



NEP 2020: Towards a Skilled Indian Workforce

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ABSTRACT: This paper is an attempt to highlight the critical role of training and skilling along with collection of information and knowledge in a student's life. The paper discusses, the social perceptions and myths around skilling and the paradigm shift in the importance that skill development has gained in the present time and its impact in enabling students to explore their interests and adopt suitable career paths. Further, an effort has been made to study the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and the stress laid on skill development in the policy document and its pivotal role in bridging the gap between education and employment. The authors take personal examples of law & dental surgery and interaction with students of higher education of various disciplines to stress the point. This work also touches upon the potential benefits of integrating innovation and skill development in the education landscape, enabling students to explore various career options from an early age in their journey of self-discovery. The authors try to reason how significant this integration would be, especially in the context of NEP 2020, in shaping the bright young minds through fostering innovation, skill development, entrepreneurship and employability thus contributing to the holistic development, economic independence and progress of each student and, the nation; as a whole. However, being primarily based on secondary data, the study relies on existing reports, policy documents, and published literature, which may not fully capture region-specific or institution-level variations in the implementation of NEP 2020. Nevertheless, it contributes to the existing literature by reinforcing the importance of destigmatizing vocational education, aligning skilling with sustainable development goals, and positioning skill development as central—not supplementary—to holistic education and nation-building.

Keywords: Skill development, NEP 2020, self-discovery, holistic development, employability.

BACKGROUND

India, with one of the world's youngest populations, is poised to reap a demographic dividend. However, the paradox of a large unemployed youth population despite educational attainments raises serious concerns. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE, 2023), India's unemployment rate hovered between 7-8% in 2023, with youth unemployment significantly higher. One of the primary reasons for this paradoxical situation is the disconnect between formal education and skill-based training. While academic knowledge is critical, practical skills are often what employers seek. The Skill India Mission, launched in 2015, was an attempt to bridge this gap by

equipping over 40 crore Indians with skills by the year 2022. The vision of Skill India Mission aligns well with that of NEP 2020, which envisages a holistic and flexible education system emphasizing skill development from early stages. Bholane (2023) describes the NEP 2020, as a catalyst for skill-based education.

(NEP 2020) which was revived and revised from (NEP 1986) as per the need of time, identifies the need to mainstream vocational education. It breaks the traditional stereotype that views skilling as a path for those who are academically weak or are school dropouts. The policy suggests a paradigm shift in India's education landscape, one that integrates knowledge with practice, theory with training and

education with employability. This paper is an attempt to highlight the critical role of training and skilling along with formal education in a student's life. This work also touches upon the potential benefits of integrating innovation and skill development in the education landscape, enabling students to explore various career options from an early age in their journey of self-discovery.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several studies and reports have analysed India's skill ecosystem and its alignment with the changing employment landscape. Seetharamu and Rao (1991, I & ii) in their studies talked about the trend of research in vocational and technical education. Majumdar (2012) as part of doctoral research, studied the significance of vocationalisation of education and skill development in India, with special reference to the state of Maharashtra. Ernst & Young (2017) in their report, highlighted that 65% of jobs that Gen Z will be employed in, do not yet exist today. The implication is clear; only a continuously learning and reskilling population can adapt to the future. Singh and Mahore (2018), did a case study of Nagpur and presented the current situation and issues of vocational education in India. Słowiński *et al.* (2018) published their studies on collaborative learning environment in vocational education. Misra and Khurana (2018), carried out a literature review of the employability skills among information technology professionals revealing some interesting findings. World Bank Reports (2019) indicated a mismatch between skills imparted in Indian institutions and those required in the job market. Chakravarty (2020) studied the current and emerging challenges in vocational education. (NITI Aayog, 2018) Strategy for New India @ 75 emphasized the need for flexible skilling ecosystems, lifelong learning, and a strong industry-academia interface. Pilz and Regel (2021) in their studies discussed about vocational education and training in India; highlighting the prospects and challenges from an outside perspective. UNESCO (2022) outlined the significance of early skill education and entrepreneurship training in promoting sustainable development. Schwendimann *et al.* (2018) carried out a systematic review on the state-of-the-art, collaborative technologies for initial vocational education (Bholane, 2021, i& ii) in several of his studies analysed the perception of commerce students towards choice-based credit system (CBCS) (Bholane, 2021, i), studied the pros and cons of privatizing higher education (Bholane, 2021, ii) and discussed the need of soft skills for today's business world (Bholane, 2022). Ortoleva and Bétrancourt (2015), studied the significance of collaborative writing and discussion in vocational education with special reference to its effects on learning and self-efficacy beliefs. Inayat *et al.* (2013), conducted research on the effects of

collaborative web based Vocational Education and Training (VET) on learning outcomes. Krithi and Pai (2021), carried out a review on diversity and inclusion in the workforce for organizational competitiveness suggesting the importance of skilling. Rajamanickam *et al.* (2024), carried out a review on enhancing TVET for a digital-ready workforce. Bhattacharyya *et al.* (2021) studied the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of vocational training programme under state board secondary level schools in Kolkata. Yasak and Alias (2015) in their paper enumerated the current problems and challenges of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Malaysia. Bholane (2023) analysed and discussed the National Education Policy 2020 describing it as a catalyst for skill-based education. Academic scholars like Amartya Sen (Sen, 1999) and Raghuram Rajan (Rajan, 2017) have also spoken about human capital development being key to economic progress, not just through education but also through empowerment via skills and capabilities. Sinha (2014) discusses the evolving role of engineering education in skill development and its implications for employability and curriculum reform—aligning with the focus of this paper on integrating skills with academics. The study by Suresh *et al.* (2024) evaluates how skill development training influences entrepreneurship awareness among undergraduates—supporting the discussion in this paper on the broader impacts of training interventions on employability and socio-economic outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive and employs secondary research methodology; in other words, is solely based on secondary data. The data and insights are drawn from government policy documents like, NEP 2020 policy document, Skill India Mission policy papers, reports from Ministry of Education, NSDC, CMIE, NITI Aayog; statistical databases and government portals such as data.gov.in, MSDE, MHRD, UNESCO, relevant academic articles, books and published research on skill development, vocational education and training.

The research method of this study was to review existing literature including policy documents and relevant published academic articles, critically analysing them. The paper thus follows an analytical approach by critically examining the current situation and mapping how NEP 2020 addresses the challenges and issues posed by the existing education ecosystem with skill deficit. The study, thus, makes an attempt to review and study the existing literature on NEP 2020 and skill development and tries to discuss various perspectives, and come up with the way forward.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Unemployment and Skill Gaps

2. Social Perceptions and Myths around Skilling
3. Skill India Mission & NEP 2020: A Converging Vision
4. Skill Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
5. Entrepreneurship & Innovation
6. Integrating Skilling into Global Educational Landscape

1. Unemployment and Skill Gaps. As of 2023, India's youth unemployment rate stood at over 20%, with graduates among the highest unemployed demographic. This paradox arises because many are "educated but unemployable", lacking industry-relevant skills. As per the National Mission for Skill Development-A Framework for Implementation, it is estimated that only 2.3 % of the workforce in India has undergone formal skill training as compared to 68% in the UK, 75% in Germany, 52% in USA, 80% in Japan and 96% in South Korea (Foot Steps, 2016). Large sections of the educated workforce have little or no job skills, making them largely unemployable. CMIE 2023 data placed below shows the unemployment rate of different education levels. Skill development is the need of the hour and the only way to address the increasing paradox of unemployability of the so called educated and degree holders. When we consider the skill gap that is affecting employability in every sector, recalibrating the educational ecosystem had become significant (Verma, 2022). NEP 2020 document gives hope in this regard. Section 16.6 of the policy document states, "Vocational education will be integrated into all school and higher education institutions in a phased manner over the next decade. Focus areas for vocational education will be chosen based on skills gap analysis and mapping of local opportunities. MHRD will constitute a National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE), consisting of experts in vocational education and representatives from across Ministries, in collaboration with industry, to oversee this effort."

Qualification Level	Unemployment Rate (%)
Below Primary	2.4
Secondary	5.7
Graduate	17.2
Postgraduate+	18.9

(Source: CMIE 2023)

2. Social Perceptions and Myths around Skilling. In Indian society, there has long been a stigma attached to vocational training. Traditional notions often prioritize white-collar professions over skilled trades. A commonly held view is that skill-based jobs are for the academically weak. In other words, skill development is often seen as a last resort for students with limited academic potential. This perception is misleading and needs correction. This attitude leads to underutilization of technical education infrastructure and poor

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enrolment in vocational programmes. Section 16 of the NEP 2020 policy document discusses the concern in detail and 16.4 states, “This policy aims to overcome the social status hierarchy associated with vocational education.”

The Rigveda rightly states:

(You have the right to perform your duties, but not the right to the fruits of your actions)

This shloka can also be interpreted as emphasizing the dignity of labour, a principle that modern education must embrace by valuing both cognitive and practical skills equally. Needless to say; that, even highly intelligent individuals can benefit from acquiring hands-on skills that complement their academic learning.

3. Skill India Mission & NEP 2020: A Converging Vision. The NMSD-The National Mission for Skill Development (National Skill India Mission (NSIM)) aims to make skill development aspirational by integrating skills with academic education (NMSD, 2015). The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship was set up in November 2014 to drive the 'Skill India' agenda in a 'Mission Mode.' NEP 2020 reinforces the aim of SIM, by proposing vocational education at school level itself, by integrating internships and hands-on experiences, integration of ITI, NSDC, and PMKVY programmes with formal schooling and by setting up skill labs and using digital learning platforms for skill dissemination.

Section 18.6 of NEP 2020 says, “A National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) will be formulated by the General Education Council (GEC) and it shall be in sync with the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) to ease the integration of vocational education into higher education. The GEC will be mandated to identify specific skills that students must acquire during their academic programmes, with the aim of preparing well-rounded learners with 21st century skills.”

This convergence ensures that students are job-ready and socially empowered.

4. Skill Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals SDG 4.4 states, “By 2030, there would be a substantial increase in the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship” (United Nations. (2015). India’s NEP 2020 and Skill India Mission directly align with this target. Quoting the policy document in this regard at Section 16.5, “By 2025, at least 50% of learners through the school and higher education system shall have exposure to vocational education, for which a clear action plan with targets and timelines will be developed. This is in alignment with Sustainable

Development Goal 4.4 and will help to realize the full potential of India's demographic dividend."

SDG Target	India's Approach
4.4 - Skills for decent jobs	NEP 2020, PMKVY, ITIs
8.6 - Reduce NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)	Integration of skill with school
9.3 - Innovation and small-scale industries	Entrepreneurial skill training

Here the role of institutions: ITIs, PMKVY, and JSS is crucial as seen in the table below. Over 15,000 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) train students in trades like electrical, plumbing, carpentry, mechanics, and more. As per reports of NSDC (2022), MSDE (2023) and Skill India (2020), the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) has trained over 1.3 crore candidates since 2015. Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) offers skill programmes in non-formal education mode targeting youth in rural areas (JSS, 2023).

Institution	Number (Approx.)	Candidates Trained
ITIs	15,000+	20 Lakh annually
PMKVY	Nationwide	1.3 Crore (2015–2023)
JSS	233	3 Lakh annually

5. Entrepreneurship & Innovation. With over 65% of India's population under 35, fostering entrepreneurship is critical. However, entrepreneurship too needs to be taught and supported through incubation centres, mentorship programmes and funding opportunities.

NEP 2020 (Section 11.12, 13.7 and 17) supports the concept by recommending the setting up of Innovation & Incubation centres, local enterprise linkages to schools and encouraging project-based learning to nurture creativity. "HEIs will develop specific hand holding mechanisms and competitions for promoting innovation among student communities" (section 11.12). The Start-Up India initiative can also synergize with NEP's vision by identifying school and college entrepreneurs and mentoring them.

6. Integrating Skilling into Global Educational Landscape. There are successful examples where countries like Germany and Switzerland have integrated Dual Vocational Training (DVT) models wherein students split their time between classrooms and industry. NEP 2020 suggests a similar approach and shows the way forward. Approaches like blending vocational education into regular schooling, credit-based modular skill courses and National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) for certification have been suggested in NEP 2020. As rightly pointed out by Zeidan & Bishnoi (2020) there is a mismatch between academic curricula and industry skill needs; emphasizing that developing educational strategies to

enhance graduates' readiness for employment and integrating skilling into global educational landscape is the need of the hour.

As professionals in distinct yet skill-intensive disciplines—law and dental surgery—two of the authors have personally witnessed how the integration of training and practical skills can transform student learning experiences and outcomes. In the field of law, beyond theoretical understanding of statutes and precedents, true competence emerges only when students are able to apply legal principles in real-life contexts. Activities such as moot courts, client counselling sessions, and legal aid clinics not only develop analytical and advocacy skills but also nurture empathy and ethical awareness. During classroom discussions, it becomes evident that students who engage in such experiential learning display greater confidence, critical reasoning ability, and professional readiness—attributes that NEP 2020 seeks to institutionalize across disciplines. Similarly, in dental surgery, while foundational knowledge of anatomy and pathology forms the bedrock, it is through hands-on clinical exposure that students develop precision, decision-making ability, and patient-management skills. A student's first experience of performing a dental procedure under supervision is often transformative, bridging the gap between learning and practice. This embodies NEP 2020's vision of integrating vocational and experiential learning into mainstream education, ensuring that graduates are both knowledgeable and skilled.

One of the authors being an experienced academician feels that interactions with students from diverse fields—sciences, management, social sciences and the humanities—reveal a common desire for education that connects theory with real-world application. Many students express the need for more flexible curricula that allow interdisciplinary exploration and innovation. This feedback resonates strongly with NEP 2020's call for a holistic, multidisciplinary approach that empowers students to discover and pursue their passions.

Through these experiences, the authors further reiterate the point that, skill development is not an ancillary component of education but its very essence; and therefore, integrating skilling into global educational landscape is crucial. When students are encouraged to innovate, collaborate, and apply their learning, education becomes a transformative process—improving their skills and preparing them not just for employment, but for lifelong growth and meaningful contribution to society. NEP 2020's emphasis on this alignment between education and employability holds the promise of nurturing a generation that is skilled, competent, confident and creative.

CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY

Despite its comprehensive policy-oriented analysis, the study faces certain limitations. Being primarily based on secondary data and descriptive analysis, it relies on existing reports, policy documents, and published literature, which may not fully capture region-specific or institution-level variations in the implementation of NEP 2020. Additionally, since NEP 2020 is still in the early stages of implementation, the long-term impact of its skill-development initiatives on employability and workforce outcomes cannot yet be empirically measured.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the above-mentioned challenges, this study makes a significant contribution by offering an integrated and interdisciplinary perspective on skill development within the framework of NEP 2020. By combining policy analysis with experiential insights drawn from professional domains such as law and dental surgery, the paper bridges the gap between theoretical policy intent and practical educational realities. It also contributes to the existing literature by reinforcing the importance of destigmatizing vocational education, aligning skilling with sustainable development goals, and positioning skill development as central—not supplementary—to holistic education and nation-building.

CONCLUSION

The study critically examined the issue of skill deficits and unemployment among educated youth in India, highlighting the mismatch between traditional academic education and industry requirements. It discussed how entrenched social perceptions, inadequate vocational integration, and lack of experiential learning have contributed to the paradox of “educated unemployability.” Through a detailed analysis of NEP 2020 and allied initiatives such as the Skill India Mission, the paper demonstrated that India’s education policy is undergoing a decisive paradigm shift—one that recognizes skill development, innovation, and entrepreneurship as essential pillars of educational reform.

The discussion underscored that NEP 2020 provides a robust framework to bridge the education–employment divide by integrating vocational education, experiential learning, and multidisciplinary flexibility across all levels of education. If effectively implemented, these reforms have the potential to empower learners, enhance employability, foster entrepreneurship, and enable India to fully harness its demographic dividend. Thus, skill development emerges not merely as a policy objective, but as a transformative force for individual dignity, economic resilience, and sustainable national progress.

THE WAY FORWARD

It is imperative that skilling be seen not as a fallback but as a foundation for economic growth and individual dignity. Society must accept that “every job done well is worthy of respect.” It is high time that we break the social taboos around vocational education. Secondly there is a need for Universal Skill Learning. Every student, irrespective of academic inclination, should learn a skill; be it carpentry, coding, culinary arts or communication. This will promote self-reliance and creativity.

NEP’s emphasis on experiential learning, flexible curriculum, and multidisciplinary education will foster a generation that is not only employable but entrepreneurial. Effective teacher training, infrastructural upgrades, partnerships with industries and policy monitoring and revision will ensure the success of NEP 2020.

NEP 2020 is a timely reform that rightly recognizes the importance of skill development in shaping India’s future workforce. When implemented effectively, it can dismantle outdated taboos, bridge the education–employment divide, and empower millions of young Indians to thrive in the 21st-century knowledge economy. As rightly said by Swami Vivekananda, “Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man” (Vivekananda, 1902). It is not far when the Indian education manifests not only knowledge but the practical ability to create, build, innovate and serve; in turn ensuring the emergence of our nation as a knowledge superpower and a Gyan Vishwa Guru.

FUTURE SCOPE

Future research may adopt empirical and field-based methodologies to assess the real-time implementation and outcomes of NEP 2020’s skill development initiatives across different regions and socio-economic contexts. Longitudinal studies examining the impact of vocational exposure on employability, income levels, and entrepreneurial outcomes would further enrich the discourse. Comparative studies between India and countries with established vocational systems could also offer valuable insights for policy refinement and global alignment.

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