



Combating Unemployment through Education for Employability Skills: the NEP-2020 Perspective

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Abstract:

The article offers a holistic view of the challenge of unemployment and the use of education for employability skills as a measure to overcome it. It starts with the indication that the young generation is the most affected as a result of unemployment. This young generation, struggling for employment, may cause severe national unrest. The view presented here has been structured from the perspective of the NEP2020. It emphasizes the empowerment of the young ones through education for employability, which demands skills like innovation, transfer of learning, empathy, acceptance, etc., beyond the content knowledge required for a particular job. It has also been highlighted that the education for employability must ensure equity, excellence and sustainability. Some general issues related to the theme of the article, like multiple entries and multiple exit option, skill development of people with disability, the effect of a financial crunch and change of social and personal attitude have entered into the purview of the article.

Keywords: *Unemployment; Employability skills; Education; NEP2020; National Economy And Youth Unrest.*

1. Introduction:

Unemployment has a direct impact on a country's economy. First, this indicates under-utilization of the country's human resources. Second, it creates severe pressure on the mental health of the eligible persons, which may lead to a serious threat to the stability of that country. Especially in our country, the situation is alarming since the majority of such unemployed persons are young people. In this context, one can recall the concept of the great psychologist Erik Erikson, who coined the question 'Who am I?' on behalf of an adolescent. According to his theory, an individual, in the adolescent stage, wants to identify the role in the environment and seeks the answer 'Who am I?'. This is true for his career as well. If he fails to get the answer, he may face confusion and the development of a balanced personality gets delayed. Erikson calls this stage of delay as 'the stage of moratorium'. It may be interesting to know that Erikson himself had to go through this stage of moratorium. After the school days, he had to spend many years around Europe without an identification of self as an adult. What is important, during his moratorium stage, Erikson experienced that the outcome of the confusion might lead to a rebellious attitude. Here, the young individual blindly refuses whatever the parents and others advocate. Erikson has designated this state to be a negative identity.

In this article, a general discussion on the issues of overcoming the challenges of unemployment with the help of education for generating and increasing employability has been presented from the perspective of the National Education Policy (NEP) -2020.

2. The major Reasons for Unemployment:

The reasons can be many: local, national and international. Major ones are: Dominance of unskilled or under-skilled labourers, Skill mismatch and recent Advancement in technology.

People are termed as unskilled or under-skilled when they do not have sufficient skills beyond their normal education, which is not oriented to a job. Such people either don't get any job or may be exploited with very low wages, getting involved in jobs that require minimum skill, e.g. fast-food worker, elementary construction worker, etc. Definitely, the education system has to be responsible for empowering such workforce and at the same time changing the social mind set against exploitation. In this context, the words from Dr. Bhaskar Chatterjee, Principal Adviser in the Planning Commission 2008-09, admitted that "job market conditions are such that enough jobs are not created to absorb all the educated manpower. This leads to recession, slow-down or even under jobless growth."

Skill mismatch occurs when people acquire vocational skills, but those skills are not required in the job market. In order to combat such failures, the education system should train the learner how to identify possible openings and then acquire the relevant skills. Apart from these, the learner should acquire the skill for getting a particular job that can be used in another job as well.

To reduce the skill mismatch, the following steps can be taken: The planners may look at each vertical sector of the Indian Industry and assess the numbers at each level in terms of manpower requirement. The second step is to create courses which answer the needs of the skills requirements. The third step is to find efficient teachers for the skill development courses. One way is to retain the experienced workers so that they are able to impart the needed education to the students. Skill development is a major initiative that tries to reach the people who need it the most. We should also note that it is not just about creating jobs for a minimum number of people within a country, but it is actually skilling at a broad level.

Due to the rapid development of technology in the form of AI, Robotics, Machine learning, etc., many jobs are not requiring human labour. In other words, many people are facing the threat of losing their job and the number is huge. However, with a change in the look towards the challenge, one can make it a helper or a partner. Let us take the example from the field of teaching and learning. Examples of using technology as a helper are using an overhead projector, power point projections, etc., which help in making the process of teaching and learning more effective. In some critical situations like the lockdown period for COVID 19, there was no other way than to use an online process. People had to make changes in the prevailing pedagogical practices so as to make teaching and learning possible through an online platform. Here we say, the technology has become a partner in the process. One example of the strategy is the TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge). Job seekers also must be alert about the changes, challenges and opportunities and must be ready to be a lifelong learner.

3. The NEP-2020 Perspective:

NEP2020 has given emphasis to overcoming the challenges with the following guidelines.

Career mapping: The job seeker should look around with an open mind at the possibilities of careers. While doing so, the person should not be judgmental about whether this career is good or that career is bad.

Career choices: Then the job-seeker can make choices. Here also, the choice should not be dominated by the feeling that this career is good and that career is bad, or it should not be guided by the opinions of others. Rather, those should be used as sources of information, and the information available should be cross-checked before use.

Preparing for the chosen career: Once the choices are made, the person should prepare for those career entry requirements: relevant content materials, relevant skills like critical thinking and a person's own liking.

Remaining in touch with career counselling through multiple channels: Information and guidance are available in the different print media like Employment News, social media and other channels. The job-seeking person should keep in touch with these channels.

However, from the standpoint of education, all of the above activities are not easy and cannot be developed through the conventional general and even vocational education. It requires a completely new type of education that is multidisciplinary and at the same time integrated. This is the major recommendation of the NEP2020.

Now, one can have a quick look at the vocational education levels : It can be on the Job Training (Example: cashier, fashion model, farmhand, office clerk etc.); Apprenticeship (Example: carpenter, electrician, mason, mechanic, plumber, welder etc.); Vocational certification: (Example: chef, cosmetologist, dental assistant, paralegal); Associate degree (Example: commercial artist, draftsman, licensed practical nurse etc.); Undergraduate degree (Example: accountant, teacher, registered nurse, software developer etc.); Professional Degree (Example: architect, dentist, engineer, lawyer, medical doctor etc.); Graduate Degree (Example: astronaut, mathematician, nurse practitioner, scientist, university professor etc.)

The recommendations of NEP2020, which promises to enhance employability, are compatible with the philosophical bases of education as well. Those are: Swami Vivekananda's 'Man-making Education', Sri Aurobindo's 'Integral Education', Mahatma Gandhi's 'Basic Education', Dewey's 'Pragmatism', Dewey's 'Pragmatism', etc.

As advocated by Swami Vivekananda, "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man." This goes well with the concept of entrepreneurship. Actually, Vivekananda insisted that every person should realise his own worth, be confident and work hard for achieving difficult goals. This type of education has been called by him as the Man-making education. With this philosophy, a job-seeker does not pray for a job; on the other hand, he discovers his worth for a job.

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Education advocates the integration of the five key components of a person's life. The components are: the physical, vital, psychic, mental, and spiritual. It emphasizes the integration of knowledge among all the disciplines and, at the same time, the integration of the inner and outer growth of a person. With this philosophy, a job-seeker does not see the world of work as fragments. Rather, he perceives it as an integrated entity.

Basic education of Mahatma Gandhi is also known as 'Nai Talim'. This education is free and compulsory for 7-14 years. The education is activity-based. The students should learn practical, productive work along with general education. With this philosophy, the jobseeker gains the mental setup for accepting the dignity of labor irrespective of whether labor is given by others or self.

Dewey's pragmatism advocates problem-solving learning in real-life situation. This philosophy generates an educational system that gives importance to gathering experience and problem-solving. Thus, with this philosophy, a job-seeker gets trained in the modern job market through the learning of problem-solving skills.

4. Employability Skills:

With the background described in the previous sections, one can generalize the need of the moment related to employability skills. To appreciate it, one can focus on two basic skills required for a teaching post: communication skills and basic psychological counselling skills. Examples of such skills are innovation, learning how to learn, and transfer learning, ability to communicate with other persons or a group of persons. Those are quite general and are useful for a number of professions. With these basic skills, a person is more likely to acquire expertise in other specific skills, and even in multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary environments. Skills can often be divided into general and specific skills e.g. in the domain of work, some general skills would include time management, team work and leadership, self-motivation and others, whereas, domain-specific skills would be useful only for a certain job.

The skills are classified in the following manner as well.

Labour Skills: It is a measure of the amount of a worker's expertise, specialization, wages and supervisory capacity,

Life Skills: Life skills are problem-solving behaviours used appropriately and responsibly in the management of personal affairs.

People Skills: The term people skills are used to include both psychological skills and social skills. It is the ability to communicate effectively with people in a friendly way.

Social Skills: Social skills facilitate interaction and communication with others and help others in the process of learning socialization.

Soft Skills: The skills are further classified as:

'Communication skills' that help to convince employers about the job seeker's potentialities; 'Self-management skills' that help to take the challenge of the uncertain job market; 'Information and communication technology skills' that help to take on the challenge of fast advancement of technology; 'Entrepreneurship skills' that ensure individual self-dependence in job creation; 'Green Skills' that help to ensure sustainable development.

According to the NEP 2020, 'Soft skills' are communication, discussion, and debate. This notion of a 'knowledge must be brought back to Indian education, as it is exactly the kind of education that will be required for the 21st century.'

5. Need for Equity, Excellence And Sustainability:

The act of providing equity ensures extending need-based assistance to different individuals so as to achieve a common goal of building employability skills. In the language of NEP 2020, what is important can be stated as 'equitable access to quality education to all students, with a special emphasis on SEDGs (Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups)'.

Excellence means a high level of achievement in some activity. The individual achieves excellence in the attitude, critical thinking and emotional control. The external achievement is an outcome of that internal environment.

Sustainability means "ability to continue over a long period of time". For example, a sustainable development indicates serving the purpose of the present generation and, at the same time, ensuring the welfare of generations to come. The NEP 2020 places this target as : 'India's progress towards achieving

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) of ensuring free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education for all children.’

Taken together, the role of Equity, Excellence and Sustainability towards Employability can be summarized as follows. Lack of equity generates inequality on economic and social status that again leads to the digital divide, poor access to modern avenues to information and inability to harness the opportunities. Thus, poor equity leads to ‘poor attitude of excellence and its sustainability’, finally leading to lowering employability. In India, the prevalence of poor equity is one of the major problems today. A positive attitude towards sustainability generates the opportunity to create a huge number of job opportunities.

6. Some General Issues:

Multiple entries and multiple exit option : In order to admit flexibility, NEP2020 allows and encourages multiple entry points and multiple exit points in different courses of higher education so as to take care of the changing choices made by the learners in a changing environment. For example, the recommendation of NEP2020 allows one to leave after one year, two year, and three years of a 4-year graduation program with certificates of achievement at each of the stages.

Special emphasis on the skill development of People with disabilities: In the language of NEP 2020, Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality. The education system must aim to benefit India’s children so that no child loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of the circumstances of birth or background. This Policy envisions ensuring equitable access to quality education to all students, with a special emphasis on SEDGs.

What is the challenge that may crop up due to a lack of fund? The policy starts with the target: to earmark suitable Government funds for the education of SEDGs and to provide more financial assistance and scholarships to SEDGs in both public and private HEIs. Unfortunately, everywhere there is a financial crunch.

What are the way outs for achieving the goal even with minimal fund?

Students must be trained in self-learning and self-surfing. Self-learning is more or less known to us. Self-surfing means the searching digital resources efficiently and effectively. Information is abundant on the digital platform. But most of the students and even adults do not know how to get the desired information, how to make a cross-check, or how to use the information innovatively. In most situations, they are doing copy and paste and facing cognitive loss and the risk of using wrong information. This has been more important with the advent of AI based resources.

Mere joining a job is not successful employment:

If a new applicant for a job observes that this workplace offers a good work environment and there is a possibility of getting a better job after getting experience here, the new applicant gets motivated. Also, that person contributes wholeheartedly after joining the service. The efficiency of the workplace can also be improved.

Change of social and personal attitude:

In contemporary India, there is a low social attitude to vocational education. Naturally, the same attitude is percolated to the young students.

There is a huge gap in salary among different types of work, which are also called different collar jobs. However, such classification is not well-defined. Among those, easily distinguishable ones are blue-collar

and white-collar. Examples of blue-collar jobs are a factory worker, a plumber, a construction worker, etc. These involve mostly manual work. Examples of white-collar jobs are an office manager, an accountant, or a software developer. These involve mostly strategic thinking and problem-solving.

7. Conclusion:

Unemployment has a direct impact on the economy of a country. However, the challenge can be overcome. The government and non-government agencies have to develop flexible policies and offer courses which cater to the needs of the fast-changing job market. Employability skills have become an essential requirement in addition to the content knowledge that is required for a job. Among such skills, the most relevant ones are innovation, transfer of learning, empathy, ability to accept, etc. The guidelines provided by the NEP 2020 in this regard are quite helpful.

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