The global quest for credentials and the role of national qualifications frameworks

Markus Maurer, University of Zurich

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1 Introduction
1.1 Why NQFs are so puzzling

A super macro curriculum reform in vocational skills development, with potential consequences for most aspects of these systems,

- instruction and testing
- infrastructure and equipment
- training of trainers
- governance
- financing
1.1 Why NQFs are so puzzling

... that is subject to a very rapid global diffusion

see Allais, 2010; also Meyer & Ramirez, 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Countries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980ies</td>
<td>The core</td>
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<td></td>
<td>England, Wales and Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>1990ies</td>
<td>Countries of the Commonwealth (examples)</td>
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<td>Scotland (incremental)</td>
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<td>New Zealand (1991)</td>
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<td>West Africa (1995)</td>
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<td>Transition countries (examples)</td>
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<td>South Africa (1995)</td>
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<td>Mexico (1995)</td>
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<td>Post-2000</td>
<td>EU / partner countries of the EU</td>
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<td>Economically less developed countries (examples)</td>
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<td>Bangladesh (2008)</td>
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<td>Sri Lanka (2005)</td>
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What is the reason for this rapid diffusion?
2 Skills standardisation in development cooperation: a short review
2.1 Why is skill standardisation needed?
(see e.g. Rauner, 2009)

Training organisation‘s perspective
– Training needs curricular guidance

Trainees’ perspective
– Basis for certification
– Enhancement of mobility in labour markets

Employers’ perspective
– Skill standards as proxy for skills of new employees, thus serving as signals in the labour market
2.2 Potential scope of skills standard frameworks

Three dimensions
2.2 Potential scope of skills standard frameworks

**Systemic breadth**
- all training centres of an administrative unit, or
- all courses in the respective trade as well as related in-house training
2.2 Potential scope of skills standard frameworks

**Systemic breadth**

**Economic breadth**
- selected economic sectors, or
- all economic sectors in a given country
2.2 Potential scope of skills standard frameworks

- Systemic breadth
- Occupational depth
  - one occupation in one industry, or
  - different occupations in one industry, or
  - all occupations in one industry
- Economic breadth
2.3 Skills standard frameworks prior to the NQF era
From the 1970s until the NQF era

Systemic breadth

Occupational depth
- skill standards
- curricula

Economic breadth
- curricula

see e.g. NAITA, 1997; Pang, 1995; VTA, 1998.
2.4 Limits of early skills standard frameworks

Lacking systemic breadth

- Skill standards mostly only used by one administrative agency

Lacking occupational depth

- Programmes not accessible to the poor

No link to higher education

- Lacking social demand for skill programmes at intermediary level because of missing links to higher education
3 Why are qualifications frameworks so appealing?
3.1 Competency-based skills standardisation

- In theory, strong orientation towards needs of employers.
- Change from being input-led to being outcome-led.
  - Focus is on skills employed in the labour market and not on contents of training programmes.
3.2. The broad scope of qualifications frameworks
Systemic breadth

NVQs ..
• for all training agencies involved
• applicable also for in-firm training
• with potential to link up with overseas VSD systems/labour markets
Systemic breadth

Occupational depth

Economic breadth applicable to all economic sectors
Occupational depth
• Open to the poor: lowest levels open for individuals with little or no formal education.
• Links between all levels, facilitating transition to highest levels

Systemic breadth

Economic breadth
3.3 The basis of NQF‘s attractiveness

I.
Skills standardisation becomes relevant for poverty reduction.
3.3 The basis of NQF’s attractiveness

II.
Skills standardisation becomes an instrument for handling the quest for educational credentials.
The quest for credentials

The NQF rationale links the idea of skills standardisation with the ideal of educational and upward labour market mobility.
Educational systems in developing countries are often based on egalitarian ideologies.

Educational expansion leading to growing importance of educational credentials to enter labour markets,

Pressure on policy making to increase the social status of VSD qualifications.

Persistence of structural barriers that impede the poor to access education or to reach higher education.

see e.g. Brown, 2001; Collins, 1979; Lange & Topel, 2006; Maurer, 2011
4 Challenges in implementing National Qualifications Frameworks:

The example of training for Industrial Sewing Machine Operators (ISMO) in Sri Lanka
4.1 Skill standard and curriculum for Industrial Sewing Machine Operators (ISMO)

Skill standard
... covering four levels
... focussing on 12 different types of machines

Curriculum
... specifying the skill standard for use in the classroom.
... including tremendous amounts of academic knowledge.
... covering a length of more than 300 pages.

see Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training, 2006; NAITA, 2005; NITE, 2003.
### The statistics 2005-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of trainees in courses for Industrial Sewing Machine Operators (ISMO)</td>
<td>approx. 8’900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of certificates (any level) for Industrial Sewing Machine Operators (ISMO) awarded</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution of ISMO skill standard to poverty reduction (e.g. increased wages)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution of ISMO skill standard to educational mobility</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Difficulties in implementing skill standard and curriculum

**Training administration**
- Logistical problems to take documents to the schools
  - Ignorance of the entire document
- Lack of adequate practical resources (machines)
  - Training on one / two types of machines
- Obvious desinterest at all administrative levels to resolve these problems

**Trainees**
- Limited social demand for the programme, despite considerable promotion with reference to the NQF
- Limited perspectives for upwards labour market mobility for those with little formal education

**Private sector**
- High demand from the labour market for trainees with just basic operational skills
- No interest of firms to support operators to get a NQF-certificate
5 Synthesis

- Rapid diffusion of NQF model in developing countries is rooted in the fact that its approach to skills standardisation is in line with poverty reduction strategies and the quest for credentials.

- To reach the core goals of the NQF model (upward labour market mobility / poverty reduction) is challenging.

- Competency-based NQF standards may not necessarily be relevant for the actors in the implementation context.
6 The way ahead

- Focus on those economic sectors, where it is realistic that both firms and employees are interested in training programmes that are based on NQF skill standards.

- To really contribute to upward labour market mobility, implementers of NQF must address the issue of general education.

- The involvement of firms into implementing NQF skill standards is often not realistic. This requires a careful analysis of the infrastructural consequences of such skill standards.
Thank you.
Literature


Literature


