



Addressing Skill Mismatch of Indian Youths Through Experiential Learning with reference to NEP 2020

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Abstract : Education is fundamental for achieving full human potential and promoting national development. Providing universal access to quality education is the key to India's continued ascent, and leadership on the global stage. Universal high-quality education is the best way for developing and maximizing our country's rich talents and resources for the good of the individual and the society at large. India will have the highest population of young people in the world over the next decade, and our ability to provide high-quality educational opportunities to them will determine the future of our country. The future labour market situation of young persons is highly influenced by their initial experiences, including how quickly and how well they can access the labour market, and the skills and competencies acquired through education and training (ILO, 2019). Skill development initiatives offering training, skilling, upskilling, and reskilling of millions of people may reap the desired outcomes if the foundational and incremental education is highly tilted towards applied learning. Thus, in all likelihood, it would become difficult to carry out effective skilling missions without the introduction of parallel policies to improve our education system in line with the changing dynamics of the 21st century. India's National Education Policy was framed way back in 1986 and modified in 1992. Over the last three decades, significant changes have taken place in India's education. At this juncture, my paper highlights the attempts made by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to diagnose the problems plaguing the sector and provides innovative solutions to the problems right from the pre-school level to higher education courses for making it skill based and experiential. The policy adopts a learner-centric approach while focusing on experiential & lifelong learning, vocational education, and the transformation of higher education institutions for bridging the skill mismatching. One of the most crucial policy overhauls in the NEP pertains to the dismantling of the rigid distinction between curricular, extra-curricular, and co-curricular subjects in school along with the integration of vocational education into mainstream education in a gradual manner. This would provide the much-needed flexibility to the students to realize their interests and sharpen in-built skills while also acquiring new ones.

Key Words: NEP 2020, Skill Mismatch, Experiential Learning, Indian Youth.

1. Introduction :

Education needs to focus on all-round development and it is best obtained through experience. Education is effective when it is transacted through work experience and craft and not only through books and abstraction. For true character-building education, the focus needs to be on values, ethics and ideal citizenship. Education needs to be based on non-violence. All forms of violence and exclusion in schools needs to be rooted out. Focus is also needed on culture, arts, music, dance sports and games which are the basis for the development of creativity, imagination and peaceful living with harmony. Educational planning needs to be undertaken with rural Indian masses in mind. Community is a part of every school and the community's engagement in terms of owning and managing of schools needs to be focused and promoted. With these ideas, the present article focusses on how to improve the quality of education through experiential learning.



Background of Experiential Learning

As humans, we are social animals and tend to interact with the people and environment around us. It is from our experiences we have amassed over time that we learn the most in life. While knowledge from books is important, the true worth of the knowledge and information gained from school books is known through practical experiences where you implement the knowledge and understand the value of it. By the way of doing, a human learns the most and experiences gathered from actions stay with us as lessons.

For us, practical experiences are the connecting links between theory and knowledge. Experiences are what shape a student's intellect and have a great role to play in how they learn and what they learn. In a world which demands a lot out of an individual than just bookish knowledge taken in by rote learning, experiential learning is the future of learning. Like the famous scientist Albert Einstein once said, all knowledge of reality starts from experience and ends with it. Theory might be giving us an inkling of reality and the framework to work with it, but each one of us understands the reality of the world around us through individual experiences. Experiential learning therefore preserves a person's individualism and gives him the freedom to navigate his own path of learning. This way students are honed to be independent, confident and intelligent.

Experiential Learning and It's Importance

In our early childhood, books are not our first teachers. Books come second to our early experiences which teach us a lot of things and develop our thought processes and reflexes. From our likes to dislikes, our beliefs to our fears, all our behavioural nuances and body language have been shaped from our early childhood experiences. Our brain and its perception develop from our experiences because as a toddler, our brain has no knowledge of many things. It is through our first experiences that we differentiate between things and separate the right from wrong. Whether it is our first words or our first steps, the most basic learning for us happens through experiences. For example, whether fire is hot or not is not known to a baby until he has come close to it. We only know of fire's warmth and its potential to harm us through our first experiences around it. We learn the most basic as well as the most complex things in life through experiences. It therefore makes sense to extend learning through experiences during schooling too and integrating experience into the learning process at school is called experiential learning.

Experiential learning not only shapes the skill set of a child but also the mindset of a child by affecting their convictions and beliefs. While values and beliefs cannot be taught theoretically, they can be imbibed experientially in a child. For example, the importance of charity and compassion is only understood when a child steps out of the school and observes the lesser privileged people who need charity to survive. The art of giving and empathy is imbibed in our students through various social welfare and community service and forms a crucial part of experiential learning. Experiential learning therefore is a part of every part of education in the school.

Experiential learning allows the students to identify their areas of interest and develop them into feasible skill set so that they can be implemented in real life and help them build their career at a later stage in their life. It engages the students in a better and fruitful way, ensuring that they learn something new every day at school and prepare themselves for the future that awaits them outside it. Engaging the student mind during years when they have short attention spans is a challenge and experiential learning achieves that goal easily. Experiential learning engages the mind in a stimulating way and promotes the overall development of a child. Since one of the prime goals of education is to help the child go through 360-degree development, experiential learning is an important part of its learning strategy. By replacing rote learning with experiential learning, we support the development of 21st century skills like critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are necessary for their future.

Through experiences, the school accelerates learning for the students as they learn in a faster and better way through practical encounters. For example, instead of only focusing on theoretical physics, the students focus on finding out the real-life applications of those theories and this helps them understand the concepts of physics better. Experiential learning is seen in case of literature and languages too where the students learn the usage of languages by implementing and sharpening their oratory as well as writing skills.

Skill Mismatching

Skills mismatch is a discrepancy between the skills that are sought by employers and the skills that are possessed by individuals. Simply put, it is a mismatch between skills and jobs. This means that education and training are not providing the skills demanded in the labour market, or that the economy does not create jobs that correspond to the skills of individuals.



Why is it important to address Skill Mismatching

The consequences of skills mismatch reach all levels of the labour market.

At the individual level there are serious wage penalties especially for overqualification that eventually affect both job and life satisfaction. For example, you would assume that in developing countries overqualification should not be a problem because of a lack of sufficient training opportunities. However, people receive training and are still unable to find a job that corresponds to their skill level, which means they are not employed at their full productivity potential. In addition, skill deficiencies decrease chances of landing a job altogether.

For companies, skills mismatch has negative consequences for productivity and competitiveness, which affects their ability to implement new products, services or technologies. What is more, skills mismatch causes higher staff turnover and sub-optimal work organization. Eventually skills mismatch leads to the loss of profits and markets.

For countries and regions skills mismatch can increase unemployment, and affect competitiveness and attractiveness to investors, meaning lost opportunities on the pathway to productive transformation and job creation. Public or private resources are invested in training with the assumption that achieved qualifications will yield positive results in terms of employment insertion or wages. Yet, if skills mismatch is present, these expectations often do not materialize, leading to returns on investment that are lower than expected.

Steps Taken by the Govt. of India to address Skill Mismatching

To address the skills mismatch, the Government of India in the recent years has set up the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and various schemes under its purview such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Skill India, SANKALP, National Skill Development Mission, among others. Although significant progress has been made to skill and re-skill India's growing young workforce, there remain concerns regarding the market relevance of candidates keeping in view the rapid technological advances and the digitization that is transforming our world.

The future labour market situation of young persons is highly influenced by their initial experiences, including how quickly and how well they can access the labour market, and the skills and competencies acquired through education and training (ILO, 2019). Skill development initiatives offering training, skilling, upskilling, and reskilling of millions of people may not reap the desired outcomes if the foundational and incremental education is highly tilted towards rote learning rather than applied learning. Thus, in all likelihood, it would become difficult to carry out effective skilling missions without the introduction of parallel policies to improve our education system in line with the changing dynamics of the 21st century as emphasized in NEP 2020.

India's National Education Policy was framed way back in 1986 and modified in 1992. Over the last three decades, significant changes have taken place in India's education system in almost every segment of the sector. Still, there remain many problems ranging from inadequate enrolment to quality issues to lack of equity and insufficient infrastructure. At this juncture, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has attempted to diagnose the problems plaguing the sector and provides innovative solutions to the problems right from the pre-school level to higher education courses.

The policy adopts a learner-centric approach while focusing on experiential & lifelong learning, vocational education, and the transformation of higher education institutions. One of the most crucial policy overhauls in the NEP pertains to the dismantling of the rigid distinction between curricular, extra-curricular, and co-curricular subjects in school along with the integration of vocational education into mainstream education in a gradual manner. This would provide the much-needed flexibility to the students to realize their interests and sharpen in-built skills while also acquiring new ones.

The proposed vocational skill exposure starting from the middle and secondary grades through internship opportunities with local industry, businesses, artists, crafts persons, professionals, among others is also a welcome step to lay the foundation of early technical education and would accelerate the skilling efforts in the country. Hence, the NEP envisages a renewed focus to promote creativity and curiosity among young minds to make the curriculum of schools & colleges more skill-oriented, thereby, leading to a transformation of our youth into tangible global resources.

As such skill development is a continually evolving process; it doesn't stop at one stage. To become an Aatm Nirbhar Bharat as envisioned by our Hon'ble Prime Minister and a true "knowledge-based economy", India needs to build innovative and advanced skills and go beyond automation, computers, and electronics. Better late than never, the announced NEP should provide a further impetus to Government's Skill India campaign and establish a strong workforce equipped with better skills including life skills, problem-solving skills, critical thinking, scientific vigour, etc to meet the challenges of the times ahead.



Skill development is a significant driver to address poverty reduction by improving employability and inclusive growth. It facilitates a cycle of high productivity, increased employment opportunities, income growth, and overall development. For the last few years, the Government has laid the foundations for a sustainable skill development ecosystem, however, it is now time to further build and bank upon it by leveraging the NEP to reap the benefits of our unique demographic dividend.

It becomes crucial to align the skilling efforts with the NEP to further stimulate the skill development initiatives in the country. The on-going skilling initiatives would need to be turned around and tweaked accordingly to inculcate the approach and spirit of the NEP. This would ensure the formation of a strong human capital base ready to serve the nation targeting self-reliance and also engage with the world from a position of strength and valour.

CONCLUSION / SUMMARY:

The primary aim of this article is to promote Gandhiji's ideas on Experiential Learning, Nai Talim, Work Education and Community Engagement, and mainstreaming them in School Education and Teacher Education Curriculum & Pedagogy for developing skills in the youths so that they will fit them as per the societal challenges. Curriculum Exercises for D. El. Ed., B.Ed. and Class wise lessons/activities and assessment items from Pre-primary to Class – XII and even at higher level are principal inputs. We can achieve the goal if concepts of Nai Talim, Work Experience, Experiential Learning, skilling and Community Engagement are integrated in the Curriculum and Pedagogy of both Teacher Education and School Education. Teachers need to be oriented on the transaction of proposed lessons, activities and assessment to integrate in the regular in-service teacher training programmes under "Samagra Siksha Abhiyan" and other courses under faculty development programme meant for teachers of higher education. The proposed lessons focusing on Work Education, Experiential Learning, skilling with appropriate activities/projects linking education to life could be incorporated in the regular text books and assessment practices from pre-primary to Class XII and higher education. We hope the ideas are useful in initiating, enhancing and implementing Experiential Learning, Work Education, skilling and Community Engagement at all Education levels.

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