

Role of Higher Education in Improving Employability Skills among The Indian Youth – A Study

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Abstract

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Higher Education, 1948 says that "Everyone has the right to education" and this is the first international legal instrument which recognizes education as the human right. Such is the importance education has across the globe. It has been proved time and again that education is the solution to most of the social and economic issues which the world is facing. But education alone will not serve the purpose of growth and sustainability; there is need for better skills in order to make the youth employable and prepared to enter the job market. To achieve this objective of education coupled with required relevant employability skills, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of United Nations has identified Quality Education as Goal No.4 among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nations (UN) has called for immediate action by the member countries regarding the same. India has also taken up the issue and has been pouring in lot of efforts regarding this. This paper is an effort in knowing and understanding the UNDP SDG in detail with higher emphasis on Goal No.4 i.e., quality education. In order to achieve this, empirical study will be adopted. The paper also intends to bring out the efforts undertaken by the Government of the country regarding transforming the education system at the primary, secondary and higher education level with the intention of making education accessible to all and also emphasizing on improving the employability skills among the youths in accordance to the UNDP SDG Goal 4.

Keywords: *Education, Higher Education, Employability skills, Skill Development, Youth*

The process of learning through promotion of knowledge, skills, morals and values is called education. The word education is derived from the Latin word 'Educatio' which means breeding, bringing up or rearing. The early education started with the adults teaching the young about the skills needed to function in the society. A formal education system came into existence with establishment of structured environment which included classrooms, curriculum, students, assessment, feedback and other activities which disseminates knowledge. Along with the regular education setup, there are also other forms like the informal learning, self-directed learning, evidence-based learning and open learning. Indian Education system started with the Gurukula system and the present modern education system came into existence with Macaulay's Minutes on education, 1835. The British East India Company established Calcutta Madrasa, then three Universities at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras were established in 1857 and all these concentrated on Humanities and English. Ministry of Education (MoE) looks after the higher education in

the country and it aims at providing opportunity to quality higher education. Providing quality higher education to all is aim of governments across the world.

The United Nations emphasizes on quality education for all irrespective of any sort of discrimination, because as per Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Higher Education, 1948, "Everyone has the right to education". This is the first international legal instrument which recognizes education as human right.

Article 26 also emphasize on availability of technical and professional education and higher education for all.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in September 2015 at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York. The Agenda contains 17 goals namely No Poverty; Zero Hunger; Good Health and Well-Being; Quality Education; Gender Equality; Clean Water and Sanitation; Affordable and Green Energy; Decent Work and Economic growth; Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; Reduced inequalities; Sustainable cities and communities; Responsible consumption and production; Climate Action; Life Below Water; Life on land; Peace, justice and strong institution; and Partnership goals.

Review of Literature

- **Lee Bernice et.al (2022)** in the article "Students leading students: a qualitative study exploring a student-led model for engagement with the sustainable development goals" highlights the role played by student leader at the grassroots in engaging and organizing the SDG activities. Thematic analysis was used for the study to know about the experience of the student leaders involved in conducting SDG activities. From the study it was found that the leadership role undertaken by the students helped them in overcoming the barrier of lack of knowledge and thus leading to community-building and a sense of ownership, hopefulness, self-confidence and inspiration to take lead. All these in turn shows the commitment of HEIs towards responding to the needs of students at the grassroots and HEIs promoting innovation and capacity building towards achieving SDGs.
- **Ghasemy Majid et.al (2022)** in the article "A Comparative study on turnaround leadership in higher education and the successful implementation of the UN's sustainable development goals" has concentrated on comparing the academics of Malaysian and Japanese HEIs and have highlighted their role as leaders in promoting sustainability in higher education as per the UNSDG. This paper has adopted quantitative comparative research in collection of data from the lecturers affiliated to the Malaysian and Japanese public and private universities.
- **Briens et.al (2022)** in the article "Assessing sustainability knowledge for undergraduate students in different academic programs and settings" have undertaken campus-wide survey to assess the students' sustainability knowledge score (SKS) through assessing the impact of undergraduate curricula on sustainability knowledge and assessing the opportunities for improving sustainability education in HEIs. The findings represented the role of HEIs in developing sustainable education and improving the sustainable learning outcomes.

From the review of various articles, it can be noted that most of the articles reviewed focused on sustainable education by HEIs which promotes leadership, confidence, increased hopefulness among the students, innovation, capacity building and community development. The articles reviewed missed on promoting employable skills in particular as per the UNDP SDG. Therefore, this paper tries to find out importance of employable skills among the youth, and highlights on the efforts undertaken by the Government of India in effectively implementing UNDP SDG 4.

Objectives

1. To know the importance of employability skills among the youth.
2. To know about the UNDP Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 4).
3. To know the efforts made by Government of India in implementing UNDP SDG 4.
4. To offer suggestions to improve the employability skills among the youth.

Methodology

The researcher has adopted empirical study for this paper, where the data is collected majorly from the secondary sources through research articles and journals, Reports of the Government, Reports of the Institutions, and Reports of the Government institutions.

Importance of Employability Skills Among the Youth

The technological advancement has led to industry seeking qualified human resources with relevant skills matching their requirements. The human resources need to be competitive enough to adopt to the changing requirements of the industry. The industry expects youths with such flexible and competitive skills as part of their team. There are many such reasons for the youth to be employable:

- 66% of the total population in India consists of youth below the age of 35 years and therefore there is an immediate need to create employment opportunities for them.
- The increased number of youth population demands skills to sustain competition and also to explore employment opportunities as well as entrepreneurial opportunities.
- There is a need to withstand the pressure of globalization.
- There is a need for expertise in technical skills along with soft skills such as communication, critical thinking and problem solving.
- New business ideas demand exceptional skills to float the business ideas into actual business and survive in the market.

UNDP Sustainable Development Goal 4

The Goal 4 of Agenda 2030 commits itself to provide inclusive and quality education at all levels irrespective of any sort of discrimination. It strives to provide for an environment where the children and the youth can realize their capabilities and potential to the fullest. The paper tries to highlight on the SDG 4 which aims to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. The Goal 4 of Agenda 2030 has the following seven objectives:

Targets		Indicators	
4.1	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes	4.1.1	Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex

		4.1.2	Completion rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)
4.2	By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education	4.2.1	Proportion of children aged 24–59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex
		4.2.2	Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex
4.3	By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university	4.3.1	Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex
4.4	By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship	4.4.1	Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill
4.5	By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations	4.5.1	Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated
4.6	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy	4.6.1	Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex
4.7	By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development	4.7.1	Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment

4a	Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all	4.a.1	Proportion of schools offering basic services, by type of service
4b	By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries	4.b.1	Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships by sector and type of study
4c	By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States	4.c.1	Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications, by education level

Source: (United Nations, n.d.)

The Goals 4.3 to 4.7 is relevant here in this paper since it concentrates on skill development through vocational and technical education, developing relevant skills to fetch decent jobs and also promote entrepreneurship, to both men and women, including persons with disabilities, indigenous people. These goals also ensure that learners acquire knowledge and skills for sustainable development.

Steps Undertaken by the Government of India in Developing Skills Among the Youth through HEIs

- National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) aims to align its objectives on par with the goals of UNDP SDG4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Government of India rolled out the NEP 2020 and the document indicates on revamping not just the curriculum but also the pedagogy.
- The NEP 2020 document insists on experiential learning along with inclusion of basic arts, crafts, sports, cultural activities, literature along with conventional subjects which helps in the development of competitiveness, creative thinking, critical thinking, rational thinking as well as ethical thinking among the students. This leads to development of skills as well among the students thus making them potential for employment.
- Experiential learning is suggested by NEP 2020 at school level to improve cognitive skills among the students.

- NEP 2020 focuses on integrated higher education system wherein professional and vocational education will be offered. Medium of instruction for these programmes to be in local/Indian languages.
- NEP 2020 aims at integrating Humanities and Arts with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) helps in positive learning with increased creativity, problem solving skills, communication skills, team work, and moral awareness which help the youths to cope up with the organizational environment.
- Integrating vocational education programmes with mainstream programmes to emphasize on dignity of labour and overcome the social status hierarchy associated with vocational education programmes is also the highlight of NEP 2020.
- NEP 2020 emphasis for vocational skill development to ensure obtaining local employment.
- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to have options for Open Distance Learning (ODL) and Online programmes to provide opportunity for lifelong learning to the youths as per SDG4. These programmes should be necessarily of quality equivalent to diploma or degree offered at HEIs at their campuses.
- Announcement of the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) in 2013.
- Vocational education to be introduced at the middle and secondary school level and to be integrated into higher education.
- Secondary schools to collaborate with ITIs, Polytechnic and local industry.
- HEIs to conduct short-term certificate courses in various skills.
- 'Lok Vidya', a vocational knowledge developed in India to be made available to students through integration into vocational courses.
- MHRD will constitute a National Committee for Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE) which consists of experts in vocational education and representatives from across Ministries, in collaboration with industry to ensure choosing of vocational courses based on the skill gap analysis and tapping local opportunities.
- The NSQF will provide details for each vocation and profession and these will be aligned with standards of International Standard Classification of Occupation maintained by International Labour Organization.
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana by Technical Institutions (PMKVY-TI), to be implemented through AICTE approved colleges to impart Engineering skills to drop-out students (All India Council for Technical Education, 2017) and to prepare them to secure jobs in the private sector.
- AICTE has signed an agreement with Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (DBEIS), UK as part of the joint operation of activities under UK-India Education and Research Initiative (UKIERI) Phase III, wherein skills will be integrated into the education system (All India Council for Technical Education, 2017).
- AICTE has signed an MoU with IL&FS Skills Development Corporation Ltd; Advanced Technology Development Centre (ATDC); Footwear Design Development Institute (FDDI), Indira Gandhi

National Centre for Arts (IGNCA); National Institute of Electronics & Information Technology (NIEIT) to impart vocational training to students enrolled under NSQF programme and the training centre imparting the training is called as the Skill Knowledge Providers (SKP).

- AICTE approved Polytechnics will be provided financial assistance by the AICTE to run the courses as per the NSQF under the Community College Scheme. (All India Council for Technical Education, 2017).
- AICTE has signed MoU with AICTE-LinkedIn, AICTE-ICT Academy; AICTE-Monster.com under the Employability Enhancement Training Programme (EETP) to enhance the employment opportunities under the skill initiatives.
- NEAT (National Educational Alliance for Technology) is a public-private partnership (PPP) model between Government of India (through AICTE) and Education Technology companies, wherein the companies will be provided a national portal to showcase their products to the learners, who can procure the products based on their requirements. The main aim of this PPP is to ensure availability of technological products to the students on a single platform and the products having high employable skills will be showcased on the portal. (Ministry of Education, 2021).

Suggestions to Improve Employability Skills Among the Youth

- The HEIs to assist students in working on the technical as well as soft skills.
- Implement the programmes and projects of Government at the earliest in the HEIs.
- Create awareness among the youth regarding skill development initiatives undertaken by the HEIs under the schemes of Government.
- The skills offered at the HEIs should be in accordance with the requirements of the industry/employer.
- The HEIs need to impart an effective practical skill along with formal education to enable the youths to gain employment.
- HEIs need to work on changing the pedagogy with inclusion of technology.
- The HEIs need to follow-up on the skill development initiatives, in order to know the usefulness of such initiatives.
- The HEIs can sign MoUs with industries located in the local area to provide employable skills to the local students and thus increasing the chances of employability of the youths.

Conclusion

From the study and review of various articles undertaken it is very much necessary for the youth of the country to have skills both technical as well as soft skills which are to be in-line with the requirements of the industry. Not just employable skills but also it is essential for the youths to have entrepreneurial skills. The responsibility of imparting these skills to the youth needs to be taken up by the HEIs, which in turn also increases the Gross Enrollment Ratio (27.1% as per AISHE Report 2019-20) in higher education. HEIs can publicize about their skill development initiatives for the youth and can ensure higher enrollment into programmes. The skill development initiatives of the Government can be complimented by the HEIs, by implementation and imparting industry specific training and entrepreneurial skills through their trained faculties and well-equipped infrastructural facilities available. Thus, making the youths of the country

ready to take up employment in accordance with their skills and also to take up entrepreneurship based on the skills and the demand in the market.

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