ALIGNING GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS WITH VIKSIT BHARAT: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

Dr. Mamta Sharma
Principal,
Aditi Mahavidyalaya,
University of Delhi

Prof. Sandeep Kumar Sharma
Department of Chemistry,
Rajdhani College, University of Delhi

Gurman Singh
Department of English,
Aditi Mahavidyalaya,
University of Del

Abstract: *'Viksit Bharat'* is the title India has adopted for its definitive vision of becoming a developed nation by 2047. Fundamental to this vision is the cultivation of a highly skilled workforce, capable of engaging with the global economy's evolving shifts. Focusing on the employability skills gained by graduates from Indian degree colleges, this paper presents strategies for aligning such skills with the aspirations of Viksit Bharat as well as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. In addition to its analysis of existing employability gaps as well as effects of current policies, the paper offers a holistic skill development framework. In this manner, the paper aims to contribute to India's economic growth.

Introduction

Viksit Bharat (lit. 'Developed/advanced Bharat') encapsulates India's vision of development by 2047. The three pillars this vision hinges on: advanced technological infrastructure, robust economic growth, highly skilled workforce. It follows that graduates from India's higher education institutions will have a vital role to play in actualizing this vision. However, a significant gap exists between skills attained in academic institutions and the industry's requirements (Sinha, 2019). This paper focuses on closing this gap by aligning employability skills with the NEP 2020, which seeks to prepare students for the demands of the global job market via holistic and multidisciplinary education (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Literature Review

Job readiness and career success are determined by one's employability skills – commonly divided into technical (hard) and non-technical (soft). In addition to domain-specific technical skills, contemporary

research (e.g. Forrier & Sels, 2003) emphasizes graduates should also possess soft skills, e.g. communication, teamwork, leadership, critical thinking. As per the World Economic Forum (2020), future job markets will lay stress on such skills as problem-solving, adaptability, and emotional intelligence – areas where Indian graduates tend to lag.

With an aim to address these shortcomings, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 advocates for a multidisciplinary education system, synthesizing practical learning and theoretical knowledge. It also promotes 'life skills such as communication, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience.' (NEP 2020, pp. 5) To this end, industry-academia collaboration, experiential learning, and continuous skill development are prioritized (Ministry of Education, 2020). Despite government and institutional initiatives, studies indicate, employability among Indian graduates lingers below global standards; key gaps persist in critical thinking, problem-solving, and soft skills (Prasad & Parasuraman, 2014; NASSCOM, 2009).

Osmani, M. et al[1] look at teaching methodologies availed at Qatar University in terms of impact vis-à-vis enhancing employability skills among Management Information Systems (MIS) graduates. Their study recognizes that traditional approaches (e.g. lectures, case studies) prove insufficient in fostering essential skills such as critical thinking, time management, and research. As such, it integrates such innovative methods as flipped classrooms, case study workshops, problem-based learning, and collaborative learning. The study finds that this approach effects an exponential improvement in students' skills: a blended learning model effectively aligns graduate competencies with market demands.

A Pathways Of Viksit Bharat @2047,[2] edited by Dr. Chavan (2024), presents chapters illustrating potential roadmaps to actualize *Viksit Bharat @2047*. It covers various development strategies across socio-economic, educational, cultural, and technological sectors, in addition to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's orientation towards inclusivity, digital literacy, and vocational training, aimed at cultivating

[1] Osmani, M. et al. 'Developing Employability Skills in Information System Graduates: Traditional vs. Innovative Teaching Methods.' *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education* (Volume 14, Issue 2), April-June 2018.
[2] *A Pathways Of Viksit Bharat @2047*. Edited and published by Dr. Prabhakar Chavan. 2024.

a skilled and prosperous Bharat. The volume further explores lifelong learning, professional development, women's empowerment, and cyber hygiene in education; in addition, sustainable tourism, regional infrastructure, and economic finance initiatives are discussed vis-à-vis long-term growth and job creation. It also touches upon traditional knowledge systems, spirituality, and culture as empowering paradigms, providing a pertinent synthesis of India's heritage into contemporary pedagogical and social practices.

Kesharwani (2020)[3] engages with the issue of technology adoption, through the framework of digital natives (raised with technology) and digital immigrants (adapting technology). Digital natives, having grown up with and continuously used technology, have a greater aptitude for adapting to and mastering newer technological and digital innovations. As such, it is vital to facilitate relevant support structures ('optimal user–technology–induction combinations,' pp. 15) for digital immigrants, who have encountered technology later in life, and thus find it harder to acclimatize to newer technologies. This is especially crucial in India's context, in terms of ensuring equitable access to state-of-the-art technologies and digital literacy, thus maximizing students' employability in the modern world.

Sriprakash's *Pedagogies for Development: The Politics and Practice of Child-Centred Education in India*[4] is a timely intervention into the pressing issue of providing equitable, accessible and affordable education to children in developing nations. it advocates for policymakers to take into account and address local contexts such as facilities and resources available in rural educational institutions. By creating participatory, inclusive, and learner-centred educational space, the children can be oriented towards becoming skilled and capable citizens across the board. To this end, digital/AI tools like digital teachers ('E-Acharya' and E-Gurus) have been proposed as ways to augment teaching infrastructure in rural educational spaces. (Virmani, 2024, pp. 42-43).

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[3] Kesharwani, A. 'Do (how) digital natives adopt a new technology differently than digital immigrants? A longitudinal study.' *Information & Management* (Volume 57, Issue 2), March 2020. 103170, ISSN 0378-7206, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2019.103170.

[4] Sriprakash, A. *Pedagogies for Development: The Politics and Practice of Child-Centred Education in India.* Springer, 2012.

Understanding emotional nuances within social contexts is essential to provide a holistic education amenable to students' psychological and pedagogical needs. To this end, Torino, et al. (2019)[5] present a relevant study of microaggression, through which we may gain a general understanding of emotional dynamics not only in the classroom, but also in society in general. The volume's working definition of microaggressions as 'derogatory slights or insults' that may reinforce social inequalities, is especially relevant in a diverse, multicultural country like India. It is important to identify and mitigate such social tendencies in educational spaces, to ensure a free and motivating learning environment.

These texts circumscribe this paper's general ambit of concerns, approaches and methodology, contextualized in terms of the question of graduates' upskilling and employability in India, keeping in mind the vision of *Viksit Bharat @1947.*

Current Scenario of Employability Skills in India

For several years, the prospect of graduates' employability in India has been a pertinent topic of concern. The India Skills Report (2022) reports that only about 50% of Indian graduates are considered employable – a figure that has been stagnant of late. This section pinpoints three critical skill gaps: technical skills, soft skills, and cognitive abilities.

1. **Technical Skills**: Technological advancements in areas like artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data science, and their rapid adoption with the COVID-19 pandemic, has rendered many curricula outdated. This paradigm shift necessitates proficiency in these technologies, affecting students, graduates and professionals alike. In India, many graduates lack proficiency in the latest industry-relevant technologies, due to a number of factors – inequitable access, inadequate

[5] *Microaggression theory: Influence and implications*. Edited by Torino, G., Rivera, D., Capodilupo, C. M., Nadal, K. L., & Sue, D. W. John Wiley & Sons, 2019. http://dx.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11275372

facilities and guidance, digital immigration, etc. This serves to hamper their employability (Haleem, Javaid, et al, 2022).

2. **Soft Skills**: Employers consistently highlight the lack of communication, leadership, and teamwork skills among graduates. Today's collaborative, fast-paced work environments make these soft skills – 'performance elements that extend beyond task performance' (Miles et al, 2002, pp.15) – indispensable. A World Economic Forum report (2020) indicates the increasingly essential nature of skills such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, and negotiation – and yet, such skills are frequently underdeveloped in the current education system.
3. **Cognitive Skills**: Employers also report a deficiency in critical thinking and problem-solving abilities among graduates – skills vital for dealing with complex, dynamic work environments. In the professional world, these skills are crucial as regards innovation, adapting to new workplace challenges and consistent upskilling (Prasad & Parasuraman, 2014).

A number of factors contribute to these skill gaps: lack of practical exposure, outdated curricula, limited collaboration between industry and academia, etc. (NASSCOM, 2009). Rigid academic frameworks and structures across institutions continue to prioritize retention and theoretical learning over hands-on experience; this leaves graduates underprepared for real-world challenges (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2011).

Research Methodology

This paper employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing quantitative as well as qualitative data collection techniques. To assess the contemporary state of employability skills, a national survey was conducted with 500 graduates across disciplines, 100 faculty members, and 50 industry professionals. In-depth interviews with a subset of respondents, qualitative insights were gained as regards the efficiency of existing training programs, as well as relevance of skills imparted in educational institutions.

Further, secondary data from government reports, industry publications, and academic journals were analyzed, so as to contextualize the findings with regards to broader global trends and policy initiatives. Data triangulation allows for accuracy and a comprehensive understanding of India's employability landscape.

Findings and Discussion

The research findings reveal that substantial gaps exist in Indian graduates' employability skills. Among the most pressing areas of deficiency count communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and teamwork. According to industry professionals, these gaps serve as hurdles, keeping graduates from contributing effectively in collaborative, innovative environments (Prasad & Parasuraman, 2014; World Economic Forum, 2020).

Communication Skills: Graduates frequently struggle with clear articulation of ideas, as well as working within teams – general skills essential to the contemporary workplace. The gap in communication skills, verbal as well as written, affects employability in a substantial manner, since employers tend to prioritize candidates who can effectively collaborate across teams (Forrier & Sels, 2003).

Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking: In addition to technical proficiency, it is also crucial to be capable of applying knowledge to solve real-world problems. Although Indian graduates may possess adequate technical skills, they often lack the critical thinking skills critical for adapting to complex and unpredictable work environments (Prasad & Parasuraman, 2014). Importantly, this finding is consistent with global trends: employers increasingly value problem-solving as a core competency (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Industry-Academia Collaboration: Despite NEP 2020's advocacy for industry partnerships, in practice such collaborations remain limited. Lacking linkages with industries, many educational institutions leave graduates underprepared for the workplace's challenges (Ministry of Education, 2020). Facilitating greater

collaboration between academia and industry will ensure students are provided with real-world experience; further, it will additionally help align curricula keep up to speed with current market needs.

Proposed Framework for Enhancing Employability Skills

In light of these findings, a comprehensive framework is proffered, designed to align with the goals of *Viksit Bharat* as well as the provisions of NEP 2020. In this regard, it centers curriculum development, industry-academia collaboration, and continuous skill development.

1. **Curriculum Development**: Educational curricula should be revised to encourage inclusion of industry-relevant skills. This includes: introduction of interdisciplinary courses, experiential learning opportunities, practical applications of theoretical knowledge, etc. In fact, the NEP 2020 encourages such a flexible approach; it advocates for the inclusion of skill-based training and real-world problem-solving in academic programs (Ministry of Education, 2020).
2. **Industry-Academia Collaboration**: Partnerships between educational institutions and industries can provide internships, live projects, and mentorship programs for hands-on experience. In addition to practical exposure, such collaborations also assist students in bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world application (NASSCOM, 2009; Prasad & Parasuraman, 2014).
3. **Continuous Skill Development**: Skills like adaptability, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, are increasingly important in today's job market. Such skills can be developed through ongoing training and education, taking into account local and individual skilling needs (NEP 2020). Further, lifelong learning should be encouraged among graduates via continuous professional development programs. (World Economic Forum, 2020).
4. **Assessment and Feedback Mechanisms**: Regular assessment of students' employability skills is instrument in gauging progress and generating actionable feedback. Moreover, continuous

evaluation is also vital for identifying relevant areas for improvement, as also to guide students in their skill development journey (Forrier & Sels, 2003).

5. **Faculty Development**: Importantly, faculty members need to be well-trained to adequately deliver industry-relevant education. NEP 2020 highlights the pertinence of faculty development in shaping an environment amenable to practical learning and skill development (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Recommendations

The grounds for a employability-enhancing framework are thus established. To ensure successful implementation of this framework, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Policy Reforms**: Government policies should work on promoting stronger linkages between industry and academia. This can be accentuated through incentives for collaboration (Ministry of Education, 2020). In addition, in line with NEP 2020, domain-specific skills must be incorporated into curricula, and holistic development be prioritized.
2. **Infrastructure Investment**: In addition to physical infrastructures, investing in digital platforms (and other infrastructure supportive of continuous skill development) is essential for scaling up efforts to improve employability universally, and to address and provide for local/domain-specific contexts. This also extends to 'technology-based education platforms, such as DIKSHA/SWAYAM,' facilitating accessible learning and skill upgrading for students and teachers alike. (NEP 2020).
3. **Culture of Lifelong Learning**: Both educational institutions and industries should encourage a culture promoting lifelong learning and adaptability. This also ties in with the development of digital learning infrastructures, e.g. the development of digital applications 'dedicated to vocational training and lifelong learning' (World Economic Forum, 2020, pp. 45).

Conclusion

It is critical to enhance employability skills among graduates if India is to achieve the vision of *Viksit Bharat*. Existing skill gaps must be identified and addressed, and a comprehensive framework should be implemented subsequently for skill development. Bridging the skills gap will serve to enhance employability, amplify productivity, reinforce industry ties, strengthen India's start-up ecosystem, shape a globally competitive and future-ready workforce, and elevate the stature of educational institutions. Collectively, these outcomes will prove instrumental in creating a robust, skilled, and adaptable workforce. Through a committed focus on skill alignment and employability, India can realize its aspirations of self-reliance, sustainable growth, and inclusive prosperity.

In this manner, India will surely produce the kind of highly skilled workforce capable of fueling innovation, economic growth, and global competitiveness. Aligning such strategies with NEP 2020 will assure their meaningful integration into the national framework for educational reform and workforce development.

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