
Integrating Skill Development in Higher Education

Mr. R. VINODH KUMAR

Assistant Professor, Department of Education,
Periyar University, Salem.

Dr. M. VAKKIL

Assistant Professor, Department of Education,
Periyar University, Salem.

India has the largest number of young people and the highest global unemployment rate - these are pointers to the nature and efficiency of our education system. The entire skill set required to work in a company that competes at the global level has undergone a change, and education, particularly higher education, cannot afford to overlook the new realities of the 2nd decade of the 21st century. Surveys and studies are conducted at regular intervals and it is reiterated in the surveys and studies that the 80 percent workforce in rural and urban India does not possess any identifiable employability skills. The World Economic Forum's Global Talent Risk report (2011) cautions that developing countries like India and Brazil will face huge skill gaps due to low employability. India can reap the benefits of this situation only by effectively Skilling and up. Skilling, its vast manpower by mainstreaming vocational education, modules of finishing school and partnership of industry-academia in the curriculum of higher education.

Keywords: Unemployment, Employability and Vocational education.

Today, the world and India need a skilled workforce. If we have to promote the development of our country, then our mission has to be 'skill development' and 'Skilled India'. Millions and millions of Indian youths should acquire the skills which could contribute towards making India a modern country. I also want to create a pool of young people who are able to create jobs and the ones who are not capable of creating jobs and do not have the Opportunities, they must be in a position to face their counterparts in any corner of the world while keeping their heads high by virtue of their hard work and their dexterity of hands and win the hearts of people around the world through their skills. We want to go for the capacity building of such young people.

Introduction

The Government has initiated the process of formulating a New Education Policy to meet the changing dynamics of the population's requirement with regard to quality education, innovation and research, aiming to make India a knowledge super power by equipping its students with the necessary skills and knowledge and to eliminate the shortage of manpower in science, technology, academics and industry. The New Education Policy (2015) task force has identified twenty themes on higher education for consultation. Integrating skill development in higher education is one among them. Developing skills among the students is very important for the socioeconomic development of our country.

Today, India is one of the youngest nations in the world with more than 62% of its population in the working age group (15-59 years), and more than 54% of its total population under 25 years of age. Its population pyramid is expected to “bulge” across the 15–59 age group over the next decade. It is further estimated that the average age of the population in India by 2020 will be 29 years as against 40 years in the USA, 46 years in Europe and 47 years in Japan. In fact, during the next 20 years the labour force in the industrialized world is expected to decline by 4%, while in India it will increase by 32%. This poses a formidable challenge and a huge opportunity. To reap this demographic dividend which is expected to last for next 25 years, India needs to equip its workforce with employable skills and knowledge so that they can contribute substantively to the economic growth of the country. The World Economic Forum’s Global Talent Risk report (2011) cautions that developing countries like India and Brazil will face huge skill gaps due to low employability. India can reap the benefits of this situation only by effectively skilling and up- skilling its vast manpower by mainstreaming vocational education, modules of finishing schools and partnership of industry-academia in the curriculum of higher education.

Need for Skill Development

The percentage of employers facing difficulty in finding skilled workforce is as high as 81 percent in Japan, 71 percent in Brazil, 49 percent in US, 48 percent in India and 42 percent in Germany. One wonders what it that we are turning out is from our universities and colleges.

Even for India- the youngest country in the world, if the percentage is 48 per cent, it is an alarming situation, to put it mildly, because it means that half of our companies and businesses are finding it difficult to run their daily operations due to the lack of skilled workforce. India has the largest number of young people (age group of 14-25) and the highest global unemployment rate - these are pointers to the nature and efficiency of our education system. Against this, the job market is increasingly being redefined by specific skills.

The entire skills set required to work in a company that competes at the global level has undergone change, and education, particularly Higher Education, cannot afford to overlook the new realities of the 2nd decade of the 21st century. Across the world, skills development has been addressed with considerable seriousness. According to figures of 2008, the percentage of workforce receiving skills training is 96 percent in Korea, 80 percent in Japan, 75 percent in Germany, 68 percent in England and 10 percent in India.

Moreover, it is estimated that 75 percent of the new job opportunities to be created in India will be skill-based. While the skill set has changed and employers look more and more for 21st century skills in the job seekers, it is required to take a close look at the academic nature of our curricula and their mode of transaction. It is not that we do not have enough degree holders in the country; we have a number of them, but the world of business and industry thinks that they are not employable.

Surveys and studies are conducted at regular intervals and it is reiterated in the surveys and studies that the 80 per cent workforce in rural and urban India does not possess any identifiable employability skills.

The NASSCOM-McKinsey report "Perspective 2020: Transform Business, Transform India" (2009) said that only 26 percent of India's engineering graduates were employable. An Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) survey reported that only 10% of Master of Business Administration (MBA) graduates from Indian business schools get a job right after completing their course (2012). These reports and many others indicate that the employability or non-employability of Indian graduates is a rising concern.

Leaders of business and industry in India have regularly voiced their concern over the lack of skilled manpower ready to be absorbed in various sectors. We have the government intervening by establishing a National Skills Development Council (NSDC) and several other skills development initiatives in the pipeline, but unless our higher education wakes up to this and responds proactively, the youths coming out of it would find it hard to claim a place in the world, and thus the growth of this country will also remain under threat because without the requisite human resource the magic growth is impossible.

In a large country like India, only government agencies and system cannot accomplish this task of up Skilling the youth. Private companies with requisite experience in skills training may also be roped in to expedite the process of enhancing the skills development of youth in colleges and universities.

In today's world, particularly in India, the future and relevance of higher education are inextricably linked with skills development; the earlier, higher education accepts this and acts accordingly, the better it is for the country and its growth. Skills Development is not an additional course that can be added to a university curriculum, but it requires to be integrated into the training and education of a youth who will have to be readily employable and competent enough to run the operations of a company or business in India. A youth seeking job in the market today is expected to have salient life and soft skills which he has no clue about till she/he faces an interview.

Higher education does little to address the skills requirement of a youth raring to go into the world and make a mark. To make it amply clear as to how higher education has got to address the issue of skills development and employability, no better evidence than what Planning Commission's Approach Paper to the Twelfth Five Year Plan says: "There is a need for a clear focus on improving the employability of graduates.

Indian higher education is organized into 'General' and 'Professional' streams. General education which is an excellent foundation for successful knowledge-based careers, often fails to equip graduates with necessary work skills due to its poor quality. Graduates now require the skills beyond the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. Skills such as critical thinking and creativity are now important in more and more jobs. Special emphasis on verbal and written communication skills, especially in English would go a long way in improving the employability of the large and growing mass of disempowered youth."

Reasons for the Poor Employability of Indian Graduates

Experts have opined various reasons attributing to poor employability ranging from school education, selection procedure in our graduate colleges, curriculum and quality of teaching,

student interest and lack of corporate involvement. Unfortunately, most of these reasons have some part to play in this huge challenge. Our approach has been to create an ecosystem to help identify employability gaps, provide quantitative and qualitative feedback at various levels, be it an individual, institutional, regional or national level to help bridge the employability gap in a constructive manner.

What are the main traits that employers look for when hiring graduates?

The employers look at a mix of aptitude, language, personality and domain skills in selecting the right candidates for various roles in their organization. The detailed fine-tuning happens based on the job role and the industry they are recruiting for. While core domain skill requirements vary from industry to industry, aptitude, language and personality skills requirements change from role to role.

Conclusion

Policy papers in India are beginning to show their commitment to skills development and employability through it but that is not enough either. The true reflection of their commitment would be when they make it mandatory to establish Skill Development Centers at university and college campuses and provide specific funds for the same. These Centers should be endowed with the task of training each and every student of the college and university in terms of soft skills and life skills and prepare them for the jobs they dream of.

Reference

- Department of Higher Education. (2015). New Delhi, India: Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- Katyal, S. & Katyal, R. (2015). *International Journal of Social Relevance and Concern*, 3(1), 1-11.
- Meshram, S. A., & Dubey, D. (2015). Employability of engineering students in IT sector. *Asian Journal of Management Research*, 5(4), 673-683.