



Skill Development in the 21st Century India: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

The present era is facing the paradoxical situation as the students coming out of academia find themselves less competent for the industry because of not having sufficient skills. Skills and knowledge are the prerequisites for the economic growth and social development of any nation. A nation possessing better and higher levels of expertise manages obstacles and can generate new prospects. It is widely known that changes and breakthroughs in technology have a constant impact on the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of the workplace. In order for India to become a Knowledge Economy and satisfy the demand for skilled labor globally, it is imperative that attention be paid to the advancement of skills that are pertinent to the country's developing economic development. 21st century is the era of globalization and to match the pace of change, there is high need that the workforce be regularly updated, upskilled and upgraded. Our work force will quickly become obscure, outdated, and eventually eliminated from the workplace if we are slow to act. The government is taking a number of actions to end this circumstance and is placing a strong emphasis on skill development to equip the workforce for the future. Because it would enable young people to obtain the skills they need for the jobs they seek, skill development would contribute to a decrease in the nation's unemployment rate. The aim of the present paper is to review the current status of education, skills development and the challenges of employment opportunity for the young generation.

Key Words: Skill Development, Economic Growth, Challenges, Opportunities, Technological Advancement

Introduction

According to Wilbur Wright, 'It is possible to fly without motors, but not without knowledge and skill'. Skills and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and social development for any country. The capacity, competence, proficiency, and talent to do a specific job or task successfully are usually understood to be the components of skill. The importance of skills stems from the fact that they determine one's capacity to successfully carry out plans. It might come from a natural source or develop gradually over time. It could be hard skills that are refined via education, training, and experience, or soft skills that represent a person's character characteristics and qualities like people skills, communication skills, leadership abilities, etc. An employer expects both hard skills and soft skills in his workforce so that the required work can be done effectively and efficiently in his organisation.

The process of determining skill gaps and filling them with refined skills is known as skills development. It serves as a tool to increase overall effectiveness and gives each person the ability to operate more productively. A more creative, competitive, and productive economy is the result of more competent human potential. Globalization and technical advancements are accelerating at a rate that presents both opportunities and difficulties for economic growth and job development. Higher and better skilled nations are better able to adapt to the opportunities and problems of the global workplace.

Skill development is defined as the acquisition of work-related skills or competencies through vocational education and training. Such vocational education and training is essentially to be imparted from school education onwards in order to promote entrepreneurial skill development which will fetch breadwinning in life of individuals. Our educational system has many challenges in making students employable, including a large population, a relatively small number of educational institutions, poor infrastructure, a shortage of qualified instructors, etc. India has robust policies and plans to support lifelong learning, vocational training, and education, but they are not being implemented with the same intensity and speed. In his speech in 2014, the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi expressed that "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'" (Modi, 2014). His speech reveals the fact that Skill Development is the need of the hour of India, as it has a large un-employed / under employed population and even the Indian students are considered being unemployable by most companies especially MNCs and many are migrating abroad in search of better opportunities. They could become victims of drug addiction and other anti-social behavior if their potential is not realized which something the country cannot afford is. The success of recently announced national missions, such as Made in India, Digital India, and Smart Cities, among others, depends on having a competent labor force. Through the integration of skills and

training alongside education, India must produce a workforce that meets worldwide standards for quality and productivity. Only then will this goal become a reality. Giving due importance to Skill Development, Ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship have been established in 2014 to coordinate with other Ministries and Departments to achieve the goals of Skill India Mission. Government aims to skill 40 crore populations by 2022. To identify the skills needed in different sectors, create skill development training programs for those sectors, and oversee such trainings carried out by various agencies and corporations in that sector—so benefiting both the industry in that sector and the job seekers in that sector—a number of Sector Skill Councils have been established.

Need and Significance of Skill Development in Students

Experts express their opinion that skill development in students should start from a young age as students prepare themselves to enter into the career after completion of the study. Without certain talents, whether they be life skills, physical skills, soft skills, or technological abilities, a profession is practically unattainable. Students must strengthen their skills in order to meet the obstacles of daily life. The world has drastically changed in the last several decades as a result of our unparalleled use of technology, and these developments have an impact on every aspect of our lives, including our careers, economies, and educational systems. To cope up with the increasing pace and changes, students need to learn the required skills to make sure their desired career. Programs for skill development fill the knowledge gap between the demands of the modern workforce and our formal educational system. It is critical to bring meaning to life and to work hard to make ends meet. Theory-based knowledge alone cannot provide skill; only practical knowledge can provide real-world experience. It aids in improving pupils' capacity to "think and act." In addition to this skill development can benefit students in the following ways:

- 1. It can develop critical thinking & problem solving skills*
- 2. It can create ability to take responsibility*
- 3. It can help in growing self-confidence*
- 4. It can improve decision making power*
- 5. It can enhance a greater sense of self-awareness*

Present Lacunae in Education in India

It is evident that skill development is the need of the hour in India but still this need is not being handled effectively. The following points highlight the present missing aspects with regard to skill development in our education system in India:

1. Despite the rapid advancements in science and technology worldwide, the syllabus is rarely revised

2. According to a data of 2018 there are almost 40000 colleges in India granting degrees. But many of the teachers of those institutes are not having the required quality.
3. There is also the lack of innovation and research in this field. Students need to be given the space and scope to think and innovate, to question and come up with solutions.
4. Faulty education system is not up to the level. Improper implementation of Semester systems, CBCS and process of continuous evaluation proves incapable in fulfilling their desired learning outcomes.
5. Another issue is the dearth of education focused on skills. Based on the issues that they are likely to face in the actual world, students must receive hands on training.
6. The IT sector carries out the highest number of recruitments from the pool of engineers, only 18.43% engineers are skilled enough to work there, while, for IT product roles, the numbers are as low as 3.21%.
7. Soft skills have become very important in the present job industry but there is disregard of essential soft skills in educational institutes.

Issues and Challenges of Skills Development and Measures to Overcome Them

At one hand India has a large number of educated unemployed while on the other hand the industry is short of skilled professionals. HR managers have the difficult task of choosing job candidates with the appropriate skill set. It is one thing to be qualified for a job; it is another to be skilled for the job. India is confronted with numerous issues in light of the existing policy framework and infrastructure. The following challenges have been faced in skill development:

A Poor Scenario of the Status of Education

In order to build a high rise building its foundation must be well laid and strong. In the same way a wide and deep knowledge is necessary to develop and build skill strongly. The first and foremost basic issue is the Education System of India. The country does not have a single or common educational system. Interventions from politics, culture, and ethnic groups bring down the system to fit their whims and fancy. Ethnic and regional differences can be justified, at least, in the social sciences, languages, and art studies. But there needs to be a national curriculum for science and technology. It must be latest and updated curriculum to suit and address modern innovations at global level. There is an enormous challenge to meet in this regard. Furthermore, another related concern in these institutions is the dearth of highly trained teachers. One of the main issues with government institutions is the lack of monitoring and quality control. Using current, updated, digitalized, and intelligent technological approaches to provide teacher candidates at all levels with appropriate training is the issue. Experts at all levels should conduct

rigorous academic and technical inspections as well as internal and external audits on a regular basis.

Lack of Infrastructure

As per the Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18 seventy (70) million Indians of working age of 15 to 59 will enter work force by 2023 and will include 404.15 million. Out of this, new entrants 59 million are youth of 15 to 30 age group. Almost 7.7 million people are denied access to adequate training facilities annually. It is believed that there is a significant cost burden associated with creating proper curricula, hiring personnel, acquiring necessary equipment, and providing other infrastructure.

Public Private Partnership (PPP)

Promoting public-private partnerships benefits the workforce's internal and external mobility, which benefits both the public and private sectors. However, the majority of private sector businesses are hesitant to spend money on employee training because they fear that employees may leave in search of greater benefits and compensation.

Minimal Institution Industry Interface

There is very minimal connection between training Institutions and Industry. A few reasons are: (a) There may not be relevant industry where the institute is situated, (b) Either the institution or the industry may not have interest for a tie up, (c) The industry may not be willing to share its technology, and (d) The industry may not be ready to waste its manpower on imparting training to the students, etc.

Lack of Awareness among Students, Teachers and Parents

The stakeholders in the training program are not aware of it. The different sectors of training that are accessible for their wards are not known to instructors or parents, particularly those who reside in remote areas. Not even they know about the jobs available to trained people. It is no wonder that the students' indifference towards such programs. The necessity of the hour is for parents, teachers, and students to become more informed.

Sensitizing and Counseling of Students

There should be a series of strong sensitizing and counseling sessions by experts of various fields to the students. Even the parents and teachers could be included. Counseling experts must be appointed in the educational institutions.

Insufficient Scale and Restricted Capability

Considering the enormous need for labor, the infrastructure that educational institutions currently have is insufficient. There is a dearth of highly qualified and experienced trainers. It is

a reflection of the inadequate and improper infrastructure found in small towns and villages as well as large cities. The faculty needs to be motivated and skilled to take up higher responsibilities. The training infrastructure too needs to be made adequate keeping in mind the number of aspirants to be skilled. Another crucial aspect in skill development is the 'Train the Trainers'. The faculty's wealth of expertise and experience guarantees that the student has acquired the necessary skills and had an amazing educational experience. In light of the state of the labor market, the trainer ought to be able to evaluate the needs of the students. Additionally, the perfect balance between academic and practical learning experiences is necessary. As a result, one of the biggest challenges now is training trainers.

Mobilization

The enrollment of the students for vocational education and training has become an extremely challenging task. One of the main factors relating to the conventional outlook of those involved in skill development is still present. Since technical trade professions are often linked with low incomes and little recognition, the students would eventually advance to managerial responsibilities. There are students who are not able to pay for the fee and may not be aware of the schemes run by the government which also leads to a low mobility towards such programs. Skilling has always been branded as a blue collar job, which is further associated with low pay scales, limited growth and less challenging roles.

Scalability

For any approach to be effective, stakeholders must also provide strong support. The corporate sector's very low buy-in hinders the advancement of these efforts. The government had previously placed little emphasis on skill development; hence this field has always been disregarded. Since the model requires high capital investments, the people are not very willing to support such a model. The difficulties posed by inadequate infrastructure and sluggish bank loan processing rarely discourage aspiring business owners from creating their own. It becomes more difficult in rural areas because the populace is unaware of the many government and financial organization-sponsored plans and loan facilities. The urban areas face issues like high operational cost which discourages such entrepreneurs to come forward.

Skills Mismatch

There is a lot of issue related to the skills needed by the industry and the skills imparted through the educational and training institute. The skill set is not appropriate for the employer because there is not enough interaction between industry and faculty. Despite their potential skills, the individuals are unemployed. It becomes extremely important that the industry professionals are also included during the design of the curriculum.

No focus on Non-Technical Skills

The Vocational Training Centres in India is focusing on developing technical skills only whereas the employers feel the need of having Behavioral Skills also. According to the India Hiring Intent Survey, employers prioritize skills including domain expertise, communication, cultural fit, honesty and integrity values, adaptability, result-orientedness, interpersonal skills, and a learning attitude. These abilities are not addressed as essential components of skill development. Due to the large number of skilled workers that become unemployed, this is a significant challenge.

Low Educational Attainment

After 15 years of school, there are high rates of dropouts from institutions, particularly among female students. As a result, individuals are unable to obtain good professions since they lack the necessary skills. So in schools 1 period should be mandatory to give vocational training to the students so even if after leaving the school in midway they will get job.

Measures to Overcome the Challenges

There are several measures suggested by experts to overcome these challenges:

1. ***Skill Deficit:*** In India the capacity of skill development is around 3.1 million while 12.8 million youths are added to the Indian workforce. That's why prime minister launched skill India campaign whose target is to train 40 crores people in different sectors in India.
2. ***Perfect Match:*** There is no shortage of employment. The shortage is only of getting right skill for a particular job. Many a time, industry requires 10 +2 candidate to fill its vacancies. Institutes of industry and placement are able to meet the needs of the organization. The secret to successful placement is a precise talent matching.
3. ***Internship:*** Students have theoretical knowledge but they have no practical knowledge that becomes hurdle for them to get job. Internship provides hands-on work opportunity and helps them to apply their theoretical knowledge to real life situation. So educational institutions, placement institutes tie up with multinational and industry bodies to provide internship to students.
4. ***Soft Skills:*** Soft skills like effective communication are part of the job requirements. Soft skill instruction should be provided to students at the college and university levels. They can learn things that will help them land a job, like sharpening their speaking abilities, sending personalized letters for clients, and creating engaging powerpoint presentations.
5. ***Common Curriculum:*** The possible solution to this issue could be formulating and implementing a common curriculum for science and technology throughout the nation at each and every stage(s) of schooling. It would offer a level playing field for competition

and skill improvement. There are challenges in secondary and higher education. The fierce rivalry amongst private schools forces them to go too far in their quest to ensnare the kids. There are rumors that students use dishonest methods to obtain degrees, certificates, and diplomas.

Opportunities

Understanding the importance of Skill Development that it can “reduce un- and underemployment, increase productivity, and improve standards of living” (The World Bank), various initiatives have been taken by the Indian government in this direction. The earlier initiatives in the form of the policy frameworks related to skill development brought out periodically are listed below:

1. ***The Apprenticeship Act of 1961:*** Apprenticeship programmes in India are governed by The Apprentice Act of 1961 and the Apprenticeship Rules of 1992. Objectives are: to ensure trainees get optimum access to real work environment and on-the-job training; and to ensure that employers get skilled work force having adequate exposure to real work environment. About 254 groups of industries are covered under the Act and about 27,000 establishments engage apprentices. However, there has not been much success in implementation of this Act (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung & FICCI, 2015).
2. ***The National Policy on Skill Development, 2009:*** The National Policy on Skill Development was first formulated in 2009 to create a skills ecosystem in India. It acts as a guide to formulate strategies by addressing the different challenges in skill development. The objective is to empower the workforce with the required skills, knowledge and qualifications to make the Indian workforce globally competitive.
3. ***The National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF), 2013:*** The NSQF is a competency-based framework that organizes all qualifications according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude. Under NSQF, the learner can acquire the certification for competency needed at any level through formal, non-formal or informal learning. The NSQF is anchored at the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) and is being implemented through the National Skills Qualifications Committee (NSQC) which comprises of all key stakeholders (MSD&E, n.d.).
4. ***The National Policy on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015:*** The policy aims to provide an umbrella framework to all skill related activities carried out within the country, to align them to common standards and link skill activities with demand centres. In addition to laying down the objectives and expected outcomes, it aims at identifying various institutional frameworks which can act as the vehicle to reach the expected

outcomes. The new skills policy also provides details on how skill development efforts across the country can be aligned within the existing institutional arrangements.

5. **Draft National Education Policy, 2019:** As per Draft NEP 2019, objective of Vocational Education is to integrate vocational education into all educational institutions – schools, colleges and universities. Provide access to vocational education to at least 50% of all learners by 2025.

In addition to the above initiatives, the government launched Skill India Mission in 2015, in order to give boost up to the skill development in India. It is an umbrella scheme that has many skilling schemes and programmes under it. The chief objective is to empower the youth of the country with adequate skill sets that will enable their employment in relevant sectors and also improve productivity. To put India on the International map of knowledge and skill, it has to start from the scorch. The country's current situation is gradually evolving. The "Make in India," "Digital India," and "Skilled India" programs were developed to breathe fresh life into the country. There are connections between these plans. It appears that the country has a long way to go before reaching the objectives the government has set. India has appropriately made a timely and correct step in the right route.

Objectives of the Skill India Mission

The chief objective of the Skill India Mission is to provide market-relevant skills training to young people in the country. Moreover, the mission:

- Intends to create opportunities and space for the development of talents in Indian youth.
- It aims to develop those sectors which have been put under skill development for the last many years, and also to recognize new sectors for skill development.
- Closing the gap between skill required by the industry and skills people possess for employment generation.
- Reducing poverty in the country.
- Increasing the competitiveness of Indian businesses.
- Ensuring that skill training imparted is relevant and of quality.
- Preparing Indians to take on the world manpower/resources market.
- Diversifying the existing skill development programmes to meet today's challenges.
- Building actual competencies rather than giving people mere qualifications.
- Offering opportunities for lifelong learning for developing skills.

- Augmenting better and active engagement of social partners and building a strong public-private partnership in skill development.
- Mobilising adequate investments for financing skills development sustainable.

Schemes of Skill India Mission

In order to achieve the desired goal of skill development the government started several schemes under Skill India Mission. The schemes include:

- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana
- Skill Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (“SANKALP”)
- UDAAN
- Standard Training Assessment and Reward Scheme (STAR).
- Polytechnic Schemes
- Vocationalisation of Education

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana: Launched on 16 July 2015 Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) implemented by National Skill Development Corporation. The goal of the Skill Certification Scheme is to make it possible for a significant number of young people in India to enroll in industry-relevant skill training, which will improve their chances of finding employment. Here, training programmes have been built based on National Occupational Standards and qualification packs that have been specifically created for a variety of skill sets. Individuals with prior learning experience or skills will also be assessed and certified under Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Government has given a budget of Rs 12000 crores for next 4 years (2016-2020) to benefit 10 million youth. Some of the key components of PMKVY are:

1. **Short Term Training** - The Short Term Training imparted at PMKVY Training Centres (TCs) is expected to benefit candidates of Indian nationality who are either school/college dropouts or unemployed. Upon successful completion of their assessment, candidates shall be provided placement assistance by Training Partners (TPs). Under PMKVY, the entire training and assessment fees are paid by the Government.
2. **Recognition of Prior Learning**- Individuals with prior learning experience or skills shall be assessed and certified under the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) component of the Scheme. RPL aims to align the competencies of the unregulated workforce of the country to the NSQF.

3. **Special Projects-** The Special Projects component of PMKVY envisages the creation of a platform that will facilitate trainings in special areas and/or premises of Government bodies, Corporate or Industry bodies, and trainings in special job roles not defined under the available Qualification Packs (QPs)/National Occupational Standards (NOSs).
4. **Kaushal and Rojgar Mela-** Active participation of the community ensures transparency and accountability, and helps in leveraging the cumulative knowledge of the community for better functioning. In line with this, PMKVY assigns special importance to the involvement of the target beneficiaries through a defined mobilization process. TPs shall conduct Kaushal and Rojgar Melas every six months with press/media coverage; they are also required to participate actively in National Career Service Melas and on-ground activities.
5. **Placement-** PMKVY envisages linking the aptitude, aspiration, and knowledge of the skilled workforce it creates with employment opportunities and demands in the market. Every effort thereby needs to be made by the PMKVY TCs to provide placement opportunities to candidates, trained and certified under the Scheme. TPs shall also provide support to entrepreneurship development.
6. **Monitoring-** To ensure that high standards of quality are maintained by PMKVY TCs, NSDC and empanelled Inspection Agencies shall use various methodologies, such as self-audit reporting, call validations, surprise visits, and monitoring through the Skills Development Management System (SDMS). These methodologies shall be enhanced with the engagement of latest technologies.

Udaan: The Udaan Scheme, a Special Industry Initiative (SII) for the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), is funded by the Ministry of Home Affairs and implemented by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). The scheme is a significant effort by the central government to increase the employability of J&K's educated young, including graduates, postgraduates, and holders of three-year engineering diplomas. It is based on the recommendations of the Rangarajan Committee. It aims to provide skill development and exposure to top Indian corporations to enhance the capacity of youth in J&K. The project also seeks to open up J&K's vast talent pool to the Indian corporate sector.

SANKALP: Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood (SANKALP) is an outcome-oriented programme of Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) with a special focus on decentralised planning and quality improvement. It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme which is collaborated with the World Bank. It seeks to carry out the National Skill Development Mission's (NSDM) mandate. The district-level skilling ecosystem through cooperation and convergence has also been a focus of this scheme. The "SANKALP" scheme was started with the objectives like: creating convergence among all skill training

activities; improving the quality of skill development programs through building a pool of quality trainers, developing model curriculum and content, and standardizing assessment and certification; establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation system for skill training programs; providing access to skill training opportunities to the disadvantaged sections and creating industry-led and demand-driven skill training capacity.

Standard Training Assessment and Reward Scheme (“STAR”): The National Skill Certification and Monetary Reward is designed by the Government of India to motivate the youth in India to gain knowledge on efficient methods. This scheme was created to boost production, close the skills gap in employment, and satisfy the needs of the domestic industry. The plan offers a training program through which enrolled members can earn credentials by passing the required exams. The certificate will be provided by Government of India, NSDC... under the name Standard Training Assessment & Reward (STAR) Certificate. The certificate is valid across the country, which can be used for employment, additional skill development or entrepreneurship. The goal of the scheme is to implement the program through Public-private and Public-Public partnerships to increase employability and market mechanisms.

Polytechnic Schemes: Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) is implementing the Scheme of Polytechnics through Directorate General of Training (DGT). One of the components of this program is Community Development through Polytechnics (CDTP), which offers non-formal, short-term, employment-oriented skill development programs through Polytechnics to the underprivileged in order to help them find gainful self-employment or waged employment. The CDTP component is implemented by the State government and Union Territory Administrations through selected Polytechnics in accordance with guidelines issued by the Central government. Under the guidelines, the identified institution should target the poor and deprived sections of society in both urban and rural areas specifically women, SCs/STs, OBCs, minorities, school dropouts, street children, physically handicapped, economically weaker sections of the society and other under-privileged persons. No fee is charged from the trainees under this component and there is no restriction on the age, sex and qualification of the trainees.

The aforementioned programs and missions of the government of India's help us comprehend how, in the midst of global trends; skill development is at the core of changes occurring in education and labor markets. *The World Bank* also emphasized that in the dynamic landscape of the modern global labor market, education and workforce development systems must become more personalized, accessible (allowing for remote and hybrid learning), and continuous along throughout workers' careers— placing **“skills development”** at the heart of these global transitions. Finally, we may say that a student's path to both professional and personal success depends heavily on skill development. It supports all-around development, academic

achievement, problem-solving skills, self-confidence, employability, flexibility, and entrepreneurship. Through sincere vision and effort, academic institutions and responsible organizations may reduce poverty and marginalization and increase employability and competitiveness by incorporating skill development as a crucial component of their curricula.

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