahmed 2006). In the circumstances, alternative approaches for utilization of available resources may appear to merit consideration. The means-tested stipend policy, for instance, may be one such alternative for consideration. Adoption of the means-tested method for determining the eligibility for stipend is likely to have a

positive impact on the effectiveness of the training centre since the students admitted under this process are expected to be (relatively) more keen on learning vocational skills.

#### **5.6.8 Gender-based Access and Equity Concerns**

Although the students did not frame their views specifically as access and equity issues from the gender perspective, the views expressed by them on different issues were seen to have implications of varying degrees from the gender perspective. According to the participating students, greater attention to such issues was likely to result in increased participation of female students in the training centres.

The BMET as well as the TTC believe that participation of the female students in the training centres and the courses they enroll in at the centres largely reflect the personal preferences of the applicants. The data collected reveals that while this may be true to a large extent, the preferences of the female students are likely to be conditioned by a number of factors. For instance, the socio-economic background of the applicants and the cultural capital of the parents and guardians of these applicants may play a role in shaping of the preferences of the applicants. The peer group influence may be another such factor. These issues may need to be factored in before drawing appropriate inferences on the apparent preferences of the applicants.

Non-availability of the canteen facilities in the training centre is an issue which has gender overtones. In the absence of a canteen, some of the female students faced inconvenience because of their inability to buy food readily enough. Even when such students were able to get the food through the assistance of some of the male students, they could consume the food during the authorized break only if it reached them in time. The situation, in some sense, may be reflective of a double jeopardy. Firstly, the concerned female students had to request some of the male students before one of them agreed to procure the food items. This act which entailed refusal by some of the male students before one of them agreed to get the food stuff, according to the concerned students, was quite frustrating and did not contribute towards a learning environment.

Secondly, the situation described above may be considered to be reflective of different sets of standard for the male and the female students of the training centre. This is indicated in the relatively less latitude allowed to the female students as compared to their male counterparts. It can be safely assumed that the concerned staff is guided in their behaviour by the safety and security concerns of the female students. However, in considering the situation described above it may not be appropriate to ignore the gender dimension. Restricting the movement of the female students may reinforce the stereotypical portrayal of females as the weaker gender, incapable of taking care of themselves and, thus, giving rise to the need for keeping them within the confines of a place considered more secure.

The situation of the kind described above points to the imperative of paying closer attention to the gender dimensions. Although the notion of gender sensitization did not explicitly figure in any of the data collected, in situations of the above nature it may be useful to consider gender sensitization of the concerned staff so that the relevant concerns of the students, especially the female students, are appropriately addressed.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This Chapter has reviewed the data collected and examined the status of access and equity at a training centre level, the research site. Although the BMET and the TTC management hold the view that current status of access and equity concerns at the TTC level do not warrant special attention, the findings indicate that there may be room for constructive intervention in certain areas. The following chapter, i.e. Chapter 6, draws a set of conclusion from the research findings.

# **CHAPTER 6**

## **CONCLUSIONS, GUIDELINES AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This Chapter presents the conclusions, guidelines and recommendations for further research, which have emerged from the analysis of the views and perceptions of the research participants on access and equity concerns at a technical training centre level. The chapter reviews the limitations of the research and discusses suggestions for further research keeping in view these limitations. The contribution to the knowledge and practice made by this research undertaking is then considered. The findings of the study presented in Chapter 5, in conjunction with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, are used to draw a set of guidelines aimed at enhanced access and equity status at the training centre level.

### **6.2 Research Findings**

The chapter begins with a review of the limitations outlined in Chapter 1, and then considers the research questions of Chapter 1, drawing together the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the discussions of the findings presented in Chapter 5. In developing the conclusions, some amount of overlap in the issues identified is noted. Such issues have been reflected only under one head so as avoid repetition.

#### **6.2.1 Limitations of the Study**

The limitations identified for the research are presented in Chapter 1. These limitations are considered in the following paragraphs in terms of their influence in the interpretation of the research findings. The identified limitations have also assisted in shaping the recommendations for further research.

### ***Selection of research site in consultation with the concerned authorities***

The research site was selected in consultation with the appropriate authorities. The process followed had the obvious advantage of complete cooperation and a supportive environment made available by the authorities for undertaking the research. However, there was a possibility that certain bias might have affected the findings since the research site was finalized in consultation with the authorities. It can be assumed that in suggesting a particular institution as the research site, the authorities, in the normal circumstances, would like to suggest a site which is perceived to be comparatively 'better' than some other such sites. For instance, the difference in any two training institutions may be in terms of physical facilities or in the competence and skills of the staff members. If the selected training centre is comparatively better equipped in terms of resources, both physical and human, then that situation could give rise to a sense of satisfaction on the parts of the students in the current state of affairs of the centre resulting in data which may not be representative of a typical setting. However, as noted in Chapter 1, since the concerns relating to access and equity in vocational education and training are more of systemic nature, and are not so much centre-specific, the site by itself could not have been considered to influence the findings in any significant manner.

### ***Small sample size***

The sample used in the research was small as indicated in Chapter 4. This limitation was reflective of the constraint of resources on the part of the researcher. A larger number of participants would have required greater deployment of resources, including time, which was not available to the researcher. This limitation was also the result of an understanding reached by the TTC management and the researcher in terms of use of the training centre facilities for the research undertaking. The management, it was recognized, had the responsibility of ensuring that not too many students were drawn in to the research project with attendant impact on their normal study and training schedule. The management also had the responsibility of guarding against any possible dissonance (arising from possible dissatisfaction) being created for the participating members since the issues reviewed in the research undertaking – issues concerning access and equity at the training centre level - could have impacted on the participating students directly. The dissonance, if created, could have prevented the participating students from deriving optimum benefit from the training programs

for which they were enrolled in the centre. Hence, a mutually agreed balance in terms of number of staff and students participating in the research was reached.

As indicated in Chapter 5, since the research participants including the BMET and the training centre staff were selected by the researcher keeping in view their roles and responsibilities, and without any intervention from the management, it had been possible to generate sufficiently insightful data for a meaningful analysis. The data collected from the research participants indicated that views were expressed with candidness. The manner in which some of the descriptions were provided, for instance, the one relating to the impact of the absence of a canteen at the training centre, reveal that the apprehension with regard to possible biases in the student participants were not well-founded. The participants had shared their views candidly.

Notwithstanding the above, the limitation of the sample size and the related issue of collection of the data over a relatively small period of time did have an impact on the quality of the data collected. For instance, the inclusion of the past and the prospective students as research participants would have allowed further validation of the data collected from the current students but these two categories of students were not included. Similarly, a larger number of female participants would have contributed towards enriching the quality of the data obtained. Although in terms of proportion, the female participation was high when viewed in the context of the enrolment figures -female students constituted about 10% of enrolment in the TTCs while the female student participation in the research was more than 17% - their participation in aggregate number was small. A bigger sample size with higher proportion of female participation, including the female teachers, would have further enriched the quality of the data. This aspect needs to be catered for, in the future research and is accordingly suggested in the later section.

#### ***Limited participation from the BMET***

The BMET had limited participation in the research. As described in Chapter 1, the fact that the participating BMET representative was a sufficiently senior and an experienced official was helpful in obtaining the BMET perspective which could be considered almost authoritative. Moreover, given the participating official's long association with the Bureau, interactions with him provided useful inputs in

developing the guidelines presented in the later section of the chapter. The limited participation of the BMET, however, does stand out as an issue and merits attention in the future research on the subject.

### ***Use of interviews***

The use of interviews for data collection was identified as one of the possible limitations. The limitation in this case arises from the fact that the success of interviews as a medium of data collection depends upon the goodwill and generosity of the participant. Notwithstanding the above, the semi-structured interview method used in the research enabled the interviewer to gradually and persistently move from the peripheral issues to the core issues that needed to be focused on. In undertaking the research, considerable time was devoted to establishing rapport with the training centre management and that helped in creating a supportive environment in which the interviews were conducted.

### ***Non availability of up-to-date data***

The non-availability of up-to-date data was seen as a limitation for the research. The data and other public documents used in the research had become available quite some time back. It is recognized that major policy documents like the report of an Education Commission or policy reports from the public agencies are not likely to come out very frequently. The published data from official agencies like the BBS, for instance, become available with a pre-determined periodicity. The availability of the data from public sources, therefore, follows almost a set pattern in terms of time frame for collection, analysis and dissemination of the data. Therefore, if additional information/data is considered necessary to capture the more recent picture, a separate exercise has to be set in motion for that purpose which, as noted earlier, has time and cost implications. This issue needs to be taken cognizance of and addressed in the future research on this theme.

## **6.2.2 Findings for Research Question 1:**

**Research Question 1:** *How do the educational administrators, training centre management and the students of the training centre perceive manifestation of access and equity issues at the training centre level?*

### **6.2.2.1 The BMET Perspective**

The findings in Chapter 5 which have emerged from the perceptions of the three primary stakeholder - the BMET, the training centre management and the students of the training centre – indicate how the perceptions on access and equity concerns at the training centre level vary amongst the three groups.

According to the BMET, access and equity issues at the technical training centre do not necessarily represent two separate sets of issues; more often than not, one is subsumed by the other. The implication is that if concerns relating to one are addressed then the concerns relating to the other are also impacted. This is the reason for the BMET to view the process of addressing access and equity concerns in a holistic manner. These are not considered as two separate sets of issues. This line of thinking is in consonance with the views of Lee (2002) as seen in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

According to the BMET, there are no special concerns relating to access and equity at the technical training centre level as evidenced by the large number of applications received for each of the place available in the TTC. As discussed earlier, the assumption made by the BMET in this regard does not appear to be well founded. As a public institution, a training centre is expected to cater effectively to a diverse category of clientele (see, Ramsay et al. 1998). If most of the places in a technical training centre are being taken by students from the nearby locations and this is attributable to non-availability of appropriate information to students living at a distance from the centre, then access and equity status of the training centre may be considered to be an issue.

Such a situation is likely to have a disproportionate impact on the potential female candidates who are living away from the training centre. The facilities available in a technical training centre including the monthly stipend paid to the students could be major incentives, especially for the female students, in their participation in the training centre programs. The incentives lose its significance if the requisite information is not available to the target groups in a timely manner. This underscores the importance of an effective system of dissemination of information with regard to the courses and the facilities available at the technical training centre.



The findings from the research as reflected in Chapter 5 show that the BMET is cognizant of the importance of appropriate geographical dispersal of the TTCs. The decision on locations of the TTCs, according to the BMET, is a part of the BMET's overall planning process. While factors like demand for skills arising from the industries, the nature of enterprises situated in a particular location/area, and the number of potential students may be some of the important considerations in deciding upon the location of a proposed training centre, the overall availability of resources becomes a major factor in the decision making process.

The situation points to the usefulness of the targeted interventions so as to ensure that access of students from the vulnerable sections who are desirous of enrolling in technical training centre programs notwithstanding their financial and social barriers is facilitated (see, Miralles 2004, Anderson, 1998). Apart from using flexible modes of training delivery in line with the recommendations of the NEC (Ministry of Education 2004), a coordinated approach involving not only the public agencies but also the private (for profit) training centres in planning and delivery of vocational programs is likely to prove to be a useful strategy towards addressing the necessary concerns.

The findings in Chapter 5 show that availability of physical facilities in the training centres is important not only for the impact that it has on the quality of training provided in the training centres; it is also important from the perspective of improving access and equity status at the training centre level. The absence of a common room for the female students as indicated in Chapter 5 may be considered to be a typical example. Taking note of the concerns of this nature, a section of literature, for instance Butler and Ferrier (2006), advocates women-sensitive policies in place of gender sensitive policies.

Given the growing rate women's participation in the labour market (Rahman 2005), enhancing women's participation in the education and training systems assumes significance. This implies facilitating women's access to vocational training programs and entails paying particular attention to the gendered dimensions. The fact that education and training can provide a number of different mechanisms for overcoming

the barriers of discrimination and occupational segregation that women face (ILO 2002) lends priority to this task.

#### **6.2.2.2 The Training Centre Perspective**

The findings in Chapter 5 show that the training centre management does not consider access to be an issue at the centre level. The argument put forth by the TTC is essentially similar to what is advanced by the BMET, that is, receipt of applications many times over the number of places available in the TTC reflects the recognition in the general populace that access is not an issue so far as admission in the training centre is concerned. The issues involved in this line of argument have been considered earlier and therefore will not be dealt with at any length here. Suffice it to reiterate that a relatively higher number of applications against the limited number of places available in the training centre may also be reflective of limited availability of training places at macro level. For instance, in a situation where there is only one TTC in a district, it is not unlikely that the number of applicants for each of the place in the TTC may be relatively large and this would be particularly true if the density of population is high.

Moreover, as indicated by the interviewees, the perception of a training centre being comparatively better in terms of resources may also act as an incentive for a larger number of aspirants to submit their applications for admission to that particular training centre. In this scenario, it may not be appropriate to draw the only inference that higher number of applications received in a training centre is reflective of appropriate access and equity status of the TTC. Thus, the ground on which the TTC management seems to have reached the conclusion that access is not an issue at the training centre level may not be tenable unless the conclusion has been drawn after consideration of all the relevant issues, including those which are related to participation of female students in the TTC.

As per the findings considered in Chapter 5, the admission process followed in the training centres in some cases may have access and equity related dimensions. There is recognition at the training centre level that necessary vigil has to be exercised in administering the admission tests which form the basis for entry into various training courses of the training centre. Inadequate attention on this front may result in some of

the ineligible students securing admission depriving some others who may be more deserving. The related concern, as noted earlier, is about the admission of such students in courses which are much in demand thereby disadvantaging students who would have been considered otherwise eligible for those courses on the basis of marks obtained by them in the admission test. Such a situation goes against the tenets of access and equity.

The issue concerning admission of students outside the authorized strength may merit consideration from access and equity perspective. The training centre management is of the view that this process does not result in any disadvantage to the students seeking admission through the established process since such admissions, if made, do not alter the authorized strength decided for admission through the normal channel. The fact that the admissions outside the established process are over and above the authorized strength may not completely nullify its impact on access related concerns. If the number of such admissions is taken into consideration in determining the total number of available places which are to be filled up through the established process, then some more eligible candidates who are unable to secure admission in the training centre under the current dispensation may be able to do so.

There is acknowledgment at the training centre that relevance of the curriculum followed in the training centre may be a factor for the potential students in finalizing their selection of the training centre. The issue of relevance highlighted by the research participants was in relation to the mix of theory and practicum adopted in the training centre. Some of the research participants had felt that greater emphasis on the theoretical portions in the curriculum might discourage some of the potential students from joining the training centre. The view held was that the objective of the students joining a technical training centre was to gain as much practical knowledge as possible so that on completion of the training program they were able to secure a job. Any measure which seemed to adversely affect the quantum of practical training imparted in the training centre, it was felt, could affect the access of the potential students to the TTC.

The discussion on the issue of theory-practicum mix in the training centre curricula points to the need for establishing a structured arrangement for periodical review of

curricula so as to assess the changes required, if any. It was noted in Chapter 2 that there appeared to be a trend towards reduced curricula in some of the east-Asian countries so that enough time could be devoted in developing core skills (Dahlman, Zeng & Wang 2007). Singapore, for instance, has reduced its curriculum content by 30 per cent so that some time may be available for creative and critical thinking. Similarly, Japan has a five-day a week schedule in schools and an integrated program has been created there aimed at promoting independent thinking and problem solving capacity (Dahlman, Zeng and Wang 2007: 44). The extent to which some of these practices may be appropriately adapted at the TTC level may need to be considered in consultation with the industry representatives, the ultimate users of the graduates of the training centre.

### **6.2.2.3 The Students' Perspective**

The data in Chapter 5 revealed that the perceptions of the training centre students on access and equity related issues at the centre level were not always in consonance with the perceptions of the BMET and the centre management. It was noted that none of the student participants had personally seen the advertisement inviting applications for admission to the TTC issued by the management. The participating students though were candid enough to admit that the fact that most of them did not regularly go through the newspaper even when one was subscribed to by their parents, could also have been the reason for the that particular advertisement being missed by them.

From the perspective of the students, the issue regarding a more appropriate method for dissemination of information merits consideration. Given the wide coverage of the electronic media, it may be considered as an option for a more effective dissemination of information. This would allow the information to reach the widest possible target groups, including those residing in far flung areas. There could also be an arrangement in the training centre for some kind of 'open day' and holding of such a day should be announced appropriately well in advance. On the 'open day' the prospective students and their parents and guardians could come to the training centre and seek guidance and clarifications in connection with the training programs conducted at the centre and other related matters.

In the data concerning the importance of appropriate physical facilities in establishing a more conducive learning environment, the overtones of access related concerns may be seen. Some of these issues reflect the gendered dimension. The absence of a canteen facility is one such issue. The absence of the canteen facility, according to the students, affects the female students in more than one way. Firstly, the female students may have to face the inconvenience of not being able to have their tiffin during the authorized breaks. Secondly, the situation may be seen as a pointer to the fact that the female students are allowed lesser privileges when compared to the male students. For some of the parents and guardians absence of such facilities in the training centres may be factors influencing their decision regarding their female children accessing such institutions.

### **6.2.3 Findings for Research Question 2**

**Research Question 2:** *What are the gaps that exist in the perceptions of the three stakeholders and how can the identification of the gaps assist in improving access and equity at the training centre level?*

The conclusions from the findings of the study on the gaps that exist in the perceptions of the three primary stakeholders and the manner in which the identified gaps assist in improving access and equity at the training centre level are presented in this section.

The conclusions have been grouped under four broad headings: policy environment, institutional capacity building, utilizing the labour market information, and the gender concerns. These categories were deemed appropriate for discussing the findings of Research Question 2 as they enabled association of Chapter 2 information with the study context as discussed in Chapter 3. It is recognized that some of the issues which have emerged during the research may not fit completely under the above broad categories in view of the nature of the categorization. Such issues have been incorporated appropriately in the guidelines developed for enhancing access and equity at the training centre level.

### ***Policy Environment***

As discussed in Chapter 3, the report of 2003 National Education Commission is one of the important policy documents for the education and training system in the country. The report of the Planning Commission on national strategy for alleviation of poverty in a medium-term perspective, which also discusses education and training related concerns, is another such policy document. Both these documents contain important guidelines for enhancing access and equity in vocational education and training. So far as the NEC report is concerned, the recommendations of the DGTE which forms part of the report of the NEC have highlighted a number of areas which impact on access and equity considerations. Similarly, the report of the Planning Commission points to the need for enhancing women's access to vocational training substantially in a predetermined time frame and emphasizes paying greater attention to the underprivileged groups, including the poor and the adolescents in making provision for vocational training. The objective clearly is to ensure that persons from the underprivileged groups have increased opportunities to access education and training facilities.

It is seen from Chapter 5 that while the technical training centres function within a supportive policy environment, the degree of involvement of the training centres in framing the policy is somewhat limited. The data collected provides no indication of the involvement of the other stakeholders, the training centre students or the parents and guardians of these students, in the policy formulation process.

It is seen that the training centre management does not appear unduly concerned about the lack of its involvement in the policy formulation exercise. This lack of involvement of the training centre management has implications. According to Bowe & Ball (1992), the policy formulation can never be exhaustive, nor can it cover all eventualities. The implementation of a policy, moreover, entails its interpretation which has to be in relation to time and specific site of policy production (Bowe & Ball 1992). The disadvantage of not being associated with the policy formulation process, thus, can have implications for proper understanding and appreciation of the policy and, by extension, in its implementation. In this context, the interpretation of the policy at the training centre level may vary from person to person depending upon his/her maturity, understanding, vision, and even upon his/her desires and values (see,

for instance, Rizvi and Kemmis 1987). The consequence of a situation where different players are interpreting a policy in different ways on the basis of individual understanding of the policy can have an impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the training centre. Such a situation points to the imperative of associating the key stakeholders of the training centre in the policy formulation process in an appropriate manner.

It needs to be mentioned here that the issues highlighted in this dissertation in the context of policy environment necessarily had to be limited in coverage since the research focuses on one of the aspects of the vocational education system, that is, enhancing access and equity at the training centre level. The other facets of policy environment have not been considered keeping in view the scope of the instant research. For instance, the role of various government agencies involved in planning and delivery of vocational training programs in the policy formulation and coordination processes have not been discussed in the dissertation. Nor has the analysis in the thesis gone into any detail in to human resource forecasting-related issues which may be used by different training agencies in planning training delivery. Some of these issues have been indicated in the section on suggestions for further research.

### ***Institutional Capacity Building***

The findings of the research in Chapter 5 supported by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 suggest that institutional capacity is an important element in education and training systems in developing countries. This sentiment is echoed by Dahlman, Zeng & Wang (2007) who point out that “Greater attention is placed on how knowledge is created, acquired, transmitted, and used more effectively by individuals, enterprises, organizations and communities to promote economic and social development” (p. 2).

Institutional capacity building in the context of the technical training centres include not only the physical facilities but also other aspects such as continuous upgrading of teachers’ skills, industry exposure of the teachers on a regular basis, and establishing and sustaining a formal mechanism for an effective linkage between the training centre and the industry.

The industry-training centre linkage can be a useful device in assisting improved effectiveness of the training centres. The industry generally has to contend with the rapid rate of obsolescence of technologies used and this is done by appropriately adapting to the emerging technologies (ILO 2003). The industry-training centre linkage can be a helpful mechanism in acting as a forum for facilitating upgrading of TTC teachers' skills. This can be done by providing the teachers necessary exposure to the changing technologies adopted by the industry. Such a measure can supplement the other initiatives taken by the public agencies for upgrading teachers' skills. The industry-training centre linkage can also be useful in providing inputs in curriculum development so as to ensure that the curriculum followed in the training centre does not lose its relevance. This would have beneficial impact for the training centre graduates in terms of greater potential for employment opportunities in the industry.

The findings in Chapter 5 indicate that resource constraint faced by the training centre impacts its functioning. Persistence of such a situation may act as a dampener in the effective functioning of training centre -industry linkage referred to above. The industry exposure can prove beneficial for the TTC teachers only if the knowledge gained from the industry can be transmitted to the students and for that to happen necessary support in terms of availability of appropriate machinery and equipment in the training centre has to be ensured. While the industry may have to keep on adapting upgraded technologies continually for beating the competition, similar pace of continual upgradation of facilities may not be possible for the training centres if they have to contend with resource constraints.

The training centre management is cognizant of the constraints of resources and make efforts to generate additional resources through measures such as a larger number of training programs for the industry. The quantum of resources thus generated, however, does not appear to be very substantial. One of the ways to address the situation may be to allow for a greater degree of flexibility and autonomy to the centre management which may enable the centre management to adopt innovative ways to deliver training programs for different target groups and through different training delivery modes.



### ***Utilizing the Labour Market Information***

It is seen from Chapter 5 that most of the students of the TTC aim to secure some employment on completion of the training program at the training centre. Although a small proportion of the students in the training centre view the training program as an alternate pathway for entry in to a Polytechnic, the number of such students is relatively small. In this scenario, the training centre ideally has to focus on developing programs which ensure optimal employment opportunities on successful completion of the training. This has two implications. First, the training centre has to know the nature of the skills required by the labour market and the number of workers with such skills required by the industry at a given point in time. And, second, the training centre has to plan its training programs keeping in view the labour market demand in terms of skills required and the number of workers required with those skills. For this to happen, the training centre needs to have access to valid and reliable labour market information on a regular basis. More importantly, there has to be a structured mechanism which ensures that the relevant labour market information is continually taken into account in planning and delivery of the training programs.

As indicated in Chapter 3, the labour force survey of the BBS (2004) largely provides the kind of information that the training centres may find useful in planning and delivery of the training programs. However, there are a few considerations in this regard which merit attention. The first is the issue of timeliness of the information. Unless the information is of recent vintage, the usefulness of such data to the training centres in planning the training programs can be limited. This brings forth the issue of the availability of such information. Since the frequency of the data collected and disseminated by public agencies such as the BBS is usually fixed, the need for supplementing the available data with other sources of information whenever required may have to be considered. This entails not only a mechanism for collection of information on a regular basis in the interim but also the availability of sufficient resources for analysis, interpretation and dissemination of the information thus collected.

The industry- training centre linkage referred to earlier can play an important role in collection and analysis of the up-to-date labour market information in a targeted manner. The information thus gathered can supplement the information available

from other sources and can be useful to the training centres in planning and delivery of the training programs. Such an exercise though is likely to be a complex exercise with substantial cost implications. Therefore, the modalities for such data collection, its analysis and dissemination up to the training centre level may need to be discussed and finalized at an appropriate level with a view to ensure that the arrangement made for the purpose remains an effective and a sustainable arrangement.

### ***Gender Concerns***

Some of the issues concerning access and equity status at the training centre level are seen to have gender overtones as noted in the data analyzed in Chapter 5. The low enrolment of women in vocational training programs conducted by the technical training centres has been noted (see, for instance, Mahmud 2006). According to the information available on the Ministry of Education website, the enrolment of female students in the TTC is about 10 per cent (retrieved on 18 March 2009).

As noted earlier, in deciding to join a particular program in the training centre, some of the female students from lower socio-economic background may have to contend with the consequences of lack of cultural capital in the family. The inadequacy of the available family support close to the place where the training centre is located may be another factor impacting on access-related concerns, especially of the female students. There seems to be a perception amongst the students that if the distance to the TTC were not a concern for the female students, a larger number of female students were likely to seek admission in the training centres.

The stereotypical attitude of some of the teachers with an adverse bias towards the female students, if such an attitude exists, may not help the female students even if the resultant action is aimed at providing added safety and security to the female students. The female students in training institutions can optimize their learning outcomes if necessary attention is paid to their specific needs and requirements, including in terms of availability of necessary infrastructural support, with due attention to gender concerns. A larger number of female teachers in the TTCs may also have positive demonstration effect and may, therefore, succeed in motivating a larger number of female students into seeking admission in non-traditional training programs as indicated in Chapter 5.

## **6.3 Guidelines for Enhancing Access and Equity in the TTC**

The issues identified in Chapter 5 and the conclusions drawn from these findings as indicated in the preceding section provide the basis for the set of guidelines which are aimed at enhancing the status of access and equity at the training centre level.

### **6.3.1 Development of Guidelines**

The inputs available from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 have been a major resource in framing of the guidelines. The guidelines are grouped under four broad heads: effective involvement of the stakeholders in the policy framework, reorientation of the training centre management, provision of resources, and industry-training centre linkage. This grouping, broadly, encompasses the issues identified from the collected data.

### **6.3.2 Discussion of the Guidelines**

As noted above, the guidelines reflect the major issues that emerged from the research. Although some of the issues identified in the research undertaking do not find explicit mention in the guidelines, the guidelines are sufficiently broad to cover those concerns as well.

#### **Guideline 1**

##### ***Effective involvement of the stake holders in the policy framework***

The importance of the contribution which the training centre stakeholders can make in the policy formulation process needs to be recognized and the stakeholders need to be appropriately involved in the policy formulation process. Not only the training centre management but also the parents and guardians of the TTC students may have something useful to contribute to the policy formulation exercise on the basis of their experiences as the user of the facility. So far as the views of the industry representatives are concerned, these need careful consideration by the policy planners in view of the significant contribution that the industry can make in the efficiency and effectiveness of a training centre.

## **Guideline 2**

### ***Reorientation of the training centre management***

The rapidly changing economic environment demands a continual response from the training centres as well. This calls for reorientation of the functions of the training centre management. In this scenario, the TTC management in its administrative and management functions may not be expected to merely follow the guidelines with regard to the number and nature of training programs to be conducted and the mode of training delivery to be adopted for such training programs. The changed role of the TTC management should enable it develop its capacity to assess the skills in demand and plan and deliver training programs keeping in view its mandate in terms of target groups to be served and the demands of the labour market.

## **Guideline 3**

### ***Resource Provision***

Lack of adequate resources can seriously jeopardize not only attention to access and equity concerns in a training institution but may also strike at the root of its existence in the long run. A training institution which does not have access to adequate resources is not likely to deliver the expected outcomes. The training centre, therefore, needs to have access to requisite resources, both human and capital. The provisioning for resources for the training centre has to be tempered with appropriate sensitivity about the gender concerns.

## **Guideline 4**

### ***Industry-training centre linkage***

An effective linkage between the industry representatives and the training centre is a pre-requisite for successful collaboration between the employers and the training centre and, therefore, needs to be established. Such a linkage has the potential to impact the outcomes of the training centre in a significant manner. The industry-training centre linkage, if established, may be able to assist the training centre in acquiring relevant and up-to-date labour market information, designing relevant curriculum, acting as the medium for liaison between the industry representatives and the training centre so as to facilitate teachers' skills upgrading, and in exploring increased employment opportunities for the training graduates.

### **6.3.3 Implementation of the Guidelines**

As noted in Chapter 5, the findings indicate that there may be a scope for constructive intervention to improve the status of access and equity at the training centre level and the guidelines in the preceding section presents the broad outline for the way forward in that regard. This section focuses on the issues which may need to be addressed for managing the change that is required to implement the proposed guidelines.

It is evident from the data collected and its analysis in the Chapter 5 that for bringing about the necessary changes, the training centre management may have to function not only as ‘agents of change’ but as ‘objects of change’ as well. This will be especially the case if there is an expectation that the training centre management should have the capacity to take decisions, show entrepreneurial capacity, and also be efficient and responsive to the demands of the continually changing labour market. Since change management in institutions is rarely uni-dimensional, it may not be appropriate to expect that addressing any one aspect of the required changes can bring about the desired results (see, Scott 2003, Kotter 1996). According to this proposition, focusing only on enhancing access and equity status at the training centre level may provide only limited success. The inter-relationships amongst the various elements which go to contribute towards the efficiency and effectiveness of a training centre have to be seen in a holistic manner (Bowe & Ball 1992). In this light, efforts aimed at enhancing access and equity at the training centre level in terms of the proposed guidelines need to be viewed in the context of the general criterion of efficiency and effectiveness so as to achieve optimal results.

Following up on the above hypothesis in a developing country context is a challenge, especially in a resource-constrained situation. The operating scenario becomes a little more complex if it is kept in view that change and conflict are inevitably interlocked (Ball 1987). Therefore, the more the changes sought, the more is the intensity of the conflict. In this situation, any change in the existing power structure may be sought after by some while may be resented to by some others. The consequence may be conflict and this conflict, irrespective of its intensity, may have to be managed as well.

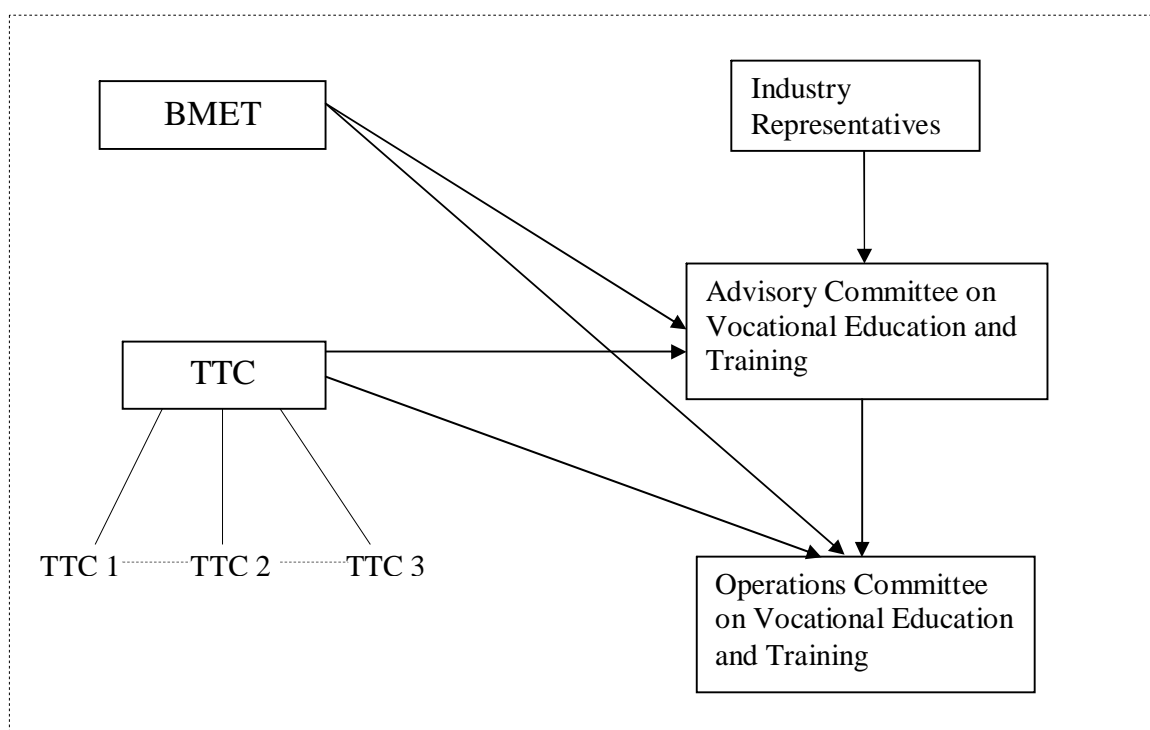
The research data indicates that there is a recognition that the role of the training centre has been continuously evolving. There is a recognition that the role of the TTC management has been evolving from the role which was originally envisaged as managing education and training to that of managing an educational institution (see, Bowe & Ball 1992). The recognition of the changed role can be seen in the expectation that the head of the training centre apart from his usual administrative and teaching functions should also be able to raise resources and maintain some degree of interaction with the labour market. This recognition may provide the necessary support for the desired change management.

This situation provides the justification for a reorientation in the skills, attitude and perceptions of the training centre management. In the changed scenario, the training centre management may not be able to view the fiats from the BMET as the sole driving force for managing the training centre. This, in turn, implies greater autonomy to the training centre management, autonomy in planning and delivery of the training programs conducted by the training centre, including in deciding upon the intake capacity of the training programs. The reorientation should also be reflected in greater empathy for the concerns of the vulnerable. With the new sets of acquired skills and approach, the training centre management may not only be able to contribute towards the policy formulation process but, to the extent necessary, may also be able to harmonize the views of other stakeholders in the context of policy formulation so as to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the programs conducted at the training centre. The enhanced in-house competence of the training center management may be helpful in optimizing the beneficial impact of the industry- training centre linkage as well.

It is recognized that in view of this evolving role of the training centre management, the training centre management has to be adequately resourced for meeting the challenges which confront them. The TTC management has to be equipped for discharging various functions, for instance, those relating to financial planning and revenue generation and the 'marketing' functions. This becomes necessary not only for raising the credibility and visibility of the training centre but also for ensuring more successful outcomes, especially in terms of greater employment opportunities for the training graduates. Since providing adequate resources to the training centres

is not an easy option in a situation of known resource constraints, the alternative approach, as noted earlier, lies in allowing a greater degree of autonomy and flexibility to the TTC.

The diagram below proposes a structure for assisting in the implementation of the guidelines on the lines described above.



**Figure 6.1: Advisory and Operations Committees of the TTC**

As indicated in the above figure, two committees are envisaged to support the training centre in administrative and management functions. The Advisory Committee, which as the name suggests, is primarily tasked with providing advice and guidance to the training centre in its management functions. This Committee would focus on “big issues”, for instance, new courses, policy to be followed for enrolment and the associated processes, and the industry-related issues. It would be a relatively small committee of about six persons who would have the capacity and the competence to

take decisions and facilitate its implementation, as required. The members of the Committee would represent the BMET, the training centre and the industry organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce. The Committee would meet twice a year. The constitution of this Committee is in line with the recommendations of the NEC.

The Operations Committee will comprise managers and key staff of the BMET and the TTC. This Committee would be tasked with planning, implementation and monitoring of various decisions taken by the Advisory Committee. The figure above shows the linkages amongst the three players in the Committee – the BMET, the TTC, and the industry – in bringing about the changes in accordance with the proposed guidelines.

Implementing the guidelines is not likely to affect the role and responsibilities of the BMET vis-à-vis the TTC in any major way. In fact, with greater autonomy allowed to the training centres, the oversight and coordination functions of the BMET is likely to assume much greater significance although with a different focus; the BMET may not have to shoulder any responsibility for any of the routine administrative functions of the TTC. Furthermore, since the major part of the funding required for capital expenditure of the training centres will continue to be catered for by the BMET, it will have an important role in the finalization of the perspective plans of the training centres. In the changed formulation, the importance of the contribution that the industry representatives can make with their more direct involvement in the management of the training centre through the proposed committees may have to be fully recognized.

## **6.4 Contribution to Knowledge**

As is evident from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, while there is a substantial body of research relating to equity and access concerns in relation to higher education, the literature on access and equity concerns in vocational education and training dealing with access and equity concerns is relatively limited. Although developed countries have taken major initiatives in this regard in terms of research and publications – Australia's National Centre for Vocational Education Research



(NCVER) is a prime example - the situation is somewhat different in the developing countries. This research aims to contribute towards bridging the current gap in knowledge and research on access and equity concerns in vocational education in developing countries in the south-Asian context.

This research contributes towards an enhanced appreciation of the access and equity concerns in vocational education in a developing country context as manifested at the training centre level. Although the study has been carried out in Bangladesh and notwithstanding the limitations of the sample, the findings of the research study are expected to find resonance in the vocational education systems in other south-Asian countries as well. This is on account of the fact the socio-economic settings of these countries are somewhat similar.

## **6.5 Suggestions for Further Research**

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 reveals the importance of vocational education and training in the national education system. In this context, the limited availability of research literature which addresses various facets of the vocational education and training system, especially in a developing country context, limits more in-depth consideration of these issues on the basis of empirical evidence.

While this research concerns the access and equity aspects as manifested at a training centre level, there are other aspects of vocational education which on investigation should be able to provide the basis for initiating necessary changes aimed at bringing about increased effectiveness of the system. Such issues include methodologies for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of the vocational education and training institutions in country-specific context, the changing role of employers and their organizations in the vocational training system especially so far as it concerns enhancing access and equity, alternate pathways for the training graduates, and efficacy of alternative models for financing of training institutions in country specific contexts.

The case study approach was considered suitable for this research as discussed in Chapter 4. The nature and scope of the research were the primary considerations

which led to the adoption of this methodology as detailed in Chapter 4. It would, however, be useful to replicate the investigation with a larger sample so as to ascertain the extent to which the situation in the training centres located in different areas differ in terms of access and equity concerns. In undertaking these studies, careful attention needs to be paid to ensure that the former and prospective students and a substantial number of female participants are included in the sample so that the findings of the study have greater validity, and thus, greater applicability.

The gender concerns merit serious attention in the education and training system, especially in situations where increased attention is paid to the vulnerable sections of the society. In some cases, a realistic appraisal of the prevailing socio-economic situation may lend urgency in attending to the gender-related issues with a sharper focus. Since the circumstances which may need to be addressed in these cases are likely to be location and context specific, it may be helpful to examine the relevant concerns in context-specific studies.

## **6.6 Concluding Remarks**

This dissertation has documented the manifestation of access and equity concerns at a training centre level in Bangladesh. As brought out in the dissertation, the views and perceptions about access and equity concerns at the training centre level vary depending upon the roles of the persons reacting to the issues. It is seen that there is a variance between the management of the training centre and its students on interpretation and understanding of access and equity related concerns at the training centre level. The findings reveal that while the constraint of resource is a known constraint, the status of in-house capacity available to respond to the relevant concerns within the given parameters merits attention.

The dissertation has developed a set of guidelines aimed at improving the status of access and equity at the training centre level and delineates the steps required to manage the change required for implementation of the guidelines. An organizational structure for the purpose has also been suggested. It is evident that the starting point in this exercise has to be a policy document, which allows the proposed changes to be formalized. Apart from the industry representatives, it would be useful to associate the

training centre management and the students of the training centre, two critical stakeholders of the training centre, in the policy formulation process in an appropriate manner

It may be apt to conclude this dissertation with a quote from Ramsey, Chair, Teaching Australia and former Managing Director, NSW TAFE Commission, which describes educational institutions in following terms: “Educational institutions become what they can get money for – from governments, from their clients, the young people and their families, and their potential employers” (Ramsey 2008: 2). The implementation of the guidelines should assist the stakeholders of the technical training centres to disprove the above contention.

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# Appendix A

## Research Information Sheet

### **EQUITY AND ACCESS IN A VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE**

ISSUES OF EQUITY AND ACCESS AT A VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE is a research undertaking being carried out by a Doctor of Education student at Central Queensland University. The aim of research is to develop a greater understanding of the equity and access related issues at the vocational training centre level.

The research will use a case-study method. This is the only technical training centre from which information and data will be collected. The information and data will be obtained by observations by the researcher, document review, and semi-structured interviews with the participating individuals. Not all members of the centre will be interviewed; selection will be made by the researcher on the basis of an individual's involvement with the relevant processes at the training centre level. Participation in the project is voluntary. Participants may withdraw from the project at any time without any penalty.

It is expected that the finding of the project will contribute towards more effective policy planning and program implementation for improved status of equity and access at the technical training centres. It is hoped that not only this training centre but other similarly placed training centres may also benefit from the findings of the research project.

(Name)  
EdD Student  
Central Queensland University

Phone:  
Fax:  
Email:

**You may contact Central Queensland University's Office of Research (Tel 61749232602) should there be any concerns about the nature and/or conduct of this research project**

## Appendix B

### Consent Form

#### **EQUITY AND ACCESS IN A VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE IN DHAKA**

I agree to participate in the research project EQUITY AND ACCESS IN A VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE on the understanding that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any penalty. I understand that I shall not be disadvantaged if I do not agree to participate or withdraw. I also understand that my name will not be used in any publication arising from the findings or in any other form of dissemination of the findings.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please Print)

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

<b>You may contact Central Queensland University's Office of Research (Tel 61749232602) should there be any concerns about the nature and/or conduct of this research project.</b>
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