



Skill-based education in NEP 2020: Bridging the gap between education and employability

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Abstract

NEP 2020 is a significant milestone in the history of Indian education. It is the latest national policy on Indian education approved by the Union Cabinet on 29th July, 2020. With many new approaches in the field of education, the policy has introduced integration of vocational education and training on skills into the traditional curriculum framework with an objective to build a skilled workforce for the 21st century world. This paper focuses on exploring the major provisions in NEP 2020 pertaining to skill development, challenges of the initiative, and strategies to improve implementation and shape India's education towards the goal of creating a skilled workforce that enhances economic and social development.

Key words: NEP2020, Skill development, Curriculum framework, Strategies, Challenges

Introduction

The skill based education has significant importance in the present socio-economic context of India. Recently NEP 2020 has put forward a very frustrating statistics which reveals that workforce in the age group of 19-24 receiving formal vocational education in India is less than 5% (as per 12th Five –Year plan 2012-2017). In USA it is 52%, Germany 75% and South Korea is highest with 96%. In view of the present status of vocational education in India, there is an urgent need of propagation of vocational education throughout the nation to engage the workforce into their chosen carriers and to strengthen country's empowerment. The skill based education focuses on developing some practical skills and competencies among students. Before implementation of NEP 2020, in our conventional curriculum framework, more emphasis was given on theoretical knowledge rather than practical skills. But the time is changing. Now it becomes an urgent necessity to equip students with competencies to face the challenges of 21st century world. And therefore, it becomes important to change the traditional concept and innovate some new strategies so that students may acquire both theoretical knowledge and practical education through skill development. NEP 2020 has made arrangement of a set of programs for this purpose. NEP 2020 emphasizes integrating skill based education into the regular curriculum framework recognizing its role in enhancing national prosperity.

Objectives of the study

- i) To explore the implementation of skill based education within the framework of NEP2020.
- ii) To know the issues and challenges in the implementation of skill based education through NEP 2020.
- iii) To suggest some measures for overcoming the issues and challenges.

Methodology

The study has followed descriptive analytical method based on various secondary sources like books, articles, news paper, research journals, websites, Govt. documents available in e-platforms etc. All relevant information have been analyzed qualitatively and presented accordingly.

An overview of vocational, Skill based education in India

The scenario of skill based vocational education in India is not very encouraging. Ordinarily in our country vocational education is provided at +2 stage (higher secondary) with the flexibility after class VIII. At different times many policies and actions have been taken for diversification of secondary education for vocationalization. The target was to cover 10% of higher secondary students under vocational courses by 1990 and 25% by 1995. MHRD, GOI and NCERT initiated many plans and actions for vocationalization of secondary education. In 1976 NCERT document “Higher Secondary Education and its Vocationalization” was presented as model conceptual framework for implementation of vocational education and accordingly implemented in 10 states and 5 union territories. After that some other states also liked to introduce vocational courses. In 1988 centrally sponsored scheme was adopted for vocationalization of secondary education for almost all states and union territories. The 8th Five-year plan 1992-97 identified vocationalization of education as a priority area. Policy adopted for imparting generic vocational courses at Higher Secondary level. In 1986, the National Policy of Education advocated a systematic and well planned program of vocational education as a distinct stream with an intention to prepare students for identified occupations. The Policy revised earlier target and set to cover under vocational courses 10% of higher secondary students by 1995 and 25% by 2000.

At present in India technical and vocational education and training depicts a three-tier system to develop human resources. They are--

- I) Graduate and post-graduate level specialist-----Engineers and technologists trained at NITs, IITs and Engineering Colleges
- II) Diploma level graduate-----Technicians and supervisors trained at Polytechnics
- III) Certificate level skilled person-----Higher secondary students in the vocational stream and craft people trained at ITIs, semi skilled and skilled workers through formal apprenticeships

Skill based education has gained significant attention and growth over the past decade, with various initiatives and programs driven by govt. and private sector to address the skill gap. The Skill India Mission, launched in 2015, aimed to train over 400 million people by 2022 in various skills. Under this Mission, various schemes like Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS), and Skill Loan Scheme have been implemented. By 2024 approximately 14 million youth have been trained under PMKVY.

Numerous skill development institutes and training centers have been established throughout the country, offering courses in various sectors like healthcare, Information Technology, manufacturing, retail, and hospitality etc.

Industry partnerships are growing with an emphasis to bridge the gap between education and employment. In collaboration with educational institutions many industries have set up skill development training centers to align skill with market needs.

Vocational education in schools is also expanding, with many states introducing vocational courses like carpentry and coding as part of curricula. Efforts are being made to provide students with practical skills alongside traditional academics by integrating vocational courses into the mainstream of school curriculum.

The rise of several online learning platforms, such as Courser and Udemy has made acquisition of Skill based education more accessible to a wider audience, especially during covid-19 pandemic. These platforms provide courses and certification in various skills allowing individuals to up-skill or re-skill at the pace of their own convenience.

Strategic approaches under NEP 2020 for skill based education:

NEP 2020 is a comprehensive educational framework designed to meet the demands of the 21st century. It has put its concerns on integrating skill based, vocational education at all levels of education with a focus on hands on training, internship and apprenticeship. NEP 2020 aims for at least 50% of students to have exposure to vocational education through school and higher education system by 2025 for which emphasizing industry linkages and demand driven courses in education. Some novel strategic ideas in NEP 2020 to be implemented pertaining to skill development are as below.

Flexible curriculum: NEP 2020 reshapes the curriculum with more flexibility where students have the freedom to opt subjects across disciplines, including vocational subjects that align with their interest and career goals and thus making education more relevant to individual career paths. Schools are encouraged to adopt multidisciplinary approaches allowing students to explore various fields. NEP 2020 going beyond rote learning provides students a holistic education by encouraging critical thinking, creativity, innovation, problem solving skills. Integrating subjects like coding, artificial intelligence and data science from an early age making a dramatic transition in the Indian education system towards a skill centric approach.

Integration of technology: NEP 2020 promotes use of technology in education aiming to equip students with 21st century skills. It emphasizes creation of online platforms and digital courses for skill development. Integrating ERP (Enterprise Resource Learning) and LMS (Learning Management System) software like learnQoch can significantly enhance skill development. This platform provides access to a wide range of resources, facilitates personalized learning paths, and enhances collaborative learning and student engagement in the interactive content. LQ offers tools for tracking academic progress, receiving digital libraries, and participating in virtual classroom.

Internship and apprenticeship: NEP 2020 aims to develop certain specific skills in students that are relevant to the industry. It emphasizes the importance of apprenticeship and internship, bridging industry and academia, and promotes partnerships for practical experience, enhancing student employability. Higher education institutes are encouraged to collaborate with industry partners to design and implement apprenticeship and internship programs. Practical learning experiences through internship and collaboration with industries will ensure that students develop job specific skills.

Role of higher education: NEP 2020 emphasizes the role of HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) in pertaining to skill based education. It has clearly mentioned about offering vocational education in the forms of several skill based education and training along with curricular programs. Vocational courses in ODL (Open and Distance Learning) mode will be explored so that learners do not face any limitation in respect of acquisition of skills. Incubation centers will be created in HEIs in partnership with industries to stimulate entrepreneurship. Different models of vocational education and apprenticeship will be experimented by HEIs. Teaching learning materials should be prepared maintaining national and international standards to ensure employability. A National Committee for the integration of vocational education will be constituted to oversee the effect on skill development, fostering innovations and promoting employability.

Challenges faced in effective implementation: Though the NEP 2020 has redesigned the framework of skill based education with great vision and mission but yet there are several challenges which hinders its effective implementation.

1. Infrastructure and resources: Progress of skill based education largely depends upon the institutional infrastructure which is lacking in the present situation. There is lack of infrastructure and resources needed for effective implementation of vocational training in many of the schools and HEIs. Limited access to adequate infrastructure, equipment can impede the delivery of quality skill development training.
2. Paucity of trained educators: Shortage of qualified, skilled instructors and master trainers to provide students high quality skill development training is a great challenge in this field as experience- oriented training is more important than knowledge based information.
3. Issues of inclusiveness: Although NEP2020 emphasizes inclusivity, but marginalized group often face systematic barriers to accessing vocational education. The policy's success will depend on targeted efforts to overcome these barriers.

4. Mismatching with labour market: There is often a huge gap between the skills being taught and the actual demands of the labour market, leading to unemployment and skill redundancy.
5. Funding and sustainability: Skill development initiatives often require substantial financial resources to sustainably operate. Securing funding and ensuring long term sustainability can be challenging, for non-profit or govt led program.
6. Quality assurance: Ensuring the quality and relevance of skill development programs is a major challenge for educational institutions as it requires a close alignment between skill development curricula and industry needs. But as industries evolve rapidly skill requirements also change frequently and educational institutions may struggle to keep pace with changing requirements.
7. Lack of awareness: Still many people, especially in rural areas and marginalized communities, perceive skill based education as inferior or less prestigious leading to limited students participation compared to traditional academic pathways. This may be due to social stigma associated with skill based education and careers or lack of awareness of available skill development opportunities.

Strategies for overcoming the challenges: To address the challenges, following strategies can be considered in implementing skill based education through NEP 2020.

1. Linking Corporate Social Responsibility to Skill India Movement
2. Establishing mechanisms for maintaining high quality and standard in skill based education programs. This may include accreditation processes, regular evaluation and feedback etc.
3. Allocate sufficient funds and resources to educational institutions to meet the diverse needs of skill based education programs, such as building specialized facilities, acquiring equipments and providing access to technology.
4. Encourage industry participation in skill based education initiatives through tax incentives, grants, reward and recognition for their contributions and long term partnership with educational institutions.
5. Teacher training programmes should include vocational pedagogy, technology use, curriculum development workshops and exposure to industry practices.
6. Developing flexible assessment approaches, like project portfolios, performance based assessment and competency based evaluations that can better evaluate practical skills and competencies acquired through skill based education.
7. Designing a comprehensive industry driven curriculum for vocational courses that goes beyond introductions but ensure that the curriculum meets industry needs and sparks students' interest.
8. Promoting collaboration between the public and private sectors to leverage expertise, resources, and networks for the advancement of skill based education
9. Fostering community engagement and raise awareness about the need and importance of skill based education through outreach programs, community workshops and media campaigns.

Conclusion: NEP 2020 has brought a change in the perspective towards skill-based education by integrating practical skills with theoretical knowledge to bridge the gap between academic learning and real life application. The emphasis on integrating skill based education within the framework of NEP 2020 represents a pivotal step towards recognition of the evolving needs of the economy and society and preparing India's youths for the demands of the 21st century workforce. The effective implementation of NEP 2020 is critical in shaping a future ready generation, equipped with technical, cognitive and interpersonal skills essential for sustainable success in an increasingly global and technology driven economy. In this regard, concerted efforts from stakeholders and collaboration among government, industry, academia, and civil society are essential to realize the vision of creating a skilled workforce that enhances economic and social development of the nation.

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