

Perception of Vocational Workers Regarding Their Career Development and to Identify the Factors Affecting Career Growth in the Unorganized Sector

A.P.Muruganandam

Scholar

and

A.Vimala

Guide and Head

Department of Career Guidance

Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

Career development is essential for enhancing employees' skills, job satisfaction, motivation, and long-term career growth. Vocational workers in the unorganized sector make significant contributions to the economy through various technical and service occupations. However, they often face limited access to formal training, career advancement opportunities, job security, and professional development. This study examines the perception of vocational workers regarding their career development opportunities in the unorganized sector. It focuses on understanding their awareness, satisfaction, and expectations related to career growth. The study may help employers, policymakers, and training institutions design appropriate skill development and career support interventions. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to improving career sustainability, employability, and socio-economic well-being among vocational workers in the unorganized sector.

Keywords: Perception on vocational work, Career Development, Factors, Employability and Sustainability.

Introduction

Career development plays an important role in improving the skills, job satisfaction, and future growth of employees. It helps workers enhance their abilities, gain confidence, and achieve better opportunities in their professional lives. In the organized sector, employees usually receive structured career development opportunities such as training, promotions, and performance evaluation. However, workers in the unorganized sector often have limited access to such opportunities. Vocational workers in the unorganized sector contribute significantly to the economy through their work in areas such as construction, repair services, tailoring, electrical work, plumbing, and other technical occupations. Despite their contribution, many vocational workers face challenges such as low wages, lack of job security, limited training opportunities, and unclear career paths.

The perception of vocational workers regarding their career development is an important area of study because it helps to understand their level of satisfaction, awareness of growth opportunities, and the barriers they face in career advancement. This study focuses on examining how vocational workers in the unorganized sector perceive their career development and the factors that influence their career progress. Vocational training historically has been a subject handled by the Ministry of Labor, other central ministries and various state-level organizations. To harmonize the variations and multiplicity in terms of standards and costs, the National Skills Qualification Framework was launched in December 2013.

The National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) is a competency-based framework that organizes all qualifications according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude. These levels, graded from one to ten, are defined in terms of learning outcomes which the learner must possess regardless of whether they are obtained through formal, non-formal or informal learning. NSQF in India was notified on 27 December 2013. All other frameworks, including the NVEQF (National Vocational Educational Qualification Framework) released by the Ministry of HRD, stand superseded by the NSQF.

Career Development is a lifelong, unique process for each individual of managing learning, work, and transitions in order to move toward an evolving preferred future and participate effectively in work and society. Successful career development is important to individuals' personal and economic wellbeing and both economic productivity and social justice. In order to undertake the lifelong career development process, individuals need to acquire skills that support employability, career management and resilience in the face of career change. Career management skills involve individuals in the development of a positive and resilient mindset; learning about themselves and the opportunities available; making informed and justified decisions and acting on these and networking with people who can support them.

Literature Review

Ram, Toshali and Santhosh (2024) examined Skilling in the Informal Economy in India: Identifying and Addressing Inequities in Designing and Delivering Lifelong Learning Opportunities. The study highlights that lifelong learning is particularly important for workers in the informal economy because it helps them adapt to changing livelihood conditions and improve their capabilities. However, informal workers face several barriers in accessing lifelong learning, including the digital divide, limited institutional support, and unequal access to learning opportunities. The authors emphasize the need for more inclusive approaches to lifelong learning that recognize the realities of informal workers. This study is highly relevant to the present research because vocational workers in the unorganized sector frequently depend on informal and non-formal learning for occupational development.

Von der Bank, Pilz and Venkatram (2024) studied Farming is charming: Informal learning of farmers in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India. The study specifically examined informal learning among workers in the agricultural sector, which represents an important part of informal employment. The researchers demonstrated that workers acquire substantial occupational knowledge through informal learning, workplace experiences, interactions with others, and practical activities. Their findings suggest that learning in informal occupations should not be understood only through formal training institutions, as workers develop important competencies through everyday work experiences. This finding is particularly relevant to vocational workers in Tamil Nadu because their skills may be acquired through experience but may not always be formally recognized or certified.

Loyalka, Mistree, Fairlie and Khanna (2024) investigated Job Training, English Language Skills, and Employability: Evidence from an Experiment in Urban India. The researchers conducted a large randomized field experiment involving 1,260 low-income individuals in Delhi. The study found that employment-oriented training, particularly training that developed English-language skills, improved participants' English proficiency, employability, and estimated wages. The findings demonstrate that targeted training can strengthen labour-market outcomes among economically disadvantaged populations. The study provides important support for the argument that vocational workers require not only technical skills but also communication and employability skills to improve their career opportunities.

Kumar et al. (2024), in research on India's labour-market challenges and youth employability, examined the relationship between the skills supplied by the workforce and the skills demanded by employers. The study reported that India has considerable demand for skilled and semi-skilled workers, while many workers experience difficulties in acquiring the competencies expected by employers. The researchers also pointed to limitations in the contribution of vocational education and training to the labour market. The study indicates that improving the connection between vocational training and labour-market requirements is essential for enhancing employability and career progression.

Research Gap

Despite the growing literature on skill development and informal employment, relatively limited research directly examines the perception of vocational workers themselves regarding their career development, career aspirations, perceived opportunities, and barriers to advancement. Much of the existing research focuses on employability, skill training, labour-market outcomes, or policy-level interventions rather than workers' own perceptions of career growth.

Therefore, the proposed study can address this gap by examining how vocational workers in the unorganized sector perceive their career development and which personal, occupational, organizational, and socio-economic factors influence their career progression.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive research design to understand the perception of vocational workers regarding their career development in the unorganized sector. The descriptive research design helps to collect information about workers' opinions, experiences, and challenges related to career growth. The study is based on the survey method, where data are collected from respondents using a structured questionnaire. The population of the study consists of vocational workers employed in various unorganized sectors, such as construction, electrical work, tailoring, plumbing, and other service-related occupations. The study is limited to selected vocational workers in the unorganized sector, responses are based on personal opinions of workers, time and resource constraints may limit the depth of the study and findings may not be applicable to all unorganized sectors.

Findings and Discussions

The study reveals that 92% of the respondents are male, indicating that vocational occupations in the unorganized sector are predominantly male-oriented. This may be attributed to the physical nature of several occupations such as electrical work, plumbing, construction, mechanical repair, welding, and other technical trades. The finding is consistent with the broader characteristics of informal employment, where occupational segregation by gender remains evident. Ram, Toshali, and Santhosh (2024) observed that inequalities in access to skilling opportunities continue to characterize India's informal economy. The strong male representation in the present study suggests the need to examine whether women have equal access to vocational training, certification, finance, and entrepreneurial opportunities.

The findings show that 32% of the respondents belong to the above 45 years age group, indicating that experienced and relatively older workers constitute a substantial proportion of the vocational workforce. This may reflect the fact that many vocational occupations depend heavily on accumulated practical experience and skills acquired over several years. von der Bank, Pilz, and Venkatram (2024) emphasized that workers in informal occupations develop considerable occupational knowledge through informal learning and workplace experience. Therefore, the presence of older workers in the present study may represent an important source of tacit vocational knowledge. However, the ageing workforce also highlights the importance of transferring traditional occupational knowledge to younger workers through structured apprenticeship and skill-development programmes.

The study indicates that 68% of respondents possess only school-level education, demonstrating that formal educational qualifications among vocational workers are relatively limited. This finding reflects the characteristics of informal employment, where practical experience often substitutes for higher formal qualifications. The OECD (2024) reported that informal workers generally have lower levels of formal education and face fewer opportunities to participate in employer-sponsored and public training programmes. Thus, the educational profile found in the present study suggests that vocational workers may benefit considerably from flexible, short-term, competency-based training programmes that do not require higher academic qualifications.

The study shows that 60% of respondents earn between ₹500 and ₹1,000 per day, while 44% report a monthly income between ₹10,000 and ₹20,000. These figures indicate that although vocational work provides a livelihood, income levels remain moderate and may vary according to the type of occupation, number of working days, location, and availability of customers. The OECD (2024) highlighted the association between informal employment and low-paying work and emphasized that limited opportunities for skill upgrading can constrain workers' ability to improve their economic position. Therefore, enhanced technical skills, certification, digital skills, and entrepreneurship training may help vocational workers improve their income-generating capacity.

The finding that 68% of respondents reported that their current occupation is not their family occupation indicates that a substantial proportion entered their vocation independently rather than inheriting it through family tradition. This may suggest changing patterns of occupational mobility in the unorganized sector, where workers enter vocational

occupations in response to employment needs, personal interest, or local labour-market opportunities. The finding is significant because it challenges the assumption that informal vocational occupations are always transmitted from one generation to another. It also indicates the importance of career guidance and vocational counselling in helping individuals make informed occupational choices.

The study reveals that 68% of respondents are fully satisfied with their present work, indicating a generally positive perception of their occupation despite the challenges associated with informal employment. Satisfaction may arise from independence, familiarity with the occupation, income generation, flexibility, personal interest, and control over working conditions. This finding is important because career development should not be viewed only in terms of promotion or movement to higher positions. For self-employed vocational workers, career development may also involve improving skills, increasing income, expanding business activities, and achieving greater occupational recognition.

The respondents reported that they continue in their present occupation mainly because of family income requirements, personal interest, and limited alternative employment opportunities. This indicates that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence occupational continuity. Personal interest can contribute to job satisfaction, whereas financial responsibilities and limited alternatives can create economic dependence on the occupation. The finding suggests that career development interventions should not merely encourage workers to change occupations but should provide opportunities to improve their existing occupation through advanced training, certification, entrepreneurship, and access to markets.

A significant finding is that most respondents are interested in obtaining certificates for their existing vocational skills, particularly for professional recognition. This demonstrates that workers recognize the value of formal validation of their practical competencies. The finding is strongly supported by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2023), which highlighted the importance of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in India's informal sector. Many informal workers acquire competencies through work experience but lack formal documentation. Certification and RPL can therefore provide greater visibility to their skills and potentially improve employment mobility, income, and professional status.

Although workers show considerable (62%) interest in certification, the study finds that awareness of government vocational certification programmes is comparatively low. The finding suggests that government programmes may not reach informal workers effectively through conventional communication channels. Choudhury and Patel (2026) highlighted implementation challenges in Indian skill-development programmes, including difficulties related to mobilization, counselling, information exchange, and participation. The study finds that 58% not aware technological advancements in equipment. Workers who fail to update their technical knowledge may experience declining competitiveness. Ram et al. (2024) emphasized the need to address inequalities in access to lifelong learning within India's informal economy.

Conclusion

The study concludes that vocational workers in the unorganized sector generally have a positive perception of their present work, and many workers are satisfied with their occupation. The majority have considerable work experience and earn moderate income through their vocational skills. However, the study also reveals that workers face challenges such as limited career development opportunities, low awareness of certification programmes, limited knowledge of technological advancements, and lack of formal recognition. These factors restrict their professional growth and future career prospects.

The findings suggest that vocational workers are willing to improve their skills and are interested in training and certification opportunities. With proper support through training programmes, government certification, financial assistance, and career guidance, vocational workers can improve their career development and economic well-being. Therefore, improving access to skill development and professional recognition is essential for enhancing the career growth of vocational workers in the unorganized sector.

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