

Role of NEP in Reskilling the Youth for Reaping Demographic Dividend in India

A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

“With a large pool of skilled people, India has an opportunity to become a skill provider for the world, particularly the ageing developed world”, as quoted by Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana. Policy makers have the intention of en-cashing population dividend and driving the country’s growth not by natural resources but by knowledge resources. To achieve global competitiveness, India should nurture the human capital. Despite having a huge population base and substantial efforts being laid on education and training, our employability index is not showing much positive signs and we still face the scarcity of skilled human resource. Moreover, with the increasing automation certain skill sets would become redundant and thus our education system needs to focus on what we need to learn and what is best left to machines. This knowledge paper attempts to analyse the current skill gap, delve into the provisions given in National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, with respect to skill development and explore the possible interventions to fill the gap in skill ecosystem. It also aims to evaluate the existing employability gaps and highlight suggestive interventions through the new NEP.

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INTRODUCTION

India is riding high on the wave of skill development, with the aim of becoming a knowledge hub. However, varied factors, like globalisation, a changing economic landscape, socio-cultural shifts, paucity of infrastructure in education along with adverse factors, including poverty and malnutrition, amongst others, have led to an environment of uncertainty and stress for many youths. (Future of Jobs in India; A 2022 perspective, 2018).

NEP 2020, provides a framework for the transformation and reinvigoration of the education system in order to respond to the requirements of fast-changing, knowledge-based societies while taking into account the diversity of the Indian people, their traditions, cultures, and languages. NEP lays strong emphasis on liberal arts education and amalgamation of vocational education at different levels throughout undergraduate education.

The dynamic nature of business is continuously demanding the global leaders to innovate and serve. However, talent availability to cater to these demands is uncertain. This challenge has made organisation to re-skill their employees at a price reasonable enough for the organisation and at a pace sensible enough for customers.

The estimated change in workforce demographic is 600 million by 2022, from 473 million in 2018. Few sectors like automobile, manufacturing

and IT will have 2.5 to 3 million job opportunities by 2025, provided the availability of better skilled workforce (India Skills Report, 2019).

Previous few years have redefined the Indian employability scenario. The Industry 4.0 has changed the landscape of hiring with creation of innovative job roles and skills. The increasing popularity of gig workers showcases how standard work requirements are continuously evolving. There has been renewed focus on infrastructure development which has highlighted the important sectors like renewable energy, smart cities, programs for rural development and airports and industry corridors. The impact of digital transformation has led to the increasing demand for specialised skills even in sectors like automotive and retail where they too are relying more on the Robotic Process Automation (RPA) driven strategies for gaining competitive edge. The quest for innovation is leading the organisations to reskill their employees to meet future demands of business. A recent survey by LinkedIn (3rd Annual Workplace Learning Report, 2019) has indicated that 40 per cent to 50 per cent of transaction heavy jobs would get automated. Prospective job roles which would become redundant are data entry clerk, cashier, financial analyst, customer service executive and telemarketer.

The recent macro trends in Figure 1 show structural shifts from agricultural to non farm sectors majorly in construction, trade and transport.

Banking Financial Services and Insurance (BFSI) is witnessing changes in terms of newer roles for better customer experience by integrating AI for effective-service delivery.



Figure 1: Sector wise hiring trends

Source: Future of Jobs in India: A 2022 perspective- NASSCOM, FICCI and EY joint report 2018; Mapping Life Skills in India: Research, Policy and Practice- Dream and Dream, 2018

Global events like Brexit have impacted patterns of production, consumption and employment. The speed and scale at which the disruptions are happening will have a huge impact on the way we work and live.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to an article published on Skill Reporter, February 2020, the primary factor fuelling the skill shortage in Indian market, is, the disparity between classroom knowledge and its practical implications.

Sharma (2015) focused on skilled labour shortage in India, Indian education eco-system and its loopholes. According to his findings, there will be huge shortage of labour

in the country if we move at the same growth rate as that of a skilled labour.

As per a report by British Council (2014), gaps are widening between industry demands and higher education provision. Lack of English language and cognitive skills are identified as a primary obstacle in growth opportunities for graduates. The report highlights the importance of collaborations with international universities which provide certifications that are recognised by majority of the employers.

Elise K. Thijs, M.J. Nielen, Maria T. Sikkema-De Jong (2019). strategically analysed the impact of reading and listening skills on comprehension. Also, interactive and prompt feedback is more beneficial for learning.

Sahil Sharma, Purnendu Sharma (2015) highlighted that presently there is a very less collaboration of higher educational institutes with industries. In the Higher education system we need to improve teaching pedagogy, build synergies between research and teaching and facilitate alliance of higher institutions among themselves, research centers and industries.

A study by Ashenafi Abate Woya, 2019, revealed that there is a percentage of graduates who are not yet employed and never been employed. Since the quality in higher education is the outcomes achieved, therefore, the department must be a linkage with the different government

organisation and NGOs to improve the employability of statistics graduates.

Financial aids and budget constraints are also barriers in generating growth opportunities for students. Aithal, Sreeramana and Kumar, Anil and M, Madhushree and R, Revathi (2018) in their research stated that due to the non-availability of any financial support from the state and central governments, private universities are trying to sustain through their only strategy of service differentiation through 21st century curriculum and industry integrated program design.

NEED OF THE STUDY

According to Economic Survey 2018–19, India's Demographic Dividend will peak around 2041, which means that the population share of working age (20–59 years) is expected to hit 59 per cent. Effective utilisation of this demographic dividend will result in immense growth opportunities for the nation. There is a large section of youth who are educated but lack requisite skills to make them employable. This study is relevant from the perspective of highlighting the existing skill gap which our previous education system fails to cater. The NEP 2020, is an important milestone in achieving industrial demands as well as focusing on core Life Skills.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To analyse the provisions of NEP 2020.
2. To discuss the changing trends of employability for popular professional courses.
3. To explore possible interventions needed to fill the gap in the skill eco-system.
4. To suggest possible interventions for better employability and bridge the skill gap through NEP 2020.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory research which uses the qualitative techniques of research analysis. Four unstructured interviews were conducted with policy makers, industry experts and academicians focusing on key features of NEP, employability attributes as expected by organisations in Indian context. A Focus Group Discussion was conducted with nine undergraduate and post graduate students pursuing professional programs regarding their perceived skill gap and the prevalent lacuna in the Indian education system.

This is a research based knowledge paper synchronised with facts and information gathered from various reports like India Skills Report 2019, People Strong, SDGs as enumerated in Envision 2030 by United Nations. The draft of the National Education Policy, 2019 has also been reviewed along with experts from respective domains.

This is a theoretically organised reviews and views imparted in this paper are authors' personal inferences

and evaluation of existing literature, and views of industry experts.

FINDINGS

The research findings cover the trends from not only the supply side but also the demand aspect of the talent pool. The dynamics of job market in India is witnessing a revolutionary change.

The findings of Focus Group Discussion held with undergraduate and post graduate student pursuing professional programs and Interview with experts from the education system indicated the following—

- role of technology as an enabler for experiential learning has to be explored. The objective should be to promote entrepreneurial skills inculcating disruptive innovation;

- role learning needs to be interchanged with ‘practice and perform’ approach;
- societal disposition needs to be altered at grass root level.

Demographic dividend in India is the highest and will continue to be so in the coming years. However, challenges of survival come with a host of problems like underdeveloped computational thinking and low emotional quotient.

The FGD indicated the need for developing life skills that focus on social, emotional and thinking skills in students. These are important building blocks for not only increased employability but also for making them life ready.

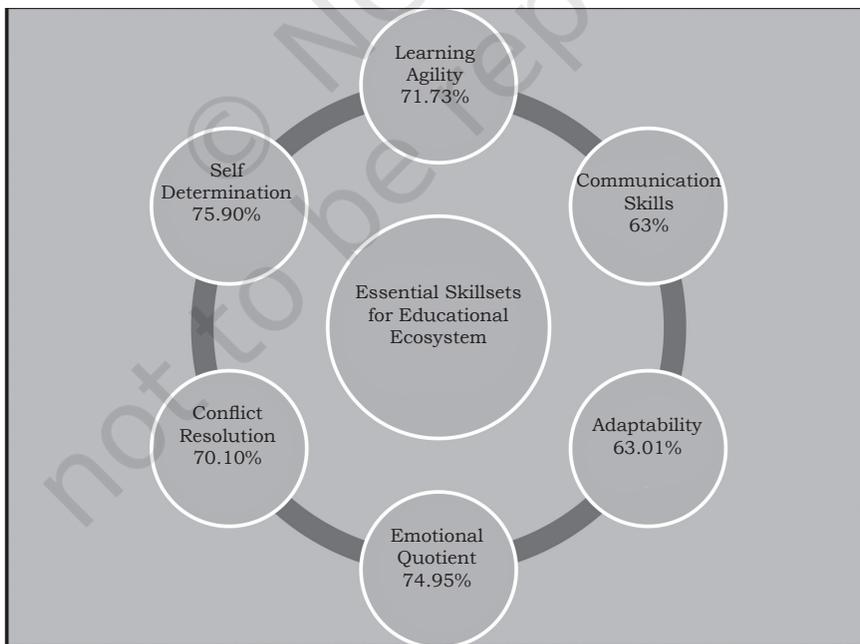


Figure 2. Life Skills for Better Employability
Source: Skill India Report 2019

Student evaluation criteria should be restructured according to the environmental dynamics. Indian Ethos and value system is to be engrained in foundation and preparatory years in order to achieve equilibrium in professional and personal life. In order to promote indigenous technology, creative-expression sessions at elementary and middle school level needs to be included in the academic curriculum.

The key highlights as stated in Figure 2 exhibit that determination, emotional intelligence and agility

are among top three key life skills for success in professional domains. Majority of workplace issues and inter-personal conflicts can be resolved with these skills, and individuals can become better team player and contribute more effectively towards organisational success. It is now imperative for Indian education system to inculcate these skills from early educational years along with the required focus on technical skills.

With the help of the above data (Figure 3), we analysed the changing trend in specific professional courses and discovered that

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
BE/B. Tech	51.74%	54%	52.58%	50.69%	51.52%	57.09%
MBA	41.02%	43.99%	44.56%	42.28%	39.40%	36.44%
B. Arts	19.10%	29.82%	27.11%	35.66%	37.39%	29.30%
B. Com	26.99%	26.45%	20.58%	37.98%	33.93%	30.06%
B. Sc.	41.66%	38.41%	35.24%	31.76%	33.62%	47.37%
MCA	43.62%	45%	39.81%	31.36%	43.85%	43.19%
Polytechnic	11.53%	10.14%	15.89%	25.77%	32.67%	18.05%
B. Pharma	54.65%	56%	40.62%	42.30%	47.78%	36.29%

Figure 3. Qualification Wise Employability
Source: Skill India Report 2019

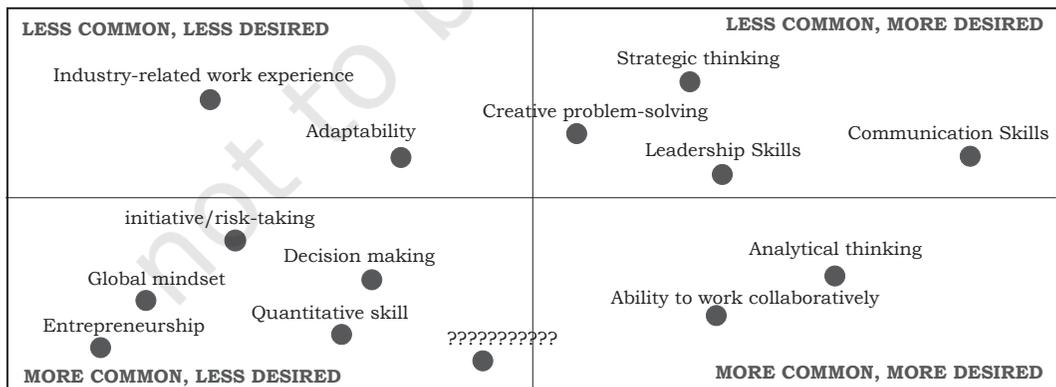


Figure 4. Desirable vs. Available Skills

Source: The Bloomberg Recruiter Report (2016): Job Skills Companies Want But Can't Get

there is a downward trend in the employability of postgraduate level technical courses like MBA over the last 3–4 years. Rather, organisations prefer to hire graduates and diploma holders and upskill them as per their specific requirements. There is an increased demand for skill-based polytechnic courses in Micro Small Medium Enterprises sector, and in fact the same has been acknowledged in the NEP as well, with a renewed focus on Vocational Courses.

Figure 4 very clearly indicates the demand and supply gap in terms of core skill set. These essential life skills include strategic thinking, creative problem solving, leadership and communication. Including these at the early schooling years would definitely improve the prospect of employability of the students.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the research are conclusive of the fact that life skills are gradually evolving and there is a need to inculcate them in professional courses. The focus of education system should be to equip youngsters with employable and life skills rather than just imparting the degree. For this, experiential approach seems to be the best option. Reasoning and thinking abilities have to be developed since formative years and replacing rote learning with experiential content should be promoted at the higher education level. In order to improve creativity

and enhance decision making skills, simulations can be used as a teaching tool. By promoting creativity and innovation, entrepreneurial skills can be developed in students. Also, there should be focus on imparting soft skills which will make youth better team player along with improving their EQ (emotional quotient).

SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are made with reference to aforementioned findings—

- integrated concept should also lead to bringing professional education into mainstream undergraduate education, thereby creating an overarching integrated approach to education, embodying the spirit of the policy in totality;
- besides general engagement and enjoyment of learning the focus should be more on enhancing increased critical thinking abilities, higher-order thinking and deeper learning. Educators need to guide students on mastery of content through problem solving and design thinking approach;
- should engage faculty and students with local communities and with real world problems, and function in collaborative, inclusive, and cross-disciplinary ways. Instead of solely mechanistic rote learning, colleges and universities must encourage active learners to develop the abilities of independent, logical, scientific thinking, creativity,

problem solving, and decision making;

- learning processes in professional education like Bachelor in Business Administration and Bachelor of Computer Application face specific challenges as these disciplines are neither entirely knowledge based nor entirely skill based, hence, they require focus on skill enhancement through developing innovative problem-solving techniques;
- reduce curriculum content to enhance essential learning and critical thinking and modify it in order to make space for more holistic, experiential, discussion-based, and analysis-based learning.

CONCLUSION

India's policy vision focuses on increasing employability which can be attained through amalgamation of Life and Technical Skills in NEP.

The policy 'Learn For Life—Ready for Future' implemented by the Ministry of Education, Singapore Government can be used as a benchmark to show how the focus on life skills education facilitated improvement in their economy, taking their global ranking to second in the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Rank, and sixth on the Global Innovation Index. The emphasis in Singapore has been on education and more specifically life skills education; within the broader focus on this approach to education

is applied learning towards meeting industry and economy needs. This approach to education towards helping students "grow richer in spirit and purpose" is what sets Singapore apart.

We are not suggesting that India emulate Singapore; our suggestion is more specifically that the complexity of adversity in our mind requires a focus on a holistic form of education with an emphasis on life skills for life preparedness. This approach in our mind would better address the opportunity the country's demographic dividend offers.

NEP 2020 vision stems from an emphasis on India's new economy and its growth; more specifically, skilling the employable youth such that the potential demographic dividend of the country is enriched. Hence, most critical perspectives on the nature and status of education, be it infrastructure capacities or policy visions on education, are from the point of view of education to meet the future economic needs of the country.

Revised NEP has very well collated all the significant aspects catering to the demands of the new age industry. The success of this policy will depend upon the involvement of all the stakeholders like educators and trainers as well as a renewed focus on crucial entities like physical infrastructure and technological inclusion in mode of delivery at the grassroot level.

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