

Catalyzing India's Progress: Integrating Youth Empowerment, Skill-Based Education, and Economic Development Initiatives

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Abstract

India, home to the world's largest youth population, recognizes its youth demographic as a pivotal 'window of opportunity' for national growth and development. The challenge lies in proactively addressing the multifaceted needs of this demographic to harness its potential effectively. This paper explores the intersection of youth, skill-based education, and national development, emphasizing the critical role of skill-based education in equipping the youth for a dynamic job market and fostering comprehensive socio-economic development. The National Education Policy 2020 serves as a transformative milestone, envisioning a holistic education system aligned with 21st-century goals. Key features include universal access to schooling, vocational integration, and targeted literacy goals, reflecting a commitment to nurturing a skilled and enlightened youth. The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector emerges as a crucial player in inclusive industrial development, providing substantial employment opportunities and contributing significantly to the nation's economic fabric. The state of Odisha aligns with the national vision, undertaking initiatives contributing to the overarching goal of youth development and community engagement. The impact of these endeavors not only contributes to economic growth but also lays the groundwork for a socially conscious and globally competitive nation.

Keywords: Youth demographic, Population projections, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Window of opportunity, Youth development, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Economic development, National Education Policy (NEP 2020), Sustainable Development Goal 4, Vocational education, National Research Foundation (NRF), Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), Skill India Mission, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Atal Innovation Mission (AIM), Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), Biju Yuva Vahini, Odisha Skill Development Authority (OSDA), Global competitiveness.

Introduction

The youth demographic constitutes a dynamic and vibrant segment of the population, and India proudly holds the distinction of having the world's largest youth population. According to the Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections, commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, individuals aged 15-29 comprised 27.2% of the population in 2021. Projections indicate a decrease to 22.7% by 2036, yet the absolute number remains substantial, standing at 345 million. Recognizing the profound impact of this sizable youth population on work participation and dependency

ratios, it is commonly referred to as a 'window of opportunity' for the growth and development of our country. However, this opportunity necessitates proactive action before the demographic window begins to close. While it offers promising prospects for growth, it also presents challenges related to inclusive development and the imperative to bridge societal divides. Effectively addressing the multifaceted needs of the youth requires interventions that transcend traditional sector programs. A comprehensive approach, encompassing a variety of initiatives, becomes imperative to cater to the diverse aspects of youth development. To harness this demographic dividend, our economy must demonstrate the capacity to accommodate the expanding labor force. Furthermore, the youth must be equipped with the requisite education, skills, health awareness, and other enabling factors to contribute productively to the economy. The Government of India allocates substantial investments to youth-oriented programs through its diverse Ministries/Departments. Concurrently, State Governments and various stakeholders collaborate to bolster youth development and facilitate active youth participation. Both the state and central governments have undertaken initiatives to cultivate a productive workforce capable of making sustainable contributions to India's economic development through avenues such as education, employment, skill development, and entrepreneurship. Over the last five decades, the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector has evolved into a highly vibrant and dynamic component of the Indian economy. This sector plays a significant role in the economic and social development of the country by promoting entrepreneurship and generating substantial employment opportunities at relatively lower capital costs, second only to agriculture. MSMEs operate synergistically with large industries as ancillary units, contributing significantly to the inclusive industrial development of the country. The Ministry of MSME administers various schemes aimed at providing financial assistance, technology support and up gradation, infrastructure development, skill enhancement and training, and market assistance for MSMEs, thereby fostering their competitiveness and overall growth.

National Education Policy (NEP 2020)

The National Education Policy 2020 represents a landmark in the educational landscape of the 21st century, designed to address the evolving developmental needs of our nation. Encompassing a comprehensive overhaul, the policy envisions a restructured education system, encompassing regulation and governance, aligned with the aspirational goals of 21st-century education, including Sustainable Development Goal 4. It harmonizes with India's rich traditions and value systems while aiming to develop cognitive capacities such as literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, and problem-solving, alongside fostering social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions.

Key features of NEP 2020 pertinent to youth development include:

1. Ensuring universal access at all levels of schooling from pre-primary to Grade 12.
2. Integration of vocational education into both school and higher education systems.
3. Targeting an increase in Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education to 50%.
4. Establishment of an Academic Bank of Credit.
5. Creation of Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs).
6. Formation of the National Research Foundation (NRF).
7. Introduction of a single overarching umbrella body, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), for the promotion of the higher education sector, encompassing independent bodies for standard setting (General Education Council), funding (Higher Education Grants Council -

HEGC), accreditation (National Accreditation Council - NAC), and regulation (National Higher Education Regulatory Council - NHERC).

8. Expansion of open and distance learning to augment GER.
9. Integration of professional education into the higher education system, with a focus on transforming standalone technical, health science, legal, and agricultural universities into multidisciplinary institutions.
10. Teacher education reform, including a 4-year integrated stage-specific, subject-specific Bachelor of Education program.
11. Aspiring to achieve 100% youth and adult literacy.

The NEP 2020 emphasizes the importance of vocational education and skill development. It proposes that all students should receive vocational education from Class 9 onwards. The NEP 2020 introduces a 5+3+3+4 system, replacing the 10+2 structure, for a more flexible and focused approach.

Youth, skill-based education, and economic development of a country.

The intersection of youth, skill-based education, and national development is a critical nexus that shapes the trajectory of a country's progress in the contemporary global landscape. Skill-based education plays a central role in equipping the youth with the practical competencies required in the dynamic job market. It transcends traditional academic learning, focusing on imparting skills that align with industry demands, fostering entrepreneurship, and cultivating a workforce capable of driving innovation. A skilled workforce attracts investments, stimulates entrepreneurship, and propels industries forward, leading to a robust and diversified economy. It narrows the gap between urban and rural areas, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds, ensuring that the benefits of development are widespread. In an interconnected world, nations must prepare their youth to be globally competitive. Skill-based education ensures that the workforce is not only proficient in local industries but can also navigate the demands of the international job market, fostering global collaborations and partnerships.

Further, it helps them to learn and develop new skills that are:

- **Industry Alignment:** A skill-based education system focuses on imparting practical skills that are directly relevant to the needs of industries. This alignment ensures that individuals are equipped with the skills demanded by the job market.
- **Entrepreneurship Development:** Skill-based education fosters an entrepreneurial mindset by providing individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to start and manage their businesses. This can lead to the creation of new job opportunities.
- **Increased Employability:** Skill-based education emphasizes hands-on, practical learning, ensuring that individuals are not just academically qualified but also possess the practical skills required in the workplace. This makes them more employable.
- **Customization and Flexibility:** Skill-based education allows for the customization of programs based on the needs and interests of individuals. This flexibility ensures that students can choose courses aligned with their career aspirations, increasing the likelihood of finding suitable employment.
- **Identifying and Addressing Industry Gaps:** A skill-based education system actively engages with industries to identify skill gaps. By addressing these gaps through relevant training, the education system contributes to reducing unemployment by supplying a workforce that meets industry requirements.

- **Vocational Training:** Vocational education, which is an integral part of skill-based education, provides practical training in specific trades or professions. This is particularly beneficial for those who may not pursue traditional academic paths but are skilled in practical areas.

The Government of India and the Government of Odisha have undertaken several initiatives in the domains of skill development, education, and employment to empower the youth and enhance overall socio-economic development. These initiatives collectively showcase the commitment of both the Government of India and the Government of Odisha towards fostering skill development, education, and employment opportunities, thereby contributing to the socio-economic development of the nation. Below are some key initiatives:

Government of India:

Skill India Mission:

Launched by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, this mission aims to train over 40 crore people in India in various skills by 2022. It includes flagship schemes like Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), which provides monetary rewards to individuals who successfully complete skill training.

National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC):

NSDC facilitates the creation of large, quality vocational institutions to enable a scalable, for-profit vocational education system. It focuses on various sectors, including manufacturing, services, agriculture, and the informal sector.

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):

AIM, under NITI Aayog, promotes a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship among students. It includes the establishment of Atal Tinkering Labs in schools and Atal Incubation Centers to support startups.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY):

PMJDY aims to provide financial inclusion by ensuring access to various financial services, including banking, credit, insurance, and pensions.

National Career Service (NCS):

NCS is an online portal that connects job seekers, employers, and skill providers. It provides career counseling, job matching, and skill-related information.

Government of Odisha:

Skilled in Odisha:

The state's skill development initiative, Skilled in Odisha, focuses on training and up skilling the youth to make them industry-ready.

It includes partnerships with industries, vocational training centers, and educational institutions.

Mo School Abhiyan:

Launched to involve alumni and other stakeholders in the development of schools, Mo School Abhiyan aims to improve infrastructure, education quality, and skill development in schools across the state.

Biju Yuva Vahini:

Biju Yuva Vahini is a youth-centric program that engages young volunteers in various social and development activities. It aims to create a sense of responsibility among the youth towards community development.

Odisha Skill Development Authority (OSDA):

OSDA coordinates and implements skill development programs in the state. It collaborates with various stakeholders to align skill development initiatives with industry needs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the confluence of youth empowerment, skill-based education, and strategic government initiatives holds the key to fostering comprehensive socio-economic development in India. The youth, constituting a significant demographic, are both the driving force and beneficiaries of these endeavors. Recognizing the immense potential encapsulated within the youth population, various government initiatives at both the national and state levels have been set in motion to equip them with skills, education, and opportunities. The National Education Policy 2020, a transformative milestone, envisions a holistic education system aligned with 21st-century goals, emphasizing cognitive, social, ethical, and emotional development. Key features, such as universal access to schooling, vocational integration, and targeted literacy goals, underscore its commitment to nurturing a skilled and enlightened youth. Complementing this, the Government of India has rolled out ambitious programs like Skill India Mission and Atal Innovation Mission, aiming to train and empower millions with practical skills, fostering entrepreneurship and employability. In tandem, the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector has emerged as an engine of inclusive industrial development, providing substantial employment opportunities and contributing significantly to the nation's economic fabric. On the other side state of Odisha, aligning with the national vision has embarked on initiatives like Skilled in Odisha, Mo School Abhiyan, and Biju Yuva Vahini, each contributing to the overarching goal of youth development and community engagement. As we delve into the significance of skill-based education, its role in closing industry gaps, promoting entrepreneurship, and enhancing employability becomes evident. The importance of customization and flexibility in education, as well as the government's commitment to identifying and addressing industry needs, lay the foundation for a workforce that meets the demands of a dynamic job market.

The narrative weaves a compelling story of collaborative efforts by the Government of India and the Government of Odisha, where youth, skill-based education, and strategic initiatives converge to shape a future characterized by inclusivity, innovation, and sustainable development. The combined impact of these endeavors not only contributes to economic growth but also lays the groundwork for a socially conscious and globally competitive nation.

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