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BRIDGING THE GAP: EDUCATION WITHOUT EMPLOYMENT IN INDIA

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The issue of education without employment is back in focus due to rising unemployment among educated youth, as highlighted by recent PLFS data. Despite reforms under the NEP 2020, a lack of industry linkages, outdated curricula, and poor skill alignment continue to hinder employability. A recent editorial by experts Gautam R. Desiraju and Mirle Surappa stressed that India's education system produces degree holders with limited job readiness, raising concerns about the future of its demographic dividend.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

India's education policy has evolved through key commissions like the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948) and the Kothari Commission (1966), both of which emphasised the role of education in national

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development. However, these policies largely focused on access, equity, and standardisation, without integrating employment-oriented skills. The colonial legacy of education as a tool to produce clerks and administrative workers persisted, promoting rote learning over critical thinking or practical training. This separation between education and employment planning has continued for decades, resulting in an academic system that prioritises degrees over job readiness an issue the NEP 2020 now attempts to address, though with limited on-ground impact so far.

PRESENT EDUCATION SYSTEM IN INDIA: STRENGTHS VS. GAPS

Strengths	Gaps/Weaknesses
Increased Access: Expansion of schools, higher enrolment under Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan	Curriculum-Industry Mismatch: Only ~20% of graduates are employable (India Skills Report 2024)
Growth of Digital Learning: NEP push for online/blended education; PM e-VIDYA, SWAYAM	Outdated Pedagogy: Focus on rote learning persists despite tech integration
NEP 2020 Reforms: Multidisciplinary education, vocational exposure, mother tongue focus	Lack of Skill-based Training: Apprenticeships and internships remain minimal at UG/PG levels
Demographic Dividend: 65% of India's population is under 35 (Census projections)	Degree > Skills Mindset: Youth chase degrees for prestige; employability remains low
IITs & IISc World Rankings Rise: Improved QS, THE rankings (2024), particularly for STEM	Weak Research Ecosystem: India spends <1% of GDP on R&D; low patent output in universities
Focus on Start-ups & Innovation: Rise of incubators, Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) support.	Poor Integration of Entrepreneurship: Start-up education not yet part of the mainstream curriculum
Internationalisation Efforts: GIFT City and Study in India initiatives to attract global talent	Uneven Quality: Rural-urban and state-wise disparities in faculty, infrastructure, and outcomes

EMPLOYMENT CRISIS AMONG EDUCATED YOUTH IN INDIA

- 1. High Unemployment among Graduates:** According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2024, unemployment is highest among youth with graduate and postgraduate degrees, reflecting a deep disconnect between education and job market needs.
- 2. Poor Employability Skills:** The India Skills Report 2024 highlights that only about 20% of Indian graduates are employable, indicating a lack of critical thinking, communication, and industry-relevant skills.
- 3. Overemphasis on Degrees:** A degree-focused system neglects skill-based learning. Many youth pursue academic qualifications without acquiring the capabilities needed in real-world employment.
- 4. Curriculum-Industry Mismatch:** Education programs are not aligned with evolving industry demands, especially in sectors like AI, green economy, and advanced manufacturing.
- 5. Lack of Vocational Training and Apprenticeships:** There is inadequate emphasis on hands-on training, internships, and vocational pathways that are essential for job readiness, particularly in non-academic professions.
- 6. Automation and Technological Disruption:** Many traditional white-collar jobs are being automated, and new jobs require digital and soft skills that are not taught in conventional degree programs.
- 7. Slow Job Creation in Formal Sector:** Formal sector jobs are not being created at the pace needed to absorb the increasing number of educated youth entering the workforce each year.

8. Psychosocial Impact and Brain Drain: Frustration due to prolonged joblessness is contributing to mental health issues and increased migration of skilled youth to countries with better employment prospects.

EVALUATION OF NEP 2020

1. Multidisciplinary and Flexible Learning Introduced: NEP 2020 has successfully introduced flexible undergraduate courses, with a multiple entry-exit system and academic credit banks (ABC).

2. Push for Vocational Education: The policy mandates vocational education from Grade 6, but progress on the ground remains slow. The target of 50% vocational integration by 2025 is unlikely to be met.

3. Emphasis on Mother Tongue/Regional Language: While promoted for early grades, implementation is uneven across states, and faces challenges in higher education and urban settings where English-medium demand is high.

4. National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 Released: The NCF aligns with NEP goals, introducing foundational literacy, competency-based learning, and revised board exams.

5. Digital and Online Learning Platforms Strengthened: Initiatives like PM e-VIDYA, DIKSHA, and the Skill India Digital Platform have expanded online learning, but digital divide issues still affect rural and poor students.

6. Teacher Training and Capacity Building: The National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) is in draft stage; implementation of regular training and performance incentives remains limited.

7. Research and Innovation Support: The National Research Foundation (NRF) is yet to be fully operational. Research culture in universities remains weak due to a lack of funding and mentorship.

8. Institutional Restructuring Slow: NEP's aim to restructure higher education into multidisciplinary institutions has not progressed rapidly; many colleges still operate in silos with outdated syllabi.

WAY FORWARD

1. Align Curriculum with Industry Needs: Regularly update school and university curricula in collaboration with industries to include emerging sectors like AI, renewable energy, robotics, and climate resilience.

2. Expand Vocational and Skill-Based Education: Strengthen institutions like ITI, NSDC, and implement apprenticeship-integrated learning from school to higher education levels, especially in semi-urban and rural areas.

3. Promote Digital Equity: Ensure widespread access to affordable internet and digital devices, particularly for students in rural and marginalised communities, to bridge the digital divide.

4. Strengthen Career Counselling and Mentorship: Institutionalise career guidance cells in schools and colleges to help students make informed choices based on aptitude, market demand, and future opportunities.

5. Enhance Teacher Training and Accountability: Fast-track the implementation of National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) with regular capacity-building, performance-linked incentives, and tech integration.

6. Accelerate NEP 2020 Implementation: Prioritise the timely execution of key NEP provisions like Academic Credit Banks, Multidisciplinary HEIs, and National Research Foundation to improve learning outcomes.

7. Foster Entrepreneurship and Start-up Ecosystem: Integrate entrepreneurship education into mainstream courses and provide incubation, seed funding, and mentorship support to encourage self-employment and innovation.

CONCLUSION

There is an urgent need to realign India's education system with evolving market demands to bridge the widening gap between learning and employability. As Swami Vivekananda wisely said, "Education is the

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manifestation of perfection already in man,” but this potential can only be realised if education leads to meaningful productivity and dignity through gainful employment. With India’s vast demographic dividend, it is imperative to act swiftly and transform this human resource advantage into a sustainable employment dividend for inclusive growth and national progress.

PRELIMS QUESTIONS

Q. The National Research Foundation (NRF), proposed under NEP 2020, aims to:

- a) Regulate teacher salaries
- b) Promote research and innovation in higher education
- c) Conduct school board examinations
- d) Provide vocational training to school students

Answer: B

MAINS QUESTIONS

Q. Discuss the challenges of employability among India’s educated youth and evaluate the impact of the National Education Policy 2020 in addressing these challenges. Suggest measures to improve the linkage between education and employment.

(250 words, 15 marks)

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