



## ENABLING HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY

Dr. Shilpa Bagdare

Assistant Professor, International Institute of Professional Studies, Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore

## ABSTRACT

Indian higher education, with one of the largest network of universities, colleges, technical, vocational and other institutions, aims at preparing individuals for career and jobs. In spite of the best efforts, a significant percentage of educated youth is not employable. There appears to be a gap between industry requirements and academic offerings. The Government of India is taking many measures to increase employability through various skill development oriented schemes while involving higher education institutions, training partners and industry. In order to improve the employability, there is a need to make suitable changes in the educational systems and create better alignment and integration between academics and industry. Students' engagement, motivation and commitment are to be developed through experiential learning approaches. The present paper aims at highlighting the need for understanding factors responsible for unemployment and proposes issues for further investigation in order to develop strategic interventions for improving employability in India.

**KEYWORDS :** Employability, Skill Development, Higher Education

## INTRODUCTION

Employment is an essential contributor to the economic growth and national development of any country. India, with a population of about 1.3 billion people, requires an educational ecosystem to provide the requisite knowledge and skill set for employability. It is observed that more than 50% of the educated youth are unemployable. The unemployment rate in India is presently around 3.5%. India has one of the largest systems of higher education in the world which is preparing individuals for different careers in life. It is being increasingly felt that with the winds of change across all dimensions of the environment and changing requirement of the employers, there is a need to update the higher education system, bring policy changes and introduce new initiatives to enhance employability of educated youth.

In the recent past, many initiatives have been undertaken by the Government of India, regulatory bodies, higher educational institutions, training organizations, and industry to boost employability through educational reforms and skill development initiatives. They have been able to impact the employability, but there is still more to be done. There is a lack of awareness and motivation among beneficiaries along with implementation related issues. India Skill Report (2018) highlights that present employability index has improved to 45.60 and it is estimated that the Indian workforce will increase to approximately 600 million in year 2022 from the current 473 million. At the same time it is also emerging that the employment landscape is constantly changing, posing new challenges before us. With the changing technologies, processes and innovations, there would be new types of jobs in future which would require different kind of knowledge and skill set. In order to improve the employability status of the country, there is a need to bring the required changes in the educational institutions which prepares the youth with required kind of attitude, knowledge, skills, qualities and proficiencies.

## Higher Education and Employability

The role of educational institutions in imparting knowledge and developing skills for career and employability is well established. Since centuries, educational institutions have been preparing individuals to take up different professions and contribute for the socio-economic development of the nation. As per the demands of the job or profession, specific type of knowledge and skill sets is required. Educational institutions have to revisit their courses, curriculum, teaching learning process and other elements to adapt as per the changing requirements. India has a great advantage of being a young nation with more than 62% of its population in the working age group of 15-59 years, and more than 54% of its total population below 25 years, and about 17.79% between 15 to 24 years of age. This demographic dividend can be converted into a

great asset – the skill capital of the world – by judiciously taking right course of action for their education and training to make them skill strong and employable.

The demand for skilled workforce will substantially increase in near future. National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2015) states that “the country, however, has a big challenge ahead as it is estimated that only 4.69% of the total workforce in India has undergone formal skill training as compared to 68% in UK, 75% in Germany, 52% in USA, 80% in Japan and 96% in South Korea. On demand side, a skill gap study has been conducted by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) over 2010-2014, which indicates that there is an additional net incremental requirement of 109.73 million skilled manpower by 2022 in twenty four key sectors.” India Skill Report (2018) also estimates that the Indian workforce will increase to approximately 600 million in year 2022 from the current 473 million.

This phenomenon is a result of many factors including industrial revolution 4.0 which has brought a wide range of disruptive digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotics, 3 D Printing, Internet of Things (IOT), Big Data, Mobile Internet, Cloud Technology etc. More future jobs will emerge in the industries affected by Automation Technologies and Information Communication Technologies. In order to prepare individuals for future jobs, educational institutions will be required to adapt their courses and reorient their teaching-learning-evaluation and other processes in line with the changing requirements. It would also call for greater participation of industry in terms of specifying their requirement and providing support for experiential learning.

Asnitoua (2015) observed that integrating Internships or W-P (work placements) was one of the most effective ways of reducing the gap between industry requirements and higher education. Rowe and Zegwaard (2017) supported the notion of providing WIL (Work Integrated Learning) to university students for promoting graduate employability. WIL is based on integrating experiential into academics through practice, internships, training, field projects, or other work based learning activities. The authors also argued for adopting a holistic approach for designing curriculum by embedding employability through academics. It calls for collective efforts by all the stakeholders. Gill (2018) emphasized upon the development of employability skills in terms of graduate attributes such as personal qualities, understanding, skills – cognitive, emotional, and behavioural along with integrity, which can be collectively described by students, industry and educators. The author cites the example of how the forum helped students in greater engagement and interactions with industry, increased employability. In many countries, particularly in Germany,

experiential learning is integrated in their educational system by adopt dual educational system through vocational education and training (VET) under their apprenticeship program. It is one of the reasons for that Germany has one the lowest unemployment rate in the world.

Government of India has taken many initiatives for skill development by establishing Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE). National Skill Development Mission states- "To rapidly scale up skill development efforts in India, by creating an end-to-end, outcome-focused implementation framework, which aligns demands of the employers for a well-trained skilled workforce with aspirations of Indian citizens for sustainable livelihoods." One of its flagship scheme of MSDE is Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY). The objective of this Skill Certification Scheme is to enable a large number of Indian youth to take up industry-relevant skill training that will help them in securing a better livelihood. Individuals with prior learning experience or skills will also be assessed and certified under Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). It has also actively made comprehensive reforms to the Apprentices Act 1961, where maximum control has been given to the private sector so that the industry standards are maintained as per market requirement. MSDE also introduced a scheme called National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) in August 2016 to promote skill development and industry connect. Under this scheme, the Government of India provides financial benefits for apprenticeship. Another important initiative of the government under MSDE is National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF). In order to bridge the industry academia gap – National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) under MSDE has developed a unique model to integrate skill based trainings into the academic cycle of the Universities. These are based on National Occupational Standards set by industry through sector skill councils. It offers courses across 40 sectors in the country under the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF). NSDC is working with 21 Universities, UGC and AICTE catering to more than 1200 colleges and 400 community colleges across the country. University Grants Commission (UGC) is offering skill-based courses under NSQF through Community Colleges, B.Voc. Degree Programme and Deen Dayal KAUSHAL Kendra. In order to further boost skill development and employability, Government of India in collaboration with AICTE has launched a scheme called NEEM (National Employability Enhancement Mission) to facilitate on the job training for 3 to 36 months to the students enrolled under B.Voc courses. In this schemes students can choose a skill of his / her interest and get on the job training along with the stipend.

It has been observed that in spite of such great initiatives by the Government of India, Higher Educational Institutions and Industry, the employability level is still very low and there exists a gap between industry requirements and educational offerings of the institutions. It is important to review and understand the impact of government and educational initiatives towards skill development and employment generation. The issues related to this state needs to be examined carefully and appropriate interventions by different stakeholders would be required to improve employability.

#### Issues for research and interventions

It is important to understand the drivers responsible for the present state of employability and the trends for future jobs. There is a need to explore the gap between the required knowledge and skills for the emerging job scenario for employability and present offerings by the higher educational institutions, and propose appropriate interventions at different levels to improve the educational ecosystem and thereby, employability in India. Some of the issues which require careful attention and further investigation relates to:

- The present and future employment scenario in India.
- The drivers governing employment in India.
- The present offerings by the Higher Education Institutions in conventional, vocational, technical and professional courses.
- The availability of knowledge and skill set, and other attributes among students for employability.

- The perceptions about the present academic offerings by the Higher Education Institutions and requirements of the employers for future jobs.
- The Institutional support for career counselling, internships, placements, professional networking, alumni networking etc.
- The awareness, implementation and impact of Government of India initiatives for skill development and improving employability.
- The initiatives which can help the Higher Education Institutions in preparing students with requisite knowledge and skills for better employability.
- The initiatives which can be taken by Government of India, Higher Education Institutions and Industry to collectively enhance employability.

#### CONCLUSION

Employment not only provides livelihood and improves standards of living, but also is a major contributor to the social and national development. The issues raised in this paper require immediate attention of all stakeholders. An in-depth investigation and analysis of these issues will help in getting insights about the grass root realities in preparing individuals for employment. It will also help in developing a roadmap for appropriate interventions by the stakeholders – Government of India and Regulatory Bodies, Higher Education Institutions, and Industry which may involve some policy reforms, new schemes, redesigning and restructuring academic approaches in the light of emerging requirements of the industry.

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