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Transforming vocational education: Insights from NEP 2020

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Abstract

The 2020 National Education Policy (NEP) introduces a transformative vision for vocational education in India, aiming to integrate vocational skills into mainstream education. This article examines the policy's initiatives to enhance vocational training, its potential impact on employability, and the challenges in its implementation. To generate a productive and skilled workforce through various courses, vocational education is very important for fulfilling the requirements of the unorganised sector. NEP 2020 underscores the importance of providing youth with self-employment opportunities through a diverse range of vocational courses. According to NEP 2020, vocational education refers to educational programmes that are designed to prepare individuals for specific careers or skills. It mainly focuses on practical skills and hands-on training that are directly related to employment in a workplace. The NEP 2020 depicts the expansion of vocational education in India, which will provide a skilled labour force in both the informal and industrial sectors.

Keywords: NEP 2020, vocational education, Lok Vidya, self-employment, practical skills, vocational training

Introduction

Historically, India has undervalued vocational education, often viewing it as a secondary option. NEP 2020 seeks to change this narrative by mainstreaming vocational training and aligning it with industry needs. Many authors explore the policy's framework for vocational education and its implications for students, educators, and the economy (Jebaraj 2020, Pathak 2021, and Yadav 2022) ^[4, 8, 9].

The National Council for Vocational Education and Training shall be entrusted with the development, qualitative improvement, and regulation of vocational education and training, for granting recognition to and monitoring the functioning of awarding bodies, assessment agencies, skill information providers, and training bodies, and to perform other incidental functions as specified in this Resolution (Ganie, 2022) ^[1].

As per NEP 2020, vocational training, also known as career and technical education, is an educational approach that focuses on providing practical skills and knowledge related to a specific job or occupation. According to various writings (Joshi & Somani, 2021; Malik & Das, 2022) ^[5, 7], NEP 2020 emphasizes hands-on training or practical education and skill development in that specific field, which is crucial for creating employment opportunities for the youth in their chosen field.

Vocational education must develop not only the foundational capacities 'of literacy and numeracy and 'higher-order' cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem-solving, but also social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions. It appears that NEP 2020 will expand opportunities for students at higher education institutes to accommodate the rapidly changing employment landscape and global ecosystem. Vocational education must shift towards less content and more learning about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt, and absorb new material in novel and changing fields. Providing such foundational learning in the early years guarantees equal opportunities for all children, irrespective of their socio-economic background, to excel in school and enhance their academic achievements and overall quality of life.

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Objectives of Vocational Education

- To eliminate unemployment by providing self-employment opportunities for the young generation of India.
- To use and apply scientific and technological knowledge for the welfare of society.
- To enhance the productive potential of the Indian economy and the economic standard of the citizens of the country.
- To use human resources, train youth as skilled and expert technicians, and contribute to the equal distribution of the advantages of economic progress in order to ensure social and economic justice.
- To assist youth in understanding the scientific and technological aspects of industrial development.
- To provide equal opportunities to accommodate the requirements of women, rural and tribal students, and marginalized people in society.

Vocational Education in India

According to the National Education Policy 2020, almost 50% of learners in the school and higher education systems will have exposure to vocational education by 2025, with clear execution planning within specific targets and times. This policy would foster a vision that emphasizes the dignity of the Indian labor force, incorporating various forms of Indian arts and artisanship. With the policy's implementation in 2025, students of the higher education institute can move towards the goal of vocational education with a clear action plan. The policy states that all higher educational institutions will implement vocational education in a phased manner, integrating it with mainstream education. NEP 2020 includes skill development through vocational education, including hands-on training, to enhance skills and capacities, while also fostering the development of other academic parameters. To fulfil the objectives of NEP 2020, higher education institutes will have to collaborate with Industrial Training Institutes (ITI), Polytechnic Institutes, industrial units, etc. Vocational education will be implemented as an integrated education policy in schools and other higher educational institutions in a structured manner over the next ten years. According to the new National Education Policy (NEP), nearly 50% of all students should undergo vocational training by 2025. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) is the ministry responsible for developing and coordinating vocational training and career development programmes in India (NEP 2020; India today, 2023) ^[3].

Recommendations in NEP 2020

Different academic streams such as arts, sciences, and commerce, along with various curricular and extracurricular activities, coexist alongside vocational and academic streams (NEP 2020: Principles). This is a concerted national-level effort to reach universal access and afford opportunity for all of the youth in our country. The objective is to obtain a good-quality holistic approach to education, including vocational education.

- NEP 2020 provides flexibility and a choice of subjects to study, like life skills, physical education, the arts and crafts, and vocational skills.
- Vocational education programmes in an integrated manner are included in mainstream education.

- As per NEP 2020, 'Lok Vidya', is proposed as an important vocational knowledge developed in India.
- The National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE), constituted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (renamed the Ministry of Education), proposes vocational education in collaboration with industry.
- The National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE) helps to reach vocational education in the institution. Different models of vocational education and apprenticeships will also be experimented with by higher education institutions. Higher education institutions will establish incubator centres in partnership with industries.
- The National Skills Qualifications Framework will be detailed further for each discipline, vocation, and profession. A concerted national effort will be made to ensure universal access and afford opportunity to all children in the country to obtain quality holistic education, including vocational.
- The integration of vocational education programmes into mainstream education should be done in a phased manner, starting with early vocational exposure in middle and secondary school.
- Over the next ten years, all school and higher education institutions will gradually integrate vocational education. Vocational education will be chosen based on skills gap analysis and mapping of local opportunities.
- Different models of vocational education and apprenticeships will also be experimented with by higher education institutions. Higher education institutions will establish incubator centres in partnership with industries.
- 'Lok Vidya,' i.e., important vocational knowledge developed in India, will be made accessible to students through integration into vocational education courses.
- The National Skills Qualifications Framework will be detailed further for each discipline, vocation, and profession. Furthermore, the credit-based framework will facilitate mobility across both general and vocational fields.
- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 announces the potential explosive growth of vocational education in the country since it requires all educational institutions to integrate for imparting knowledge and skills. A large number of educational institutes, i.e., schools, colleges, and universities, will act as potential Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers during the coming decade, ensuring vocational training will be available to millions of students.
- Vocational education and training are very essential to building a productive workforce through a range of courses that can cater to the needs of the informal sector and to equip young people with self-employment skills through a wide range of vocational training throughout India.
- NEP 2020 envisages that vocational education and training will enhance the potentiality of work, understand the challenges and opportunities that exist for the future through the execution of professional attitudes incorporated with innovation, collaboration, adaptability, exchange of knowledge, etc., and lead to a new era of education.

- Vocational education promotes capacity building by promoting multiple and flexible pathways into lifelong education and vocational training that enhance the linkage and transition between all levels of education.
- NEP 2020 emphasises vocational education design with lab-based, skill based educational programmes and learning experiences that help students adapt to the global workforce in the future with present technological developments and innovations like Artificial Intelligence, Big Data analytics, machine learning, the Internet of Things, etc. that demand renewal of curriculum and pedagogy.

Vocational Education: A Future of Work Lens

As a component of NEP 2020, vocational education in India proposes a new education system that has tried to equip the youth with the competencies required to enter the new arena of the job world. NEP 2020 is focused on empowering our students with 21st-century modern skills. In this context, students will have the opportunity to skilfully prepare themselves to meet the challenge of industrial improvement. For the successful implementation of NEP 2020, it is crucial to equip students with the necessary skills to adapt to the rapid advancements in technology and innovations. This requires a modern education system to revamp its outdated curricula and pedagogy. NEP 2020 proposes changes that drive a significant shift in employers' demand for skills, particularly in the transition towards a more technology and skill-based work environment. To cope with the present requirements of the job world that would require a systematic change of curriculum supported by good skills, which are most important in present and future work environments (Kumar 2022) ^[6].

Challenges and Barriers

These challenges encompass various dimensions and require comprehensive solutions to ensure the successful integration of vocational education into the Indian education system.

- A significant challenge lies in altering the existing education system's traditional academic pathways into vocational education.
- It is a major challenge to remove societal bias towards some professions and a misconception that vocational education is inferior to the mainstream academic system.
- Integrating vocational education poses a challenge to keeping the balance between purely academic subjects and skill-based vocational education.
- Delivering high-quality vocational education alongside mainstream education in various institutions across the country, including diverse regions and institutions, presents a formidable challenge. Trained instructors with sufficient industrial experience and teaching skills are essential for providing valuable practical knowledge to the students.
- Well-equipped vocational training facilities demand significant investment in infrastructure, equipment, and resources needed for the successful implementation of NEP 2020. Many educational institutions, especially in rural areas, may lack the necessary resources to offer effective vocational training.
- It is challenging to evaluate vocational skills without standardized assessment and certification methods.

- To ensure the long-term sustainability of the vocational education scheme, consistent policy support, funding allocation, and monitoring mechanisms must be in place to track outcomes and make necessary adjustments.

Conclusion

The National Education Policy 2020 has given due importance to vocational education and teacher capacity development to boost the employability and vocational skills of learners at all levels. The quality of VET is to be enhanced by identifying, designing, and developing vocational courses that meet the common norms and skills standards identified at the national level. The accreditation of vocational courses and the registration of providers would also improve the quality and sustainability of VET programmes. This process should encompass the selection and recruitment of teachers, the selection of students, the delivery of courses, assessment, and the awarding of qualifications to students. The administration and management of the VET system as a whole and the provision of student support services would require a strong system of capacity development for all stakeholders at all levels, i.e. National, State, District and Institutional levels. Best practices in vocational education and training with a focus on specific criteria that can be replicated in different institutions in the relevant areas need to be identified and shared at various levels to promote effectiveness in pedagogical and other aspects of the implementation of Vocational Education training.

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