

Understanding the Role of NEP 2020 in Promoting Vocational Education for Making India Skilled and Atmanirbhar

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Abstract: Education is training the head, heart and hand person who is educated. In this context, education is not only information processing but also skills development. The aims and objectives of education are changing in the 21st century with the changing demands of society and innovation in technology. There is a need for diversification of educational opportunities to enhance employability of the students and the demand for skilled human resources is also increasing. Vocational Education can play a crucial role in this regard. It can be defined as the system of both recognised as well as unrecognised methods of transmitting knowledge, skills and competencies which enhances the recipient's ability to either secure jobs in various sectors of the economy or make them self-employed.

Keywords: Atmanirbhar

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is training the head, heart and hand person who is educated. In this context, education is not only information processing but also skills development. The aims and objectives of education are changing in the 21st century with the changing demands of society and innovation in technology. There is a need for diversification of educational opportunities to enhance employability of the students and the demand for skilled human resources is also increasing. Vocational Education can play a crucial role in this regard. It can be defined as the system of both recognised as well as unrecognised methods of transmitting knowledge, skills and competencies which enhances the recipient's ability to either secure jobs in various sectors of the economy or make them self-employed. It acts as a bridge between general education and the demand of industry. The need for vocational education in India can be understood by the following observations. While over the years education has become more academic and theoretical distancing from practical skills needed for work has resulted in unemployment among educated youth. India can increase its gross national productivity by utilising its youth demographic human resources through skill development through vocational education. Pure academics is not suitable for everyone leading to dropout. In that case, vocational education can help them to acquire some skills so that they can find suitable employment or even become self-employed. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) has highlighted the needs of vocational education and provided a road map of making it more accessible, more flexible, more integrated into general educational system, more contemporary, more inclusive etc. and make it a part of lifelong learning. It recognizes the importance of vocational education in preparing individuals for work and developing their skills to meet the needs of the economy¹. Indian governments initiative of "Atmanirhar Bharat" or self-reliant India can get a major boost by vocational education as it is an effective way of skill development among countries population so that they can become productive citizen and make contribution for development of the nation.

Need For the Study:

In India, vocation and education was never seen as separate entity. But British colonial rulers created a system of education to fulfil their administrative need discouraging the vocationalization of education from traditional Indian system of education. This intension of colonial rulers has been identified and visualised by educational thinkers and

eminent persons on that period and also after. Wardha scheme of Basic Education (1937) based on Gandhiji's philosophy of Basic Education attempted to bring educational and vocational skills together. After independence Secondary Education Commission (1951-52) felt the need of inclusion and promotion of technical skills and efficiency at all stages.² Similarly, the Education Commission (1964-66) or Kothari Commission Report also suggested to relate education to work and recommended that vocational education should be part of both lower and higher secondary stages.² Later NPE 1986 proposes a systematic and well-planned program of VE which have distinct streams which will prepare students to a vocation supported by set of activities. The review committee of NPE 1986 (Ramamurti Committee) reminded the need and urgency of vocationalisation of education by making it part of three potential features viz. universalisation, vocationalisation and decentralisation.³ National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of 2005 also emphasised on reconsidering the epistemology of vocational education by bridging the gap between academic and vocational streams and the curriculum should provide space for learning beyond subject boundaries so that children and young people can make connections between different areas of learning. With National Skills Development Policy (2009) the government taken initiative to develop National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF). The present structure of Indian vocational and technical education system is a three-tier system⁴:

Certificate level skilled persons includes Higher secondary students in the vocational stream and craft people trained at ITIs, semiskilled and skilled workers through formal apprenticeships.

Diploma level graduates includes Technicians and supervisors trained at Polytechnics.

Graduate and post-graduate level specialist includes Engineers and technologists trained at NITs, IITs and engineering colleges

Following are few schemes of skill development and vocational education programme which are mainly centrally sponsored are going on Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Skill India Mission, DeenDayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) etc. But in vocational education, the growth is stagnant and slow as shown by an assessment conducted by NIOS which shows that only 2% of population have received formal vocational training, and only 8% have received non-formal vocational training in between 15–29-year age group.⁵ The NEP (2020, p.43) has put forward a much more gruesome statistic. It showed with the estimation from 12th Five-Year Plan (2012-2017) that less than 5% person of Indian workforce in the age group of 19-24 received formal vocational education compared to countries such as the USA (52%), Germany (75%), and South Korea (96%).⁶ There are many factors responsible for the slow progress of vocational education in India like lack of well-coordinated management system, social stigma towards vocational education, unemployability of pass out students, mismatch in demand and supply, lack of opportunity for professional development etc. In this context NEP 2020 considered Vocational education as crucial and it aims to overcome the social status hierarchy associated with vocational education. It also proposed the revamping of school education with more concentration on vocational skill development.⁷ The present study will look into current status of employability among Indian youth, find out the shortages in employability skills and explore the recommendation made by NEP 2020 regarding vocational education to overcome the challenges. The study also aims to contextualise the role of vocational education towards Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Objectives of the Study:

- To understand the current state of employability among Indian youths.
- To understand/fathom the gap between the kind of education our youths are receiving and the skills the current industry is looking for.
- To explore the NEP 2020 to understand the recommendations regarding vocational education in skilling the youths to make them industry-ready.
- To understand how NEP 2020 recommendations could be implemented in contextualising the role of vocational education towards Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Methodology of the Study:

Given the time constraints, the authors have resorted to exploratory study of the existing literature. As the methodology largely depends on the kind of objectives research is intended to fulfil, the literary exploration was undertaken in five

different steps following five objectives. By and large, for each step a Google search was carried out to retrieve and study the literature available in the public domain to understand the contour of the corpus of works related to a particular objective. Based on this understanding more precise searches were carried out in the Google Scholar platform for retrieval and subsequent study of scholarly contents connected to a particular objective. Finally, based on the understanding of the explored literature the authors expressed their collective views and some recommendations for making vocational education more inclusive in line with NEP 2020.

Current State of Employability of Indian Youths:

The current employability of Indian youths is a complex issue with various factors at play. Now let us look at the sectors that have enormous potential to create jobs. In the Indian context, the sectors can broadly be classified into the service sector and the goods sector. According to the 2022-23 economic survey India has achieved a remarkable success in the service sector, with a contribution of over 50% to its GDP, but the sector could not improve its overall employment status as it employs less than a third of the country’s labour force, as high-skills have been the prerequisite for getting absorbed in the service sector.⁸ Contrary to this, labour intensive goods sector is the one that can and has the capacity to generate an enormous number of jobs. Some of the focus areas could be infrastructure, transportation, logistics, energy, water, etc., where India could have done better, but it did not exploit the full potential of these sectors and the demographic dividend.

Studies have shown that educational attainment plays a significant role in improving employability prospects, particularly in high and medium-skill occupations.⁹ There is emphasis on need for relevant skills and qualifications for getting a job, particularly in the global market.¹⁰ However, despite the growing enrolment in education, youth from a general education background face challenges in finding sustained employability in high-skill occupations.¹¹ Vocational education offers brighter employability prospects, but its acceptability among youth requires policy intervention.¹² According to India Skills Report (2023, p. 38), the employability rate among Indian Youth is 50.03%, including 47.28% males and 53.5% females, while B.Com degree holders are more employable (60.62%).¹³ However, there is still a significant employability crisis among India's youth. Some key findings regarding the employability of Indian youth are:

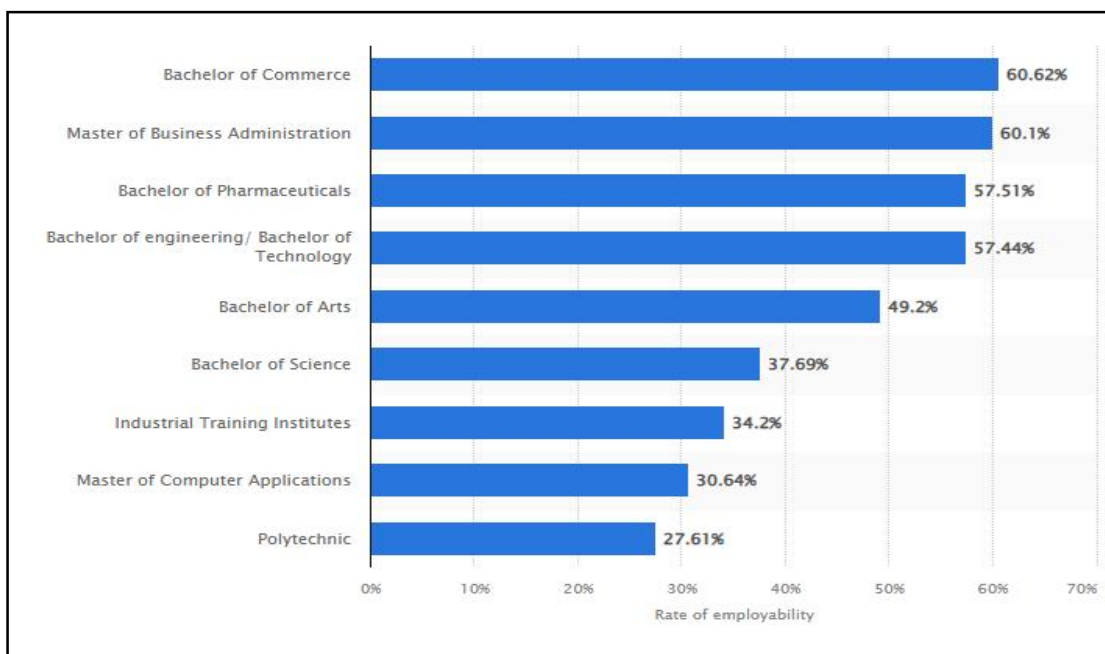


Fig-1: Employability among graduates across India in 2023, by degree (Courtesy- Statista)
(Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/738255/employability-among-graduates-by-degree-india/>)

According to the Skill Financing Report 2023, India ranks 60th globally in terms of overall skills proficiency and Around 78% of young people in the country lack practical skills.¹⁴

According to Multiple Indicator Survey (MIS), NSS 78th Round (2020-21, p.33), Only 15.4% of young men between the ages of 15 and 29 are neither employed nor studying, compared to 51.7% of young women.¹⁵

The report also shows that a significant gender gap exists among the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) population, with 65.3% of NEET men being available for work or seeking employment, compared to 34.7% of NEET women. (p.34)¹⁵

The employability of vocationally and technically trained youth has also been affected by a decline in work force participation, high unemployment rates, and wage differentials based on gender and caste.¹⁶ Overall, while there is a significant employability crisis among India's youth, efforts to improve skill development, access to education and training, and gender equality can help address this issue and prepare the next generation for the future of work.

Understanding the Education and Skill Gap:

There is a gap between present educational system and the skills required for employment in the current scenario in India. The current education system leading to a poor quality of education in India as it focuses more on rote learning, than hands on skills required handle a professional work environment.¹⁷ The formal system of skilled workforce creation in India is low than countries like China and Japan which results into supply demand mismatch of skilled workforce.¹⁸ This mismatch between the existing educational scenario, skillset and the industrial requirement has led to rising unemployment rates and low employability rate among educated youth.¹⁹ There exists a gap between academia and industry as industries are striving for survival while academia focused on recognition leading to graduates don't having necessary skills for employment.²⁰ To close the skills gap between education, training, and work, it is the priority to focus on developing the employability skills in technical education as well as general education. The academia and industry must work side by side to satisfy the changing demand of job market.

Recommendations Regarding Vocational Education in NEP-2020:

NEP-2020 which is a full-fledged education policy after National Policy on Education, 1986. It is first policy of 21st century which in its fundamental principals stated that there will be no hard separation between vocational and academic streams. It emphasizes on the integration of vocational education into the general education system in phased manner from pre school to higher education. The major observations and recommendations of NEP-2020 regarding

Causes of a smaller number of students in vocational education:

There is a social status hierarchy in which vocational education is perceived to be inferior to mainstream education, meant largely for students who are unable to cope with the latter. This has been created due to the lack of planning and the poor delivery of vocational education in the past.

One of the primary reasons for the small numbers of students receiving vocational education is that, with vocational subjects, they often do not have well-defined pathways to continue with their chosen vocations in higher education.

The non-availability of good quality vocational teachers/ trainers is a major issue in imparting quality vocational education and training.

Target:

The education policy sets a target of including 50% of learners of school and higher education in to vocational education with clearly defined targets and timelines.

The number of students in vocational education will be considered while arriving at the GER target.

Integration of Vocational Education with Academic Education:

Integration of vocational education programmes into mainstream education will be in a phased manner with beginning with vocational exposure at early ages going through middle & secondary school will be integrated into higher education. By doing this every child will understand the dignity of labour and importance of various vocations like Indian arts and artisanship. Academic institutions with Vocational Education to collaborate with Industrial Training

Institutes, Polytechnics, Local Businesses, Industries, Hospitals, Farms, and NGOs. The courses will be chosen based on skills gap analysis and mapping of local opportunities, and technical and vocational education will become part of the larger vision of holistic education. The policy recommended Ministry of Education to constitute National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE), along with industry participation, to oversee this effort and should also earmark budget for promoting this integration.

Vocational education at various phases of Education:

Upper Primary Level: The Government is implementing the scheme of Vocationalisation of School Education under the umbrella of ‘Samagra Shiksha - an integrated scheme for school education’ and through National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). At upper primary stage students should engage in fun-based activities and hands-on experience of important vocational crafts, such as carpentry, electric work, metal work, gardening, pottery making, etc.

Secondary & Higher Secondary Level: In addition to traditional academic courses, vocational courses will be offered in classes 9 -12 in secondary school. students will be allowed to mix and match academics with skills education, with sports and arts, and with soft skills training.

Higher Education Institutions: Encouragement to be given to more HEIs to offer vocational degrees and skill-based courses. They will offer Vocational Education either on their own or in partnership with industry. B.Voc. Degrees introduced in 2013 will continue to exist. Vocational courses will be available to students enrolled in all other Bachelor’s degree programmes, including the 4-year holistic Bachelor’s programmes. There will be mapping of vocational job roles offered in schools to the B.Voc. and other vocational courses offered at higher educational institutions under NSQF. Weightage will be given to students who have cleared NSQF Level 3 or 4 Courses at school level to enter higher level vocational courses to ensure their vertical mobility. They will be allowed to conduct short-term certificate courses in various skills including soft skills. Students will be familiarised with ‘Lok Vidya’ i.e., knowledge developed in India, will be made accessible through integration into Vocational Education Courses. Higher education centres will setup incubation centers in partnership with industry.

Update the National Skills Qualification Framework: NSQF will be updated to give detailed description for each discipline Vocation/ Profession. Indian standards for vocational education will be aligned with the International Standard Classification of Occupations maintained by the International Labour Organization (ILO). This Framework will provide the basis for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and credit transfer.

Monitoring System in Vocational Education: NEP proposed creation of portal for monitoring and tracking of the Vocational Education like data of students moving to ITIs, Polytechnics and Skill development programmes of Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) etc.

Implementation Plan:

Children will be exposed to vocational education from Class 6 onwards in all secondary and higher secondary schools through integration of VE with general education subjects. National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023 already taken steps in this regard.

Awareness programmes will be organised to change the general perception and attitude towards Vocational Education.

Collaboration of schools with industry to imparting skills training.

Skill Based Aptitude Test (SBAT) will be introduced in Class 8 to provide guidance to the students for making informed career choice.

Vocational courses on new and emerging skill demands of the industry, such as Artificial Intelligence, Robotics, and Internet of Things (IoT) will be introduced and enterprise education will be promoted.

courses for preparing Vocational Teachers/Trainers through online and offline mode

Recommendations for Contextualization of the role of vocational education towards Atmanirbhar Bharat:

Vocational education is the need of the hour. Technical skills are needed more than academic skills that we can understand from our day-to-day lives. This type of knowledge-based program is offered through vocational education.

NEP-2020 has refocused on vocational education and various action plans, especially the collaboration with industry to impart knowledge and training, which is a very interesting aspect, as we know if one doesn't analyse the market of any product, then the success of that product is questionable. Likewise, vocational and skill development courses are dependent on industry needs. If we see the following figure, there must be close interaction between stakeholders like industry, vocational trainers, curriculum makers, and students to make vocational education students employable.

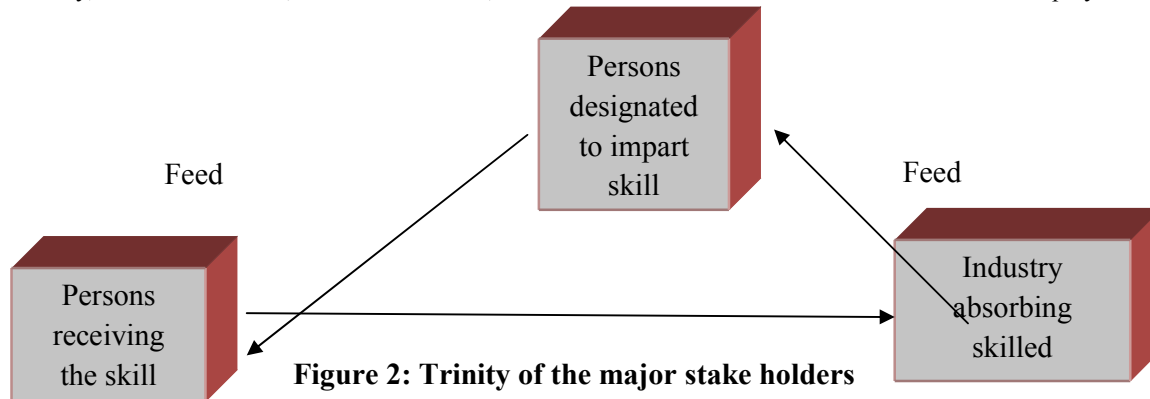


Figure 2: Trinity of the major stake holders

Vocational education, being a need-based education, can convert the unskilled, inexperienced, and low-literate population of the nation into human resources. Developing a skilled workforce that can contribute to the country's self-reliance and economic growth, can have a major impact on socioeconomic development. By focusing on vocational education and skill development, India can build a strong and self-reliant workforce that will contribute to the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

II. CONCLUSION

Following the unveiling of the National Education Policy 2020, many deliberations have been undertaken by scholars with a special focus on vocational education, and critical discussions are still ongoing to realise the significance of NEP 2020 in the present socio-economic context. The responsibility of skilling India is not at all a game to be played by an individual stakeholder; rather, it needs to be a trinity of those who are designated to impart skill training, those who will receive the training, and the industry that is supposed to absorb the skilled manpower. All the three components form a continuum. Isolating the industry would lead nowhere, and at the same time, updating the knowledge of those responsible for imparting skill training is of utmost importance. On the other hand, what is required among students in present times is a mindset that will create an urgency to go beyond/alongside bookish knowledge to skill oneself with the available tools, techniques, and real-life application under the guidance of an able body. As a ship without a proper navigational system may drift away from its path on a vast ocean, a much-cherished dream of a trillion-dollar economy may get derailed without proper interpretation and application of NEP 2020, along with the absence of synergy among different stakeholders belonging to the larger context of skilling India to become Atmanirbhar Bharat.

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