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Enhancing 'Quality' in Education through Skill Development

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ABSTRACT

Quality education has been greatly enhanced by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which has raised educational standards and encouraged students to acquire a range of skills to meet industry demands. Currently, there is a huge gap in the knowledge base and the industry needs. Further, Covid-19 impeded conventional schooling but also concerted efforts to maintain learning continuity. Students' focus has now shifted to self-sustenance from relying on conventional knowledge sources. The role of ICT has emerged pivotally to shape new pedagogical concepts and teaching mechanisms, in new-found areas. The quality aspect requires some significant capacities such as building ICT competence. Despite robust literature backing the grounds, the process of integrating ICT into education is still challenging. To deliver high-quality instruction, a teacher or educator needs to possess all the soft skills. However, a top-notch education will also include instruction in these soft skills, preparing students for success in the workplace. The paper presents a research review on quality education and quality evaluation, mandated for the stakeholders, namely students, parents, instructors, schools and HEIs, to enhance national-level graduate employability and labour productivity. The paper also suggests several ways to make sure it is integrated, raising the standard of instruction.

Keywords: *National Education Policy, quality education, Sustainable Development Goals, ICT-enabled education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is an important instrument that gives people information, knowledge, skills, and abilities and enables them to understand their responsibilities to their families, communities, and country. One can broaden their outlook and field of vision to see the world around them. Our view of life is altered by it. The capacity to experiment with new ideas to boost creativity is increased through education. Everybody benefits from education. It is a crucial factor in forming the contemporary, industrialised world. To keep up with innovations in this cutthroat environment, people require knowledge. Education is the social institution by which society imparts knowledge, facts, employability skills, and morals to its people. Its ability to enhance individual lives and promote a healthy society is one of education's most significant functions.

Since the beginning of human life on earth, we have been learning new facts and expanding our knowledge of many topics. In the past, saints, monks, or gurus imparted education to their students, which included more than just theoretical knowledge. The ways that education is delivered have changed over time and now play a variety of facets and roles. There are cutting-edge educational establishments nowadays that improve people's knowledge, abilities, and comprehension. These include professional colleges, universities, online courses, smart schools, and training and skill development centres. Setting up standards to deliver education to others is essential if one wants to have goodwill and executive recognition in the education sector. For ages, current events have called for adjustments in various aspects of teaching and learning. It has evolved into an ongoing process with the growth of the industrial sector, technology, and professions. There is a clear correlation between the availability of skilled workers or untrained professionals for lateral development and the demand for skills in the market. Technology, professional quality assurance of education and skill development, demand-supply linkages, and other factors play a critical, proactive part in the selection of diverse professions. "Skill-based education in India reflects a broader recognition of the need to foster a workforce that is adaptable, innovative, and equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st-century economy" (Ali Sahajahan, 2024). The 'Skill India Mission' (SIM) is a series of convergence initiatives that the Indian government has started across the skill ecosystem. In keeping with the Mission, over 20 Government Authorities /Ministries are implementing Skill Development Schemes/Programs to improve the skill levels of individuals throughout India, including schoolchildren, to supply skilled labour that meets industry demands.

There is a clear emphasis on vocational education in National Education Policy 2020 which will instil different skills in students to fulfil the demands of the industry and improve the standard of education. The programme aims to combine general academic instruction with vocational education in schools at all levels, improve the employability and entrepreneurial skills of the students, provide students with a taste of the working world, and raise their understanding of the range of professional alternatives available to them so they may make an informed decision based on their qualifications, abilities, and goals. In this line, The Planning Commission's 12th Five-Year Plan Document has placed a particular focus on the growth of skill-based programmes in higher education. The credit system for skill-based vocational courses, as well as the UGC guidelines for curricula and assessment criteria, have established credits for NSQF levels. (National Skills Qualifications Framework). These credits can be used as a means of achieving academic qualifications equivalent to the number of credits granted by any institution in related specialisations.

Within the framework of the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 3.0, the "Skill Hub Initiative" program (PMKVY 3.0) is being implemented by the Ministries of Education (MoE) and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE). The centers of Nodal skill known as 'Skill Hubs' are identified as places where school dropouts and out-of-school youth can get opportunities for skill development and vocational training. The pilot program evaluates how skilling is integrated through Skill Hubs starting on January 1, 2022. The programme covers public and public-aided schools. Together with emphasising the development of both technical and soft skills among graduate and post-graduate students, the strategy will play a crucial role in preparing the country's workforce to bring about change, particularly in educational procedures.

One of the main tenets of NEP 2020 is employability, and education is recognised as a major contributor to students' acquisition of employable skills. The government has created this plan to achieve the goals of Sustainable Development, (agenda of 2030), ensuring that all people have access to inclusive and equitable education and promoting opportunities for lifelong learning.

2. PANDEMIC AND THE NEED FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Covid-19 impeded conventional schooling with nationwide school closures across the globe. While the educational community made great efforts to continue teaching in the pandemic, students are now more reliant on their resources to be able to use ICT for learning. The pandemic has shifted the roles of teachers as they now must adapt to new pedagogical concepts and teaching mechanisms, even in areas that do not fall under their expertise. Further, learners belonging to the marginalised sections who could not access the digital learning resources, lacked behind as they suffered the risk of falling behind. Besides impacting economies, COVID-19 spiked unemployment and underemployment as well. Due to negative effects on the labour market, the SDGs in particular, Goal 8 which calls for comprehensive and effective employment, sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, and decent work for all have not been completely fulfilled in this environment. Skill development, therefore, became a mandate post-pandemic to ensure employability, and training at all levels, especially for educators. According to the India Policy Brief, published by the OECD (2014), it is directed that there lies a huge gap in the quality and nature of education provided in the schools and HEIs in India and the required skill set as per the industry requirement. There is a manifold increase in the demand for upskilling the existing skilled workers. Although the improved quality can be realised through hands-on activity and industry experience, it is estimated that it may take many years to transform this dream into a tangible reality. The scenario also brought impetus to the Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) as well. Indian students enrolled in MOOCs in big numbers, as the country is said to be the second-largest MOOC user after the United States. Thus, furthering their learning options with open and distance education. However, improper regulation and accreditation issues prevail. To ascertain the gap, AICTE upscaled its initiatives on empowering students and adult learners through digital literacy. Under the aegis of the India Innovation Initiative, the need to strengthen the education and skills system of India is being realised, to guarantee an advanced stage of economic growth. Our Five -Year Plan (2012-17) aspired to raise the digital literacy rate to over 80% and reduce the gender gap to less than 10%. However, as evidenced by the noticeably lower educational attainment at higher education levels compared to primary education levels, despite recent improvements in educational attainment and better integration into notably significant global chains, the foundations of our education appear insufficient to ensure a healthy competitive attitude of the labour force.

3. NEP AND THE ROAD TO EDUCATION

The announcement of the New Education Policy by the Indian government was encouraging considering the awful news and current events that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about worldwide. India created its first NEP in 1968, its second one following a protracted break in 1986, and its most recent one, spearheaded by the Prime Minister of India, in 2020. A new India with a focus on modernising the education system is envisioned in the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). The chairman of the committee that drafted the NEP 2020 strategy statement was Dr. K. Kasturirangan, a former head of ISRO. The Indian Cabinet authorised it on July 29, 2020. The higher education system in India is already being impacted by international trends and circumstances. Since a few years ago, India has drawn many international students who enrol in a variety of academic, tutoring, and professional programmes. This includes a significant number of NRIs. In addition, a lot of foreign universities provide students with the option of earning their degrees remotely from India. The gap between public and private institutions has been reduced thanks to tendencies towards liberalising educational systems. Massive changes have been made to the kind of programmes that HEIs provide, and they have acquired mastery-level skills and capabilities

that are in more demand. The likelihood of choosing a degree that will lead to career chances in the future. In this common situation, NEP 2020 is introduced to give the Indian educational system a boost and advance it to the next level. The National Education Policy is divided into four sections: school education (Part I); higher education (Part II); "Other Key Areas of Focus" (Part III), which includes adult education, the promotion of Indian languages, and online education; and "Making it Happen," (Part IV) which covers the policy's implementation. The goal of the policy is to make India a global hub for education by providing a multidisciplinary and liberal education, and to prepare the nation to confront the difficulties of the coming decades of the 21st century. "The focus is to ensure that everyone has access to high-quality education and opportunities for lifetime learning, which result in appropriate jobs and productive employment as outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030" (Inamdar & Par, 2020). The policy placed a strong emphasis on encouraging innovations and is anticipated to have a variety of effects on the Indian educational sector. Also, a framework for its successful implementation has been established. The strategy addresses a variety of pertinent issues, including how to deliver an education of a high calibre, promote educational equity, and boost private player involvement. It stressed the need to support innovation and research while letting college and university instructors choose the instructional tactics that work best for them. The goal of institutional restructuring and consolidation is to eliminate the fragmentation of higher education by expanding interdisciplinary institutions into large ones, producing creative and well-rounded individuals, and revolutionizing the educational and economic landscape of other nations. By 2035, the gross enrolment ratio in higher education, including vocational training, is expected to rise from 26.3% (2018) to 50%. (Kurien Ajay, Sudeep B. Chandramana, 2020).

Business and technical education are included in the NEP-2020's comprehensive framework for basic education. A paradigm shift from the traditional system is the addition of support for internet-based e-learning. According to the sustainable development goals of the UN, NEP's core values are access, equity, affordability, accountability, and quality. At higher education institutions, the NEP has required a multidisciplinary education paradigm. A minimum of 3000 students should attend these institutions' campuses. They are expected to reach a student body of 3000 by 2040, while the timeframe given for becoming multidisciplinary is 2030. Furthermore, these multidisciplinary universities should either prioritise research or instruction, and they can specialise in one of them. The colleges can choose to become independent and provide their degrees, or they can join an already-existing university. The Academic Bank of Credit has proposed at the national level to offer different entry-exit alternatives at all educational levels and flexibility in degree acquisition. The NEP places a strong emphasis on a multidisciplinary, holistic approach to education, and it only encourages research at the UG level nowadays. Current policies place a strong emphasis on a student's whole development through cross-disciplinary, outcome-based education.

4. CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH ICT

Capacity building of teachers remains the key to the widespread infusion of ICT-enabled practices in the school system. Post-COVID-19, a phased programme of capacity building became the need of the hour. Hence, the continuous professional development of teachers started with induction training as well as refresher courses. The induction trainings are usually imparted by the Regional Institutes of Education of the NCERT, State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERTs) and District Institute of Educational Training (DIETs). Besides, other autonomous institutions of the Central and State Governments at the time of the commencement of the academic year also provide support systems to schools and HEIs to ensure teachers are well prepared to face the academic challenges for the upcoming year. Thus, the yearly refresher trainings enable teachers to share ideas, acquire new skills, and keep current on the latest advancements in ICT based teaching and learning procedures. Where the induction trainings are conducted at the pre-service levels, in-service trainings are conducted once the teachers begin their professional journey. These trainings carry out a prior evaluation procedure that acts as the diagnosis of their preparedness so that the programs are planned and executed in accordance to ensure that the minimum competency is achieved.

Developing ICT competence is a crucial component that needs to be covered in various policies to inform stakeholders, so integrating ICT in education requires some major skills. Despite robust literature backing the grounds, ICT integration in education is still a difficult process to complete. "Being considered as vital resource, ICT capacities must be planned, acquired and maintained regularly as stated in the institutional policies" (Byungura, Jean Claude, Henrik Hansson, Kamuzinzi Masengesho, Thashmee Karunaratne, 2016). Specifically focusing on higher education systems in Europe and America, some academics studied policies connected to technological integration. There is still a dearth of evidence, particularly regarding how policies pertaining to higher education systems in developing nations express ICT capacity-building initiatives. (Valcke, 2004, Jordan, 2011, Lloyd, 2008, Freeman, 2014, Kozma, 2008). Being considered a vital part of the educational infrastructure, by institutional policies, appropriate ICT capacities need to be planed for, acquired, and routinely maintained. "Creating a shared understanding for integrating ICT at all educational institutions, at all levels, to support the development of better teaching and learning to equip students and learners with 21st-century skills" (MoE, 2008). The schools and HEIs often aim at strategies to promote ICT integration in the curriculum and pedagogical improvement. Initially, the educational institutions build the school capacity for ICT in teaching and learning as a part of the professional development of school stakeholders. However, after the pandemic, there is an essential need to support and prepare them to learn about the most recent developments in ICT and technology use. Further, rapid innovation due to dynamic technological changes in technology challenges constant new knowledge and skills. It has become the basic requirement of learners.

In addition, the administrators find it difficult to get all the teachers on board with improving the school. With the emerging trends of integrating ICT in the curriculum, schools and HEIs must develop a knowledge of their school environment to enable capacity building for staff in the integration of ICT. The emphasis of ICT-embedded curricula must be changed from the development of fundamental skills to pedagogical competency using widely accessible digital media and technology. The secondary and senior secondary schools and HEIs also need to adapt and adjust to current changing trends of using and employing social media sites to facilitate and enhance teaching and learning. To find a variety of staff technology uses that are appropriate, safe, and dependable, an exploratory approach should be promoted and implemented. Successful results should be communicated to other educators and students. With a channelised and focussed encouragement of the academic and non-academic staff, healthy academic activities such as collaboration with teaching using ICT, as well as peer mentoring between educators aim at the faculty development programs that exchange acquired knowledge and provide mutual assistance to enhance the ecosystem of the institutions. It is hence, apt to infer that the value of ICT-based learning cannot be underestimated as academicians and non-academicians thrive in the world of the internet today, with cost-effective options that promote multiple options of learning, needed to be weighed against the conventional teaching-learning mechanisms.

5. SOFT SKILL ENHANCEMENT FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

These days, in the digital age, every country depends entirely on its citizens to be intelligent and competitive to withstand the challenges of globalisation. Since it propels the country towards its vision and mission, the development of human capital is crucial and essential. A nation will not be strong if it lacks excellent human capital because there won't be any human factor capable of launching new projects and viewpoints. The creation of such human capital depends on a thoroughly thought-out educational system. Institutions that provide and instill skills among educationists play a crucial role in producing human capital with improved knowledge, skills, and capacities to endure the demands and expectations of many people. Such knowledge and skills should be available to aspiring teachers through the teaching and learning methods used in teacher education institutions. In addition to hard skills, the curriculum for teacher education should be able to give instructors some knowledge and abilities in conceptual and soft skills. For teaching to be successful, soft skills must be incorporated into the curriculum. According to Salih, Maria (2008), the primary goal of fostering soft skills in the next generation is to help them grow and enhance their knowledge, awareness, talents, and competencies as well as their understanding of the importance of values, morality, are the need for sustainable development. Soft Skills are behavioural competencies, usually referred to as interpersonal skills, or people skills; they encompass abilities like personal effectiveness, communication skills, creative problem-solving, team building, negotiation, conflict resolution, strategic thinking, and influencing skills. It is quite possible to say that soft skills serve as a bridge between cognitive and non-academic abilities, which encompass all aspects of general talents. Soft skills are the most vital competency in the current global job market, mostly due to the rapidly evolving and increasing technology environment. Soft skills are psychological constructs that increase one's capacity for positive development, improve social interactions, job performance, and career prospects, and help the individual flourish as a person. The importance of soft skills is linked to educational reorientation and is essential for maintaining the educational trust's viability. Numerous professionals, researchers, and scholars carry out in-depth research to comprehend and identify the most crucial soft skills that may be used in higher education. Based on the research findings, seven soft skills have been discovered and selected to be applied in all local higher education institutions. To be more precise, they are:

i. Communication competency

ii. Critical and logical thinking with problem-solving and decision-making skills

iii. Collaboration within the work environment

iv Management of information and continuous learning and development

v. Entrepreneurial competencies

vii. Integrity, morality, and professionalism

vii. Possessing attributes of a leader.

A teacher or educator must be equipped with all the soft skills necessary to provide high-quality education. Conversely, competent, and skilled mentors, instructors, and professors will impart knowledge to pupils and improve their prospects of success in the workplace. The two primary objectives of education, as stated in Article 26 of the International Declaration of Human Rights, are the development of the full potential of the individual and the encouragement of respect for basic human rights. The initial portion of this definition expressly states that "Education shall be geared to the full development of the human personality," which in turn points to the development of soft skills for quality education. Thus, a great education is all about the learner's personality developing to its full potential since this personality development shows that the learner is ready to handle the demands of everyday life while maintaining emotional stability. The outcomes of high-quality education include attitudes, abilities, and knowledge that are linked to both productive participation in society and national education objectives. The federal, state, and local governments have implemented several programmes to support high standards in education and enhance teaching-learning results overall. Institutions play a crucial role in helping students develop a culture of independence, resourcefulness, and values that promote peace and health. One of the foundational elements of a healthy and forward-thinking society is education.

They are the primary sources of knowledge and values, aside from parents, and they carry the burden and obligation of educating. In many nations, there is considerable discussion on the knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and abilities that teachers should possess. As a result, there is a need to incorporate soft skills using a variety of methods in teacher preparation programmes.

6. CONCLUSION

It has been determined through research that quality education and quality evaluation are mandated for students, parents, instructors, and institutions. A country's structural improvement and economic growth can be facilitated by raising its employability, productivity, and competitiveness. Increased investment in skilled labour can provide a head start on the development of necessary and high-quality competencies, which might result in positive feedback and direct foreign investment as well as the creation of high-quality products. It is advised that quality control be viewed as a competitive tactic. More attention must be paid to quality control procedures today.

Introduced higher education, skill-building, or professional course policies are required. Emphasis should be given to face-to-face meetings between students and university representatives where they can discuss concerns related to education. The ultimate goal of quality assurance is to supply students with high-quality work by upholding standards to raise productivity and strengthen the economy of the country.

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