

THE CONCEPT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION OFFERED IN LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF MALE' IN REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

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ABSTRACT

The skills of the Maldivians in the required fields are very important to develop the country. Until now, many skilled workers in the Maldives come from neighboring countries such as India and Sri Lanka. Therefore, a consistent and effective Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system is required to ensure the concept's success. This study aims to explore, understand, and explain the implementation of vocational education in Lower Secondary Schools of Male in the Republic of Maldives. A qualitative Fundamental Case Study research design was used in this study. A total of twelve (12) study participants were involved in this study. There are three (3) schools involved in this study which include three (3) principals, four (4) teachers, and five (5) students. The primary method of data collection is through interviews. The method of document analysis and observation is a method that supports the interview data. Findings are analyzed using the thematic method by understanding sentence segments and interpreting them into specific categories. These categories are analyzed and produce themes that help researchers develop conceptually. The finding shows that the concept, approach, implementation plan, impact on society, challenges, and relevance to higher education have been understood and referred to as a conceptual framework. Each of these components has its own elements that explain the implementation of vocational education in secondary schools. The framework also provides an overview of vocational education in secondary schools and can help schools to identify weaknesses in implementing vocational education and find strategies to address them. In conclusion, this research has provided valuable information about the implementation of vocational education in lower secondary schools in Male in the Republic of Maldives. The framework that was developed also acts as a guide for many parties to understand the vocational education system. The recommendation for the results of this study is to continue the study in a larger context and involve many other schools in the Maldives using different data collection and analysis methods. The results of this study can also be used to generate hypotheses for quantitative research as a continuation of the research.

Keywords: Vocational Education, Qualitative Case Study, Lower Secondary School, Conceptual.

INTRODUCTION

The Maldives is a South Asian country known as a Republic of Maldives located in the Indian Ocean situated in the Arabian Sea. It lies southwest of Sri Lanka and India and the chain of 26 atolls which were made up of more than 1000 coral islands stretches from Ihavandhippolhu Atoll in the north to the Addu City in the south. The Maldives is known for its beaches, blue lagoons, and extensive reefs. Male is the capital and most populated city and is traditionally called the "King's Island" for its central location. Regarding education in modern-day the Republic of Maldives, there are three main streams that have contributed to

the nature that is informal training, Islamic religious instruction, and western-model schooling.

The current national system of education presents a merging of traditional and modern education. In the Maldives, the high rate of population increases and make the high dependency ratio continues to place severe burdens on the education system. Increasing the economic sector of the country need specify by skills and techniques in the education. The field of education in the Republic of Maldives in the world of Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) course is unique (Noordeen, 2011) and a lot of efforts from various departments are working in conjunction to promote this unique but important arena of education in the Maldives. Most likely same as other countries, linking education with employment has proven to be a real challenge to mankind especially in technical and vocational education.

The department involves in sustaining and improving TVET are the Ministry of Higher Education and Training, Ministry of Education, Education Development Centre (EDC), Centre for Continuing Education (CCE), PIU-TVET. Nowadays CCE already turns to the National Institute of Education (NIE). TVET is based on young people in mastering skills, hands-on, upskilling and the concept behind those skills in technically over working life to get a job to support their life. Because of that, to achieve the key to success, a consistent and effective TVET system is needed. The most important is, the number of Maldivians for both men and women will increase with entry-level occupational qualifications and skills for employment or for self-sustaining livelihood initiatives (Noordeen, 2011).

TVET system in the Maldives, reconfirms that the system remains fragmented and improve in developing and approving skills development for the youth and all mankind in the country. This chapter will elaborate on the background of the study, discuss the problem statements, and emphasize the objectives to be achieved with the scope of the study. It is also highlighted the structure of the report.

The purpose of this study is to explore, understand and explain the implementation of vocational education in Lower Secondary Schools of Male' in Republic of Maldives using a fully qualitative methodology where the samples involved are principals, teachers, and students. The question is what is the concept of Vocational Education offered in lower secondary schools of Male' in Republic of Maldives?

LITERATURE REVIEW

After years of neglect, due to several complex reasons including the Bank's budget constraints and criticisms in the early 90s in the direction and focus technical and vocational education and training (TVET) back to the human resource development agenda from many countries. The World Bank has mentioned at that time, high cost of training, poor quality of training, a mismatch between training and labor market needs and high unemployment rates among TVET graduates as an excuse to recommend a basic shift from based school education and technical and vocational training. Table 1 explained the implementation of curriculum development for TVET. The Table 1 shows several steps that should be taken in implementing the TVET with the key questions as the guidelines.

Table 1 IMPLEMENTING A 'HOLISTIC APPROACH' TO CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN VET (MCGRATH, 2007)	
Steps	Key questions
Analyze both needs and goals	What vocational, community, socio-cultural or personal

	needs exist? What is the learner/community hoping to achieve from the training?
Conduct a relevant and equitable process	What prior learning is to be recognized? What links will be made with prior learning?
Use steps 1 and 2 to plan and develop a curriculum, with the community	When we map out the needs and goals against the units of competency, do they fit? How can we tailor the training to get the best match?
Customize and contextualize	Does the curriculum match the learner/community needs and goals? How can I localize the curriculum to make it relevant?
Find holistic links between all units	When we map out these links, what themes* or assessment tasks might tie the whole program together? How will different trainers incorporate these links? What overlap and repetition exist between learning outcomes?
Build a bridge' between existing knowledge and new learning. (Gagnon & Collay 2005) as well as needs and goals	How can we reinforce the connections between these needs, goals and existing knowledge within the program? What delivery and assessment strategies will 'build the bridge'?
Evaluate the outcomes and program	Where the needs and goals of the learner/community met? What social capital and other qualitative outcomes resulted?

The model for TVET implementation is usually different according to respective countries. In Finland, the VET program can be completed in three major ways which are in the form of school-based education and training, apprenticeship training and competence-based qualifications (Stenström & Virolainen, 2015). Each VET program will offer a different kind of qualifications and explained in Table 2.

Type of Education	Qualification
School-based education and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upper secondary vocational qualification
Apprenticeship training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upper secondary vocational qualification • Further vocational qualification • Specialist vocational qualification
Competence-based qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upper secondary vocational qualification • Further vocational qualification • Specialist vocational qualification

TVET Policies

The next step is to ensure that policies on TVET education are relevant and that they are aligned with government plans for the development of the country. The National Policy of Education that introduced in 1998 has underlined a few objectives of TVE in the framework. The objectives of TVE is to provide.

- Trained manpower in applied science, technology and commerce particularly at sub-professional grades
- Technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, industrial, commercial and economic development

- People who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man.

Case studies of successful TVET programs in secondary schools should be studied and presented to the Ministers of Education and other Members of Parliament, especially those concerned with economic development. The importance of TVET and the need to vocational the secondary school curriculum should be spelled out clearly and concisely. The consequences of not doing so should be made plain. A recommendation to policymakers should advocate that it should be compulsory for all secondary students to undertake both academic and vocational education courses. The important advantages of secondary students leaving school with vocational and academic education and training should be documented.

TVET Activities in the Republic of Maldives

Even though Vocational Education and Training is crucial, it has become a neglected area of human resource development. It can facilitate national development by introducing urgently needed skill-based subjects at the secondary level. Some students fail to perform well at the secondary level because of a lack of interest in academic subjects and limited options available in choosing skill-based subjects. School leavers who entered the job markets after completion of the secondary level themselves are unfamiliar with the necessary job skills which in turn prevent their successful integration, assimilation, and progression in the school system. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has developed more than 200 schools. Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) and now known as National Institute of Education (NIE) was formed by the government on the 1st January 1986 to assist people who have lost the opportunity or have found it difficult to study in the formal stream.

The center aims to provide education and skill-building through non-formal educational activities to enable the dropout, the unemployed, the educationally marginalized and those on the periphery of society to partake in social and economic development at a personal and national level. The NIE has drawn a plan to increase the number of skilled Maldivians who possess the required skills and perform well in the job market and open up further prospects for training in higher education in this field. The Republic of Maldives has designed 10 courses in 22 different skills and implemented 4 courses to enable the Maldivian to move forward at a faster rate in the global education movement. TVET in the Republic of Maldives has a few colleges and institutions that conduct vocational programs, for example, College for Maritime of Studies at Vilingili Island.

The Ministry of Human Resources, Youth and Sport of the Republic of Maldives has developed a few skills based on a vocational education course. Newsletter in January 2009 indicated that the percentage of total training based on the location of training has been achieved by the Ministry of Human Resources, Youth and Sport. 7% of the training has been conducted in Male', 29% in the Central Region, 48% in the northern region, and 16% was conducted in the Southern Region. Ministry of Human Resources, Youth & Sport explains the policy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Competency Standard Development Process, format for Competency Standard and Technical Content.

They also have 21 courses that already have started and 8 courses that are still in process. In the next topic, the researcher will discuss the existing academic stream in the Republic of Maldives where will be choices for students to further their study.

As with most educational systems, the Republic of Maldives' structure involves academic and occupational components as well as a formal and non-formal delivery system. The education system in the Republic of Maldives begins approximately at the age of 4 and ends around 23 years old. Secondary schools in the Republic of Maldives consist of grades 8-

10 (lower secondary) and 11-12 (upper secondary). The education system in the Republic of Maldives is consisting of formal preschool education, primary education, secondary education, tertiary education and technical and vocational education and training. The system is explained in Table 3.

Table 3 THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES (ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK, 2015)	
Level of Education	Explanation
Formal preschool education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caters to children aged 4 to 5 years and lasts 2 years (divided into lower and upper kindergarten). • In recent years, preschools have expanded into the atolls, as more <i>edh urge</i> (gathering of children in a private home to learn to read the <i>Koran</i>) are being transformed into modern preschools, with fully or partly trained teachers.
Primary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starts at age 6. • Arabic and English are the media of instruction in government-run schools. • In the past, the 5-year primary program was followed by 2 years of upper primary education (middle school) leading to secondary education. • These two levels have been unified into one comprehensive program (basic education) lasting 7 years (grades 1–7). • Students who complete basic education can enroll in vocational programs leading to a Certificate II (15 weeks full-time training, equivalent to 40 credits, level 2 qualification of the Maldives National Qualifications Framework [MNQF]) and a Certificate III (15 weeks of full-time training, equivalent to 40 credits, level 3 MNQF qualification).
Secondary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary education comprises two levels: lower secondary lasting 3 years (grades 8–10), and higher secondary lasting 2 years (grades 11 and 12). • The General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O-level) and Advanced Level (A-level) are taught in the lower secondary and higher secondary grades, respectively. • To obtain an International General Certificate of Secondary Education, students can take examinations administered by the Cambridge International Examinations or the London Examinations, Edexcel International. • There are also two national examinations: The Secondary School Certificate Examination (for Islamic Studies and Dhivehi, the national language) introduced in 1986, and the Higher Secondary School Certificate examination was introduced in 1987. • Lower secondary education graduates can enroll in vocational programs leading to a Certificate IV (30 weeks or 1-year full-time training, equivalent to 120 credits, level 4 MNQF qualification).

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Table 4 THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES (TERTIARY AND TVET)	
Level of Education	Explanation

Tertiary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tertiary and university education is offered at the newly established Maldives National University (previously the College of Higher Education), which has 5 campuses and some outreach posts in outer islands, and several private training institutions. • At the postsecondary level, programs leading to a diploma (level 5 of the MNQF) take 1 year (for higher secondary graduates or MNQF level 4 qualification holders) or 2 years to complete (for lower secondary graduates or MNQF level 3 qualification holders). • Programs leading to an advanced diploma, an associate degree, or a foundation degree (MNQF level 6 qualifications) normally last 2 years (1 year for holders of an MNQF level 5 qualification in the relevant field); professional certificates requiring 15 weeks of full-time training are also included at the MNQF level 6. • Programs leading to a bachelor's degree (MNQF level 7) typically require 3 years of full-time study (or 350 credits); 1-year programs lead to a professional diploma. • A bachelor's degree with honors (MNQF level 8) requires an additional year of study beyond the bachelor's degree; 1-year graduate/postgraduate diploma programs are offered at the MNQF level 8. • At MNQF level 9, a master's degree requires 2 years of full-time study (240 credits), and an advanced professional diploma, 1 year. • At MNQF level 10, a doctoral degree requires 2–5 years of study, and a higher professional diploma requires 120 credits.
Technical and Vocational Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various institutions work to promote this important area in the field of education. • The Ministry of Education, Education Development Centre, and Centre for Continuing Education are working in conjunction to promote skills development and vocational education through integration in the formal school system to prepare the students for the different levels. • The Ministry of Youth, through the technical and vocational education and training programs, prepares learners for employment and then helps them to continue their education part-time. • Vocational courses are offered by institutions such as Maldives Polytechnic, which offers both long- and short-term courses.

METHODOLOGY

Many have asked, why do we need to study using qualitative methods? Many think that qualitative methods are less popular and require communication and self-adjustment on the high background. Researchers have their own strong reasons to defend the rational selection of qualitative methods. In addition to being motivated to explore a phenomenon using qualitative methods, the concepts inherent in qualitative methods can solve the research questions contained in chapter I. Researcher describe how qualitative methods can generate data to answer each question in this study, thus achieving goals research. In summary, a qualitative study can be defined as a process for understanding social problems based on a comprehensive and complex picture through an in-depth research perspective, and should be conducted on the actual field of study (Gay & Airasian, 2000).

According to Merriam (2001), qualitative research is a process of exploring a phenomenon in depth through three main data collection methods, observation, interviews and document analysis. Hammersley (2009) and Wolcott (2009) define qualitative research as research conducted on a natural background, and the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection. Whether in the form of words or pictures, inductively analyze, focus on the meaning made by the study participants as well as explained in an expressive and interesting

language. Therefore, in this study researchers have used simple language and termed as 'Researcher' coinciding with what Wolcott (2009) and Hammersley (2009) stated.

Generally, qualitative research means any form of research that produces research findings without passing statistical procedures or calculations (Patton, 1990). Other definitions related to qualitative research are stated in the next process, based on the importance based on the methodology used in this study. Based on the opinion of the qualitative expert, researcher concludes that qualitative research is a form of exploratory research, understanding deeply through three main data collection processes, namely observation, interviews and document analysis, and researcher is the main instrument in data collection and analysis data. The definition and concept of qualitative research coincide with the data collection method used in this study and is suitable for finding answers to research questions, thus achieving the study objectives.

Data collection in this study uses three methods of observation, interviews, and document analysis, with the aim of exploring in-depth and explaining in detail the current situation of vocational education of secondary school in the Republic of Maldives. Referring to the question of the study in chapter I, which addresses the 'how' and 'why' questions, it is best suited to be explored using qualitative methods. As stated by Ary et al. (2014), they state that the method of qualitative research is best suited to find answers to the 'how' and 'why' questions. The question is to explore and understand in-depth every question in this study. Accordingly, the researcher decided to choose a qualitative research method. Selection based on the effectiveness of the use of qualitative methodology strategies as described by Patton (1990), Ary et al. (1990), Silverman (1997), Merriam (1998), Merriam (2001), Travers (2001) and many more qualitative researchers.

For them, the selection of qualitative methodologies is appropriate if the researcher intends to explore a problem in depth. Their statements coincide with the purpose of this study, namely, to explore and understand in-depth the integration of vocational education in a secondary school in the Republic of Maldives. The concept or method used in the qualitative method is very relevant to find the data or information needed to get answers to the questions in this study. Fros, (2011) says that in qualitative research there is a tradition associated with the methods used in data collection, document analysis, report writing, and overall design that encompass all phases in the study.

Lincoln & Guba (1985) explain this concept in more detail, they state that qualitative research is usually associated with constructivist or naturalistic approaches. Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, (2011) and Travers (2001) states qualitative approaches are interpretative, or perspective. While Claire & Maggie (2010) and Patton (1990) emphasize that the use of qualitative research methods in a study, is aimed at understanding the human experience inductively and holistically in a context. Qualitative research is aimed at exploring and understanding phenomena in-depth rather than deductive (Merriam, 1998). The selection of qualitative methodologies is also due to the interests of the researcher to explore, make discoveries, interpretations and build the theories from the data obtained rather than to test hypotheses.

It coincides with the concept of qualitative research for example exploring in-depth, making discovery, interpreting and not testing the hypothesis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1998). In this study, the researcher wants to find as much data as it relates to the integration of the vocational stream in a secondary school in the Republic of Maldives and subsequently interpret data to generate new theories rather than to test hypotheses. Each finding has been analyzed based on the creativity of researchers based on the discipline and the concept of qualitative research analysis. Although there is no fixed concept in this qualitative method because individual views differ in understanding the world, but some uniform concepts arise.

Lebar, O (2006), Merriam (2001), Travers (2001), Silverman (1997), Patton (1990) and Bogdan & Biklen (1992), they state that some concepts agreed by most qualitative research, emphasis on the importance of conducting research in real-time and no attempt to manipulate data. Researchers agree with the statements from these researchers as researcher has indeed been in the background to conduct interviews, observations and document analysis. Researcher has used qualitative methodologies to obtain data on the implementation of vocational education in a secondary school in the Republic of Maldives and subsequently conduct an analysis of the data, to get the answers to each question. Researcher has adhered to the qualitative research ethics throughout the course of the study which is to obtain genuine data without manipulation of the study data.

Qualitative research requires the understanding of the researcher on the opinions, experiences and feelings of a holistic and thorough sampling study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Wendy, 2010). They add that inductive approaches are essential in collecting and analyzing data before generating theory from data. From the point of writing style, researcher presented every finding from a study with a relaxed and less structured language. The writing method coincides with the method of writing a report in qualitative research. Eisner (1991) states that the writing of qualitative research reports is in descriptive form and using expressive language or beautiful language and easy to understand and not too structured or unstructured interview.

Finding

In this chapter, research findings are presented. The data was collected and analyzed to respond to the sub research questions and expected to answer the main research question of this study. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this study used a qualitative method by implementing interviews, observation and document analysis Unstructured interviews were performed by researcher and the data were managed and organized by using NVivo 11 software. Three different groups of participants from three lower secondary schools of Male' in Republic of Maldives are involved in this study and the profile of participants will explain in this chapter. On the other hand, this chapter also presents findings that related to the concept of vocational education in secondary school, challenges in implementing the existing vocational subjects in secondary school, strategies to overcome challenges, linking vocational qualification to higher education, the implementation plan for vocational education, the contribution of vocational education to the community, vocational education provides enough job, teaching and learning approach in vocational education, and the importance of vocational education in the community. All findings have been divided into sections and explained accordingly.

The main data collected is through interviews. The data obtained through observation and document analysis is the second data that supports the interview data. Therefore, most of the quotation examples included in this chapter are examples of interviews that explain the themes produced.

Profile of Participants

Twelve participants from three different schools in the Republic of Maldives have been interviewed. The participants consist of three different groups which are s principals, teachers and students. The groups of participants were shown in Table 5.

<p>Table 5 GROUP OF PARTICIPANTS</p>
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No	Group of Participant	Number of Participants
1	School Principals	3
2	School Teachers	4
3	Students	5
Total		12

Table 5 shows that three groups of participants were selected which consist of three principals, four teachers and five students. All these participants were from three different lower secondary schools of Male' in the Republic of Maldives. The detailed information of each participant also had been recorded and shown in Table 6.

No	Code of Participant	Gender	Designation	School
1	Participant P1	Female	Principal	School A
2	Participant P2	Male	Principal	School C
3	Participant P3	Female	Principal	School B
4	Participant T1	Female	Teacher	School A
5	Participant T2	Male	Teacher	School B
6	Participant T3	Female	Teacher	School B
7	Participant T4	Male	Teacher	School C
8	Participant S1	Male	Student	School C
9	Participant S2	Male	Student	School A
10	Participant S3	Male	Student	School A
11	Participant S4	Female	Student	School B
12	Participant S5	Female	Student	School C

Table 6 shows the information on the code, gender, designation, and school that they represented of each participant. There are twelve participants involved in this research which are comprised of three principals, four teachers, and five students. There are four participants from School A, four participants from School B, and four participants from School C. Schools A, B and C were included in this study because of their management excellence, offering vocational subjects, long-established schools and their location in Male'.

The Concept of Vocational Education in Lower Secondary School of Male'

This section gathered information regarding the concept of vocational education in lower secondary school of Male'. A few participants have expressed their opinions regarding the concept of vocational education implemented in their school in their schools. After analyzing the data, few concepts of vocational education have been recognized and adopted in the lower secondary schools. These concepts that will be explained in the next section cover the TVET system, structure of programs, the purpose of implementing vocational education, the school leadership in vocational education, and the promoting vocational education.

TVET System

The first concept found in this finding is connected with the TVET system. As clearly informed, TVET or Technical and Vocational Education Training in the Republic of Maldives is evolving from day to day. The TVET system in this country is seen moving forward when many reformations will plan to be implemented. A few participants gave their perception of what they believed and understand the vocational education system implemented in secondary school. According to one participant, the basic model of the education system in a secondary school in the Republic of Maldives consists of three main streams. Those are art, science, and business stream. The participant P2 gave the following quotation,

“It’s the same is actually streaming students from lower secondary. This is a model they are using actually. This is also what they have considered as one stream. Previously we had 3 streams art stream, science and business now is also a stream and they are practically known as a vocational stream.” (Participant P2)

Adding that, Participant P2 mentioned that nowadays, there are four parts in the school education model in the Republic of the Maldives that are used by the ministry which consists of science stream, business stream, art stream, and vocational stream. In this model, few subjects have been offered including some polytechnic subjects, but those subjects are abolished in the last few years.

“So there are four parts of a model that’s nowadays used by the ministry. They frame out 4 parts whereas that when they come to the lower secondary science stream, business stream, art stream, and vocational stream. Actually, there are BTEC, DHASVAAR and some polytechnics subjects but I think the last few years and polytechnics subjects are not given....” (Participant P2).

On the other hand, one of the participants explained that the new concept of secondary school is started in 2010 when all schools will start from grade 1 to grade 10, which means that the school includes primary and secondary.

“In 2010, all the schools change to secondary school that means all schools will have from grades 1 to 10. This school also get started in grade 1 to 10 which means in grade 1 join here and that, it was going on. We don’t call it secondary now we just say schools that include primary and secondary as well.” (Participant P1)

Participant P1 also added that all schools are adopted the London education concept at the beginning. Then, the concept changed to Cambridge education. However, there is some failure when implementing the Cambridge concept, which finally the government makes the decision to change the system that includes a vocational program. This program is focusing on preparing a student to work environment specifically for those who are weak in academic achievement. She gave the following statement;

“We started, I mean we were following London all over before and now Cambridge and then the government decided that it some failure that was going. So they have to change the system to have all of us plus BTEC that means vocational. We called it BTEC and DHASVAAR which is a different kind of program that is prepared for the work environment specifically those who are weak academically. So these are the three kinds of programs that will go officially within the curriculum.” (Participant P1)

Therefore, based on the statements given by the participants, it can be described that the education system in the Republic of Maldives is basically contained four streams which are art, science, business, and vocational stream. The vocational stream is introduced when the government concern about the importance of preparing a work environment for weak

students. Therefore, the government has developed a curriculum for vocational education, which gives more focus on practical rather than theory.

Structure of the Program

Another finding related to the concept of vocational education in lower secondary school is the structure of the program. The vocational program is introduced after some failure found in the previous model of education in the Republic of Maldives. Vocational education is added to the current stream which gave a total of four streams in the education system in the Republic of Maldives. Those streams are art, science, business and vocational. According to one of the participants;

“They frame out 4 parts whereas when they come to lower secondary science stream, business stream, art stream, and vocational stream and the vocational stream.” (Participant P2)

In the beginning, the duration of vocational programs is three years, but recently it has been changed to two years program which means that the student will start this program from grade 9. Participant P1 stated;

“We were preparing them for taking 3 years but now since we are to start from grade 9 that means we will have a 2-year program.” (Participant P1)

Another participant also mentioned a similar statement regarding the duration of a vocational program. She said;

“They can join the BTEC in grade 9 and finished the course in grade 10, two-year course we have. For DHASVAAR the student will join at grade 10.” (Participant T2)

In the structure of programs, there are also a few aspects that have been found that considered a concept of vocational education implemented in the Republic of Maldives. Those aspects are program approach, evaluation and assessment, program requirement, industrial training, a subject offered and trainer.

Program Approach

Basically, the vocational education program is more focused on student needs. One of the participants mentioned that the DHASVAAR which is one of the vocational programs is a student-based program. She said;

“Ok, DHASVAAR is a ... (student-based) program.” (Participant T1)

On the other hand, many participants agreed that the vocational program is more on a practical approach which requires students to learn more practical or physical tasks rather than learning theory in class. One of the participants described that vocational programs such as BTEC and DHASVAAR are more practical based rather than depends on learning theory only. This approach will also motivate the weak academic students to study. She explained;

“..they doing the BTEC course or DHASVAAR course, in BTEC is the more practical, practical based course so they learning so many things not only theory but also the practical thing actually, which motivated students to learn.” (Participant T2)

In contrast, one school principal mentioned that the vocational education program is conducted with 50 percent of theory and 50 percent for practical tasks. She gave the following statement;

“Actually, I think the program is umm 50-50. Yes. The theory also it’s like 50...” (Participant P2)

Another participant also emphasized that the vocational education program does not only focus a practical work. Students also need to write an explanation of each task given by the teacher. They should write step by step explanation and the report must be written in English. This is to enhance their writing skills as well as their English language. The participant gave the following remarks;

“BTEC is not only practical work. They need to write, assess, they have to write about their explanation step by step, why they are doing what is the purpose of doing that. Those things have to write. So weaker students what will they will do more than their own language they have to write in English right.” (Participant T3)

Participant T3 also added that the teacher plays a big role to ensure the students will be able to complete the task. Teachers are responsible to assist and motivate students by conducting a workshop to enhance student’s skills either practical or writing skills. It is important for teachers to really understand and clear about their tasks and responsibility. He said;

“In that case, teachers have to assist them; to motivate, to write something about their works. Yes. So workshops are really helpful for us to develop faster. We have to know more clearly what BTEC is and how to fill the forms and everything. Everything they explain, and now most of the BTEC teachers are familiar with that thing.” (Participant T3)

In the same way, another participant also agreed that the vocational education program is not only focused on the academic but also enhance the other skills and talents among students. So, this program will be able to give a lot of opportunities to with low academic achievement to get a better life in the future. He said;

“We got to sense that it is something like, apart from academics, it also strengthens the other skills and talents that the students have so that they would even get an equal opportunity as a student who excels in academics. So, their future will also be bright and equal; and not be comparatively any lower than the high academic student.” (Participant S4)

The finding also showed that vocational education approach students that unable to do well in academics by giving them other options to show their talents and capabilities. Apart from learning in class, students are encouraged to involve in extra-curricular activities conducted by teachers. One of the participants mentioned;

“There are students who will excel academically but there are students who might not do so well, so we try to give opportunities for all the students. We have quite co-curricular and extra-curricular activities here in Iskandar School. Today also we are having club day where all students get opportunities to be part of them so, we try our best to feel like everybody’s angle and everybody’s given an opportunity.” (Participant T4)

Participant T4 also agreed that in the vocational program, the students are encouraged to explore different kinds of knowledge which are important to create a brighter future. She mentioned;

“Yes because BTECH, ever since BTECH was introduced, like a lot of students were able to step out of their comfort zone and then just explore different things so that they have a clear idea of what they want to be in the future.” (Participant T4)

On the other hand, at the first stage of conducting vocational education, the ministry only focuses to implement the vocational course. Then, it has been further to conduct competition and exhibition in vocational education such as an art exhibition. A few exhibitions such as art exhibitions are also conducted by teachers and students in order to show student’s talent. However, recently, only students are conducting the exhibitions and teachers are not allowed to do so. One of the participants said;

“The early stage, the ministry conducted a course and not a competition. For the teachers and students, art exhibition for the past 2 years. I don’t know what is the reason behind they stopped. Now, only students are conducting an art exhibition and competition. Not for the teachers.” (Participant T3)

In addition, many students choose vocational programs based on their interests. As mentioned by one participant;

“Our school is mainly boys right so the choice that usually boy takes is different, usually choice like water sports is something that they very much interest in so but other schools they may, I don’t find that too many are to join all the sport, like that.” (Participant T1)

Therefore, from the findings, it can be summarized that there are few approaches in the vocational education program in the Republic of Maldives. This program is more on a practical basis which requires students to complete their practical tasks. However, there is also the participant who mentioned that the program is not only focused on practical tasks but also enhances other skills such as writing skills specifically in English.

Evaluation and Assessment

Interviews with participants also revealed that evaluation and assessment are also included in the structure of programs. One of the participants mentioned that the concept of evaluation in the vocational education programs is involving the assessor and verifier. The assessor is responsible to teach and help students in doing assignments while the verifier is a person who will verify the grading process done by an assessor. The participant gave the following statement;

“Actually, I am teaching subject physics so I coordinate the BTEC program, so we have that assessor and verifier. The assessor is the one who teaches, with the help of the assessor the student will doing the assignment and the verifier who will verify whether the assessor has graded them correctly or not.” (Participant T2)

In addition, the evaluation system also includes the competent system which means that the students should achieve a certain standard that has been set. Students will be trained by the industry people in order to achieve the standard that has been set. Then, after finishing a certain task, students will be evaluated to ensure those standards have been met. According to one of the participants;

“Competent system yes they have a certain standard, once they completed the standard, there will be assessing as well, training will be provided mutually through the industry people.” (Participant T1)

Additionally, student assessment and evaluation is based on practical work. In the previous year, students are sent to polytechnic to learn the practical task, then they were asked to finish the task given and the assessor is responsible to assist and evaluate the student. One of the participants gave the following statement;

“So basically, in our engineering program most assessment based on practical work. Like last year we took the student to polytechnic. It was a unit about maintenance, so we took the student to a polytechnic, from there they thought us how to clean up so practically they be doing. So, assess we will be doing what they doing even so practical work, which actually motivated the student.” (Participant T2)

The participant also stated that those assessments in practical work will be able to motivate the students. In the same way, the vocational program also needs the accountability of the teachers. The teacher is responsible to ensure all students completed their assignments and manage to follow the deadlines. One of the participants emphasized;

“Accountability is more on this program compared to the previous program. We have to ensure that all students finish their assignments and do their work on time and there are some deadlines and things which we need to make sure of. I think the word is accountability is more on this program compared to the last program.” (Participant P2)

Therefore, based on the finding, it can be concluded that the concept of assessment and evaluation is involved two important parties called the assessor and verifier. The assessor is responsible to assist the student to finish an assignment and evaluated the assignment while the verifier is a person who verifies whether the assessor has graded the students correctly or not. In addition, the finding also shows that the assessment and evaluation are done based on the student’s practical assignment. Accountability was also emphasized in this finding which related to the responsibility of teachers to ensure the students will be able to finish the task given and meet the deadline.

Program Requirements

In the concept of vocational education in secondary school, another finding revealed in the concept of program structure related to the program requirements. As mentioned by Participant T1, basically, the vocational program in the Republic of Maldives is a student-based program that focuses more on students that have low academic achievement. Therefore, the requirements to enroll in vocational programs are quite low in order to open this opportunity to many students. According to one of the participants;

“For this program actually, we open for the student who is doing academically lower than the other students, ...(low) academically low-performance students. So when they come to grade 10 we will know what the student is capable of doing O’level ... (SSC) subjects, to those who are unable to pass in at least 3 O’level ... (SSC) subjects we are offering them to enroll in the certificate level 3 course national certificate level. This is actually certified by TVET authority.” (Participant T1)

According to Participant T1, when the student in grade 10, teachers will identify a potential student that can be able to pass the O’ level. If teachers found that the student unable to pass at least three subjects at the O’ level, they will offer those students to pursue their studies in the vocational stream. It is to give opportunities for those students to continue their interest in other fields.

Another participant also agreed that the vocational program gave a lot of opportunities to students with low academic achievement to learn and pursue study and get a better career in the future. The participant gave the following remarks;

“Students who have, who do not have, who does not do not have the opportunity to learn, they can join the program and have the opportunity in the study and get a good job.” (Participant S1)

In the same way, another participant also mentioned that the requirement is very low since it offers to the students who are failed the previous exam. The participant stated;

“I believe there is an opportunity now for the students who are interested in the vocational field as well because we have this smart program, they are students who are not excelling academically, they get the opportunity to do all this and it counts, because they get internationally recognized certificates, they get nationally recognized certificates. Previously there were a lot of students who just come out of school all lose from the previous exam so they have to start all over again but now, actually, I think the ministry is thinking the best method to ensure that every student leaves the school with at least three passes. So for those students, they introduce these programs.” (Participant T4)

Therefore, the findings show that in the vocational education enrollment, the requirement to enroll in this program is quite low. The students that unable to pass at the O' level, are encouraged to pursue their study in vocational education.

Industrial Training

In the structure of the program, the finding shows that the student should attend industrial training in order to pass the program. The student should complete their practical in industry and polytechnic in order to prepare those students for the work environment. According to one of the participants, they send students to industry for practical training while for certain theoretical knowledge, they send the student to polytechnic.

She said;

“Then they are, for this program recently we have sent students to all this polytechnic course since industry people are unable to provide the necessary theoretical aspects of it.” (Participant T1)

In addition, one of the participants mentioned that the school also makes an agreement with the industry people in order to ensure that the industry will provide practical training to the vocational students. It is important for students to expose to a real working environment. She gave the following statement;

“We have to make MOU with the concerned industry people, companies so they will provide the training other than seeking in the in the class, they go to the actual locations where the work is carried out.” (Participant T1)

Therefore, it can be summarized that industrial training is one of the important elements in the structure of programs. Vocational students need to attend practical training that aims to expose those students to the real working environment.

Subject Offered

Further discussion with the participants also found another structure of the program which is related to the subject offered in vocational education. Few respondents gave their statements based on their own experience conducting classes of vocational programs. In the context of the subject offered, one of the participants mentioned that the subjects of vocational programs are different for each school. She stated that the reason why certain subjects are offered for her school is that the school is only having male students which might

the reason why engineering subjects are offered in her school. She gave the following statement;

“BTEC is...the different school offers different subjects like I mean areas for us, we were given engineering because we were having only boys then in the secondary so we started with engineering. This is a second year with engineering.” (Participant P1)

Participant P1 also added that the BTEC engineering program is offered in her school which is related to the mechanically subject in which students will be able to obtain a certificate after they complete the programs. She said;

“It called just engineering, BTEC engineering we don’t have any. It got mechanically and mainly but we don’t have a specific name as a mechanic, they said BTEC engineering mainly this. They getting certificate too...” (Participant P1)

Another participant also added that in the BTEC program, he should learn a few compulsory subjects and added with other subjects that he is interested to study. This scenario shows that the students are given an opportunity to choose their own interests in certain areas rather than focus on one particular area of study only. The participant gave the following remarks;

“Umm, yes. I think I do. Yes, we learned for the compulsory subject and pursue in other more... something that we are more interested in.” (Participant S2)

In addition, there is a lot of variation in the vocational subjects that can be chosen by students. Many students choose the subject that they are interested in to get more knowledge and the ability to provide a good job in the future. She mentioned;

“It is a lot of vast variety of things a lot of things, engineering is not there. The most popular one is water spot and photography and hotels; hotel manage (management) but not hotel management, what do we call it, the front office is was also there but now no longer there, they go and work at hotel and resort.” (Participant P1)

In the same way, students are given an option to choose at least two subjects to learn if they are unable to study all the subjects together. One of the participants mentioned that;

“Actually in BTEC, I can tell and with the detail, there is a student who can’t and unable to study all the subject together so and they are doing only just three or two subjects.” (Participant T2)

In addition, according to one of the participants, the subjects offered in the vocational program are competency-based. He emphasized;

“Are the subjects offered competency-based? Yes..” (Participant P3)

Based on the findings, it can be summarized that there are a variety of subjects offered in the vocational programs in the Republic of Maldives. The subjects are consisting of several compulsory subjects and few subjects that can be chosen by students who are more focused on what is their interests.

Trainer

The finding also found that in the program structure of vocational education, one participant emphasized the trainer involved in this program. In the context of the trainer, the

person who is responsible to train the students is not among the teachers. Most of them are from industries such as IT personal that working in an IT company. Therefore, the school will send students to attend practical training in the industry, and the person who is an expert in that area will be appointed as the trainer. The participant also mentioned that they also send students to polytechnic to learn theory and practical aspects since many of the industry people unable to provide theoretical knowledge to the students. At the polytechnic, they have the expertise to teach the student in the theoretical aspects. The participant gave the following statement;

“Actually that people who are training are not within the school, they are in the industry like for IT personals, they work in the IT company, not in the school so they work in the IT company. So we are sending the students over there. Then they are, for this program recently we have sent students to all this polytechnic course since the industry people who are unable to provide the necessary theoretical aspects of it.” (Participant T1)

Therefore, the findings show the importance of a suitable trainer in order to implement the vocational education program in the Republic of Maldives. As mentioned by the participant, there are two different trainers involved to give knowledge to students that consist of people from industry and an expert from the polytechnics. The people from the industry concern with giving practical knowledge while an expert from polytechnic is responsible to provide knowledge on theoretical aspects.

Promoting Program

Another concept in the structure of vocational education in secondary school that has been found in the discussion is related to the promoting program. There are not abundant of information regarding how to promote vocational education program to the people in the Republic of Maldives. One participant mentioned there is not much information provided regarding those programs. The details of the programs only can be obtained from school internal information. The participant stated;

“We don’t have a profile but we have our application form where you’ll find all the details of the program. That provides there (education from here. Yes, we have an internal application form for our own management purposes. We can share the application form, sure.” (Participant P3)

Therefore, it can be concluded that they don’t have a specific strategy to promote vocational education programs in the Republic of Maldives. Most of the schools only have information on the programs internally only.

School Leadership

Further discussion revealed another concept of vocational education in the secondary which is related to school leadership. According to one of the participants, the ministry has given a lot of freedom to the school leader to perform improvisation for the development of vocational education programs. He also added that the school leader has been given the authority to conduct the program in school. He gave the following statement;

“Right now we are given a lot of freedom, so improvisation has been board within the school over the past 2 years so as if for now I think we were given a lot of authority over the program.” (Participant P3)

The school leader improvises the vocational education programs by introducing a new management office which is created to organize and manage the vocational program offered in the school. The participant gave the following statement;

“Early they had one particular office prepared created under the name UFFA office so it was that office who were they were looking in the program.” (Participant P3)

Participant P3 explained further regarding the UFFA office which related to how their operation in order to organize a vocational program. The participants mentioned that the operation is on a weekly basis when all teachers involved in the vocational program, will send reports for every activity that happened in the whole week to the ministry. He remarks;

*“They on a weekly basis so every week we will have to send updates to them and then later on the school were given authority.”
(Participant P3)*

Additionally, the participant also added that the ministry will meet coordinators from all the regions in one school to discuss and share difficulties that they have been confronted with. It is to find the best solution to improve the vocational education program in school. He stated;

“They look on the status monthly and then last year it was like once every 6 months, we called the coordinators from all the regions, they meet up in one school and then we share our difficulties here so sometimes when once school isn't in we do contribute.” (Participant P3)

The school leader is not only focused on the relation with the ministry but also contribute to the student's development. According to participant P3, the school leader also put various initiatives to assist students in their studies. One of the initiatives is hiring an expert tutor in certain subjects in order to make students more competent. All schools that offered vocational programs were together to help students by hiring an expert tutor to train and teach students. He clarified;

“In 2016, one of our students, was not competent at the end of the year. So the following year some other school, had paid the tutor and they brought the tutor to that school, so we asked if it is possible to send one of the students for that session. So it was like our student went there and then she was, later on, declared as competent. So such understanding is there within the school, even so, is like more the leadership style. I would say that the school is given authority and of course, an improvement can be brought but I think it will take some time so it's not perfect at all, yes.” (Participant P3)

Therefore, in the school leadership concept, the findings show that the ministry has given the authority to school leaders to make improvements and development of the vocational education program. It is including the initiatives that have been implemented by school leaders in order to increase the student's achievement.

CONCLUSION

The findings in this section had found a few concepts of vocational education in a secondary school in the Republic of Maldives. The concepts are including the TVET system, the structure of programs and school leadership. In the TVET system concept, the findings revealed that in the Maldives education system, basically there are four streams such as art, science, business and vocational stream. Vocational education is a new stream introduced by the government in order to prepare low academic students for the working environment. The curriculum of vocational education is more focused on practical rather than theoretical aspects. On the other hand, for the concept of program structure, the findings revealed several elements that consist of this concept such as program approach, evaluation and assessment,

program requirements, industrial training, subjects offered, trainer and promoting the program. In the program approach, the vocational program is more on a practical basis which requires students to complete their practical tasks and emphasizing other skills such as writing skills specifically in English. The concept of assessment and evaluation involves two important parties namely the assessor and the verifier. Additionally, in the concept of program requirements, the findings show that the requirements to enroll in this program is quite low. Industrial training was also found in the finding of the program structure which revealed that the vocational students need to attend practical training that aims to expose those students to the real working environment. In the context of subjects offered, there are several compulsory subjects and few subjects that can be chosen by students who are more focused on what is the student's interest. The finding also revealed that the trainer is one of the concepts of program structure, which explained that there are two different trainers involved to give knowledge to students that consists of people from industry and an expert from the polytechnics. Another finding that related to the structure of the program is promoting programs which found that they don't have a specific strategy to promote the vocational education programs in the Republic of Maldives. The final concept revealed in the findings is school leadership. School leadership is related to the authority given by the ministry to the school leader in order to make improvements for student's achievement.

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