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Employability Skill Enhancing Initiatives in National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 for Higher Education

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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Abstract

The New National Education Policy 2020 aims to create a unified vision and comprehensive framework for primary, secondary and higher education systems across the country. While education is a crucial aspect of the policy, its execution still depends on additional regulations from state and federal Governments. Nonetheless, if properly implemented, the NEP 2020 has the potential to enhance the workforce and improve the employability of job seekers. Several components of the NEP directly address employability issues. It is undeniable that an improved educational system enhances an individual's prospects of securing employment. According to surveys, the majority of recent graduates report feeling inadequately prepared for their initial employment and frequently face the decision of whether to remain in or depart from

their positions. First-year professionals are insufficiently equipped for the demands of the professional environment. One of the primary factors contributing to this phenomenon has been suboptimal educational preparation. The disparity between industry requirements and academic curricula has been a predominant topic of discussion among employers and job seekers. With the implementation of the new policy, educational institutions at both the secondary and tertiary levels will approach education as a means of fostering character development and facilitating comprehensive professional growth, rather than solely as a pathway to degree attainment.

Key Words

National Education Policy, Employability Skills, Vocational Education and Training, Artificial Intelligence, Future of Schools (FoW).

Introduction

The challenges faced by college graduates in securing employment can be attributed to the substantial surge in the number of graduates alongside the imperative to enhance their employability. Consequently, it is essential for universities to engage in profound introspection regarding the challenges inherent in their educational frameworks, to thoroughly comprehend the interconnections between the quality of education and the employability of college students, and to implement a range of practical and viable strategies aimed at improving both of these critical dimensions to facilitate a more seamless transition into the workforce for graduates. Such initiatives would mitigate the obstacles associated with employment and significantly benefit millions of college graduates.

“The education system must prepare students for the jobs of the future, which will require a combination of technical skills, problem-solving abilities, and creativity,” according to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. In order to guarantee that students are acquiring higher order cognitive skills, the NEP has also implemented regulatory and revolutionary changes in curriculum and pedagogy. Among other things, these include critical thinking abilities, mathematical and computational thinking, and century skills. India has made significant progress thanks to new and enhanced “learner-centric” programs like the National Credit Framework, which permits flexibility in multiple exits and entries, credit-based learning (Academic Bank of Credits), and the provision of cutting-edge online and offline courses. Vocational and technical skills training programs can enhance an individual’s employability by providing industry-specific skills and hands-on experience. Education is essential for creating a solid foundation of knowledge. This necessitates the integration of education and skill training.

Literature Review

The notion of employability initially emerged in the United Kingdom during the early twentieth century, with its first articulation attributed to the British economist Beveridge in the year 1909. Beveridge posited that employability encompasses an individual’s capacity to secure and sustain employment. In the late 1980s, scholars in the United States undertook a revision of this concept, suggesting that employability constitutes a dynamic continuum involving the acquisition of initial employment, the preservation of that employment, and the subsequent re-evaluation and attainment of new positions, while also incorporating macroeconomic factors such as labour market conditions and national economic policies to elucidate the overall concept of employability in a more comprehensive manner.

In the year 2005, the American Commission on Education and Employment once more elucidated the notion of employability. Employability encompasses the capacity to procure and sustain employment; it pertains not solely to the capability of securing a position in a limited context, but also to the competence to persist in executing the responsibilities of that position while attaining favourable career advancement.

Employability skills encompass a comprehensive array of competencies and behaviours that are imperative for achieving success across various professions. These competencies are frequently referred to as soft skills, foundational skills, work-readiness skills, or job-readiness skills. Proficiency in employability skills enables individuals to: effectively communicate with colleagues, adeptly resolve problems, comprehend their role within a team context, make judicious decisions, and take accountability for their own professional development. Individual characteristics, routines, and attitudes significantly shape one’s interactions with others. Employers accord substantial importance to these competencies as they correlate with the management of relationships with colleagues and clients, the quality of job performance, and overall career advancement.

Chithra R (2013), in her scholarly investigation titled “Employability Skills - A Study on the Perception of Engineering Students and Their Prospective Employers,” has conducted an analysis of the perceptions held by both employers and employees regarding the requisite employability skills for entry-level engineering graduates within multinational software corporations. Utilizing two distinct sets of questionnaires designed to evaluate the perceptions of the skill sets deemed necessary by employers and engineering graduate students, the study elucidated a notable divergence between the perceptions of students and those of their employers. The findings indicated that students possessing work experience exhibit a heightened awareness of the employability skills compared to their counterparts lacking such experience. The enhancement of skills and the application of knowledge through specialized training are imperative for enabling employees to execute their responsibilities with optimal efficacy, aligning with the current exigencies of the labour market.

Gooptu, S., Bros, C., and Chowdhury, S. R. (2023) in study found significant geographical variance in skill mismatch across India, indicating a gap between educational capabilities and labor market demands. This emphasizes the need for region-specific training and educational programs to better address these disparities.

Mathur A., Sharan M., Chakraborty S., and Mullick S. (2022) in study highlights the importance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in providing students with industry-relevant skills in India's changing landscape. The report recommends policy reforms to improve access, quality, and alignment with market demands, while also highlighting weaknesses in the current TVET system.

Jain, A. (2021). "National Education Policy 2020: a transformative initiative" presents an outline of NEP 2020, which aims to reshape the Indian education industry by fostering transdisciplinary education and flexible skill development. This approach aims to tailor education to local conditions while aligning with global standards. This will improve employability by connecting graduates with industry demands.

Shukla, P.D., and Kaur, J. (2021) report examines the influence of NEP 2020 on India's higher education system, specifically the transition towards skill-based education, research, and innovation. The policy aims to develop students' critical thinking and entrepreneurial abilities, preparing them for a global economy.

The Initiative – Road Ahead

The National Education Policy (NEP) facilitates an enhanced degree of autonomy for the future workforce in selecting their educational courses. As articulated within the policy, "There will be no rigid demarcation among 'curricular', 'extracurricular', or 'co-curricular', among 'arts', 'humanities', and 'sciences', or between 'vocational' or 'academic' streams." Furthermore, to bridge the disparity in the attainment of educational outcomes, classroom methodologies will transition towards a focus on competency-based learning and education. Moreover, the NEP will provide students with the opportunity to accumulate and preserve academic credits, thereby enabling them to resume their educational pursuits from the point at which they had paused, should they need to discontinue for any reason.

According to Neeti Sharma, Senior Vice President at TeamLease Services, a significant aspect addressed by the policy is the introduction of the Choice Based Credit System. This multidisciplinary approach offers students the flexibility to select programs according to their preferences. Sharma considers this a major advancement in enhancing students' future employability prospects. The upcoming generation of workers will benefit from increased adaptability and independence, allowing them to pursue diverse opportunities and develop skills that are more relevant and sought-after, rather than adhering to conventional career trajectories. Nevertheless, this emerging workforce will require guidance, support, and mentoring to ensure that the newfound flexibility does not lead to greater confusion. When properly implemented, a adaptable learning environment will foster a more self-motivated workforce.

Professionals with emerging skills are in high demand due to the rise of new-age technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), automation, robotics, and analytics. The Government can make investments in youth up skilling and infrastructure to create a workforce that is competitive.

Emerging technologies can be kept from endangering the workforce by using technology ethically. The Government can also establish rules and policies to guarantee that new technologies are applied morally, without violating human rights like privacy, and in support of the shared objective of sustainable development.

It is imperative that schools, ITIs (Industrial Training Institutes), and higher education institutions adopt the Future of Schools philosophy in order to prepare students for the evolving nature of the workforce. Moreover, combining skill development with general education is essential to equip students with the abilities and mind-set needed to thrive in the ever-evolving labour market. Integration of skilling with general education and the ethos of the FoW must be ingrained in schools, ITIs, and higher education institutions.

Challenges and Problems

Under the new education policy, Indian institutions are likely to encounter a number of challenges when putting the Multiple Entries and Multiple Exit (MEME) system into practice. As per the report, although the

MEME appeared to be a versatile system that was successfully implemented by Western educational establishments, it might not function well in the nation.

The Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) Scheme seeks to offer strategic funding to qualifying state higher education institutions. Strategic support for higher education institutions based on a critical assessment of the State's intentions. Financial restrictions, geographical constraints, stereotype threats experienced by students from marginalised groups, and other factors all contribute to limited access to higher education in socioeconomically deprived places.

The majority of higher education institutes employ English as their primary medium of instruction, while there are few HEIs that teach in local languages. This results in the isolation of non-English speakers, cultural and regional alienation, and a worsening of economic inequality.

To address the funding gap, public investment in education must reach 6% of GDP as soon as possible. According to the Economic Survey 2022-23, total education expenditures amounted to 2.9% of GDP.

Although the strategy places a strong emphasis on the use of technology in education, the current digital divide especially among socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and in rural areas may make it more difficult to apply technology-driven learning solutions fairly.

The NEP requires students to take 8 semester exams, as well as numerous internal assessments for a four year degree course. This, combined with separate attendance marks and continual assessment classes attended, results in a massive bureaucratic load (for both students and teachers).

Conclusion

In order to improve the employability and vocational skills of students at all levels, the National Education Policy 2020 has placed a fair amount of emphasis on vocational education and teacher capacity building. The identification, design, and development of vocational courses that satisfy the common norms and skills standards established at the national level will improve the quality of Vocational Education and Training (VET). In addition to improving the quality and sustainability of VET programs, accreditation of vocational courses and provider registration should cover the hiring and selection of instructors, student selection, course delivery, evaluation, and student qualification awarding. A robust system of capacity development for stakeholders at all levels is necessary for the administration and management of the VET system overall as well as the delivery of student support services. e. District, State, Institutional, and National levels. To increase effectiveness in pedagogical and other aspects of VET implementation, best practices in vocational education and training that concentrate on particular criteria that can be replicated in other institutions in the relevant areas must be identified and shared at various levels.

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