Integrating School Culture and Competency-Based Curriculum to Enhance Employability Skills in Secondary Students: A Parallel Skill–Academic Pathway

Dr. Arya Ajit Tawde

Assistant Professor, Smt. Surajba College of Education, Mumbai
Email: aryatawde33@gmail.com

Abstract:

The evolving demands of the 21st-century workforce require schools to integrate academic learning with practical skill development. Although NEP 2020 strongly endorses vocational education, implementation across schools remains inconsistent, leaving adolescents—particularly academically weaker students—with limited exposure to certified skills. This paper argues that school culture plays a decisive role in bridging this policy–practice gap. Drawing on secondary literature, it highlights persistent challenges in career guidance, vocational integration, and teacher preparedness. A Parallel Skill–Academic Pathway is proposed, wherein cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains develop simultaneously in a culture that values dignity of labour, collaboration, and experiential learning. The model outlines scalable skill options appropriate for Grades 6–10, alongside assessment mechanisms based on hands-on performance and behavioural competencies. Embedded within school culture, this approach can reduce dropout rates, enhance employability, and support inclusive, future-ready education.

Keywords: School Culture, Skill-Based Education, Competency-Based Curriculum, Nep 2020, Employability, Vocational Learning.

Introduction:

Adolescence is a formative period involving exploration, fluctuating motivation, and uneven academic performance. Many students leave school with the belief that vocational skills can be acquired later; however, most never enter formal training, ultimately engaging in low-skilled work. This highlights a fundamental limitation of traditional schooling, which privileges cognitive learning while undervaluing practical competencies crucial for employability.

School culture—defined by Peterson and Deal (1998) as the deep patterns of values, beliefs, and norms that shape behaviour—significantly influences how students perceive learning, career pathways, and hands-on work. When a school values collaboration, creativity, dignity of labour, and experiential learning, students are more likely to develop practical competencies and self-belief.

Given the rapidly changing labour market and NEP 2020's call for integrating vocational learning into mainstream education, schools need models that embed skill development in everyday culture rather than treat it as an optional add-on. This paper proposes such a model, linking literature gaps to a culture-driven, parallel skill–academic approach.

Aim of the Study:

To propose a parallel model in which academic learning and vocational skills develop simultaneously to enhance employability among secondary students.

Objectives:

1. To examine how school culture influences adolescent skill development.

2. To review the current status of vocational education in secondary schools.

3. To propose a scalable Parallel Skill–Academic Pathway aligned with NEP 2020.

4. To explain the potential impact of the proposed model on engagement and employability.

Research Questions:

1. How does school culture shape students' engagement with skills?

2. What is the status of skill-based education in secondary schools?

3. How can a parallel skill–academic model be designed for Grades 6–10?

4. What impact can the proposed model have on student engagement and employability?

Data Collection:

This study draws exclusively on secondary sources, including NEP 2020 documents, government reports, journal articles, and reviews on school culture and career readiness. Secondary data enables broad analysis of policy intentions, implementation gaps, and systemic challenges across Indian schools.

Literature Reviews:

Studies consistently reveal inadequate career guidance for adolescents. Janetius (2013) shows that poor counselling leaves students uncertain about future pathways, while Amoah et al. (2015) find that effective guidance improves decision-making when appropriate tools exist. Recent research highlight policy reforms. Naveen (2022) emphasises NEP 2020's mandate for vocational learning from Grade 9. Lukose and Sharma (2023) argue that 21st-century skills require strong teacher preparation and meaningful integration into the school. Kaur (2024) highlights the importance of industry-aligned, hands-on vocational education for adolescent empowerment. A recent study by Bala et al. (2025) concludes that NEP 2020 provides a robust framework but its success depends on classroom-level implementation and collaborative governance.

Although extensive research discusses policy intent or school challenges, few studies offer feasible, scalable models that schools can implement with limited resources. The missing link is how school culture can operationalise vocational education on a daily basis. This paper addresses that gap by connecting school culture with an actionable skill–academic framework.

School Culture and Skill Development

Cavanagh and Dellar's typology identify six school cultural dimensions that includes professional collaboration, shared goals, supportive learning environment, teacher–student relationships, and community engagement. These dimensions show how effectively new initiatives can be adopted. Stoll and Fink's typology show that "moving schools," characterised by adaptability and collective vision, are more successful in implementing innovations.

A supportive school culture strengthens vocational learning by:

- Encouraging teachers to integrate hands-on tasks into lessons.

- Normalising dignity of labour and practical work.

- Fostering community partnerships for real-world exposure.

- Ensuring psychological safety, allowing students to attempt, fail, and improve.

Thus, culture is not peripheral; it is the mechanism that enables academic and skill learning to grow in parallel.

Status of Skill-Based Education:

Despite NEP 2020's emphasis on vocational integration, implementation remains uneven. Reports—including summaries of the PARAKH Rashtriya Sarvekshan 2024—indicate that fewer than half of surveyed schools offer structured skill-based subjects and enrolment levels remain low. This suggests that skill-based education is still emerging rather than fully embedded.

Schools face persistent barriers:

- Shortage of trained vocational instructors

- Inadequate workshops or skill labs

- Limited industry and community partnerships

- Resource constraints affecting hands-on learning

Consequently, adolescents especially those who are academically weaker or practically inclined miss opportunities to gain certified skills, reinforcing low employability.

Proposed Parallel Integrated Skill–Academic Education Model (Grades 6–10)

The proposed model positions cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains as equally important. Skill-based learning operates parallel to academic learning and not as a fallback option. Every student participates, ensuring inclusivity.

Key Skill Areas for Grades 6–10

Basic and intermediate skills appropriate for Indian school contexts:

- Gardening, horticulture, eco-projects

- Cooking and food handling

- Stitching, tailoring, embroidery

- Mehndi, self-grooming, basic beautician skills

- Basic electrical work and appliance repair

- Digital creativity: posters, simple graphics, videos

- Pottery and handicrafts

- Yoga, karate, taekwondo

- Soft skills: communication, teamwork, leadership, emotional regulation

These skills are affordable, culturally relevant, and feasible even in low-resource schools using local materials or community expertise. High-resource schools can add advanced modules (culinary arts, fashion design, robotics, filmmaking, cosmetology, sports training).

Scalability and Assessment Table

School Type	Skill Level Offered	Assessment Methods	Certification Approach
Low-resource schools	Foundational skills using locally available materials	Practical demonstrations, participation, teamwork, safe handling	School-based competency certificate
Mid-resource schools	Foundational + intermediate vocational skills	Project completion, application of skills, creativity	Level-based certification
High-resource schools	Advanced modules (culinary arts, robotics, multimedia, design)	Portfolios, specialised performance tasks, presentations	Tiered certification aligned to national vocational standards

Impact of the Model

Embedding this model within school culture may:

- Increase engagement and reduce dropout rates among students.

- Provide verifiable skills that enhance employability.

- Promote dignity of labour and reduce vocational stigma.

- Strengthen partnership between school, community and industry.

- Schools contribute to reduce skill gap among youth.

- Experiential learning develops a stronger sense of purpose, identity and orientation towards students' future careers.

- Offer meaningful pathways for academically weaker students.

By integrating psychomotor and affective development into daily school life, students experience learning as purposeful, relevant, and empowering.

Challenges and Considerations

Implementation barriers include:

- Shortage of trained staff for hands-on modules

- Resource limitations

- Parental resistance favouring traditional academics

- Difficulties standardising practical and behavioural assessment

- Uneven community support in remote areas

These challenges underscore the need for teacher development, collaborative leadership, and partnerships with local artisans or industries.

Conclusion:

Integrating vocational and academic learning through a parallel model embedded within school culture has the potential to significantly strengthen secondary education. Such an approach ensures that all learners—irrespective of their academic proficiency—acquire certified practical skills alongside their academic studies. This dual pathway nurtures creativity, confidence, and dignity of labour, aligns closely with the vision of NEP 2020, and broadens future career possibilities for adolescents. By giving equal importance to psychomotor, affective, and cognitive development, schools can reduce dropout rates, promote social equity, and enhance employability outcomes.

Although the model could be implemented in a phased manner, a gradual rollout risks depriving a large segment of students of essential work-based skills during crucial years of schooling. This may, in turn, affect their long-term career readiness and contribute to a shortage of a skilled workforce. Hence, adopting the parallel model comprehensively and at an early stage is vital.

Furthermore, the sustainability and effectiveness of this model depend on inclusive decision-making. Therefore, the perspectives of subject experts, teachers, school leaders, students, and parents must be taken into consideration. Their collective insights will ensure that the framework remains contextually relevant, pedagogically sound, and responsive to the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders.

References:

- Amoah, S. A., Kwofie, I. A., & Kwofie, F. A. (2015). The school counsellor and students' career choice in high school. Journal of Education and Practice,6,57-65.

- Bala, I., Kaur, K., & Dhiman, T. (2025). Revolutionizing classroom learning through NEP 2020: Bridging policy and practice in modern education. International Journal of Contemporary Research in Multidisciplinary,4(4),265-274.

- Janetius, S. T., & Mini, T. C. (2013). Choice of field of study in higher education and career decision. Management Wisdom, 2(1).

- Kaur, H. (2024). NEP 2020: Skill enhancement through vocational education. Edumania- An International Multidisciplinary Journal, 2(1),23-32

- Lukose, M., & Sharma, P. (2023). A Study on the role of NEP 2020: Skill development of students. Amity International Journal of Teacher Education (AIJTE),9

- Maity, A. (2025). Teacher effectiveness in relation to ICT acquaintance among secondary teachers of Medinipur District of West Bengal: A study on demographic variables. *American Journal of Social and Humanitarian Research, 6*(5), 1108–1118. https://globalresearchnetwork.us/index.php/ajshr/article/view/3641

- Maity, A., et al. (2023). Correlation between study habit, test anxiety and academic achievement of the male and female B.Ed. college students. *Journal for ReAttach Therapy and Developmental Diversities, 6*(9s), 1872–1880. https://doi.org/10.53555/jrtdd.v6i9s.2660

- Maity, A., et al. (2023). Job satisfaction among secondary school teachers in Paschim Medinipur district in the present context. *Journal of Pharmaceutical Negative Results, 14*(3).

- Maity, A., et al. (2024). Exploring multidisciplinary perspectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: Implications for education, society, and policy reform. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development, 8*(5), 1303–1307.

- Maity, A., Sanuar, S., & Ghosh, D. (2024). An assessment of the socio-economic status of the minority girls students at secondary level in Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 30*(5), 9123–9127. https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i5.4522

- Maity, N., Maity, A., & Bairagya, S. (2024). Innovation in teaching-learning process: Requirement of the present era. In *Perspective issues and research in teacher education* (ISBN 978-93-92522-26-0).

- Majumder, R., & Bairagya, S. (2025). Attitude towards e-learning: A study on secondary school teachers. *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development, 3*(3), 80–88.

- Majumder, R., & Bairagya, S. (2025). Exploring teachers' perceptions on the provisions of NEP 2020 for teachers. *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development, 3*(3).

- Roy, S., & Bairagya, S. (2019). Conceptualisation of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) of science from Shulman's notion to Refined Consensus Model (RCM): A journey. *Education India Journal: A Quarterly Refereed Journal of Dialogues on Education, 8*(2), 55–59.

Citation: **Tawde. Dr. A. A.,** (2025) "Integrating School Culture and Competency-Based Curriculum to Enhance Employability Skills in Secondary Students: A Parallel Skill–Academic Pathway", *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development (BIJMRD)*, Vol-3, Issue-12(1), December-2025.