

Integration of Skills in Higher Education: Its Relevance

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Abstract:

Skills are considered as essential pillar for a successful future and economic growth of a nation. The persistent industrial market demand for employability skill, has necessitated the integration of skill-based education in higher education to equip graduates future work-ready. India is the third largest provider of higher education, with a large number of highly educated youths, who cannot be employed because they do not have skills. It is a major concern which requires an urgent investment in skill training and harness the untapped potential of the youth, making them employable with relevant skills. This indicates, the relevance of integrating skill-based education into the curriculum. The present paper intends to focus on the need of integration of skills in higher education, and highlights its relevance for a holistic growth and development of an individual and society.

Keywords: Integration of skills, Higher education, relevance.

Introduction:

Skills, Education, and employability are crucial for the holistic and sustainable development of the nation. Skills are referred to as the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance. It also refers to the training, practical, theoretical, and soft skill knowledge of the present industry standards. Skilled work force is vital for economic development and engagement of the skilled workforce in various sector is a key concern. Hence, an effective and ongoing system of skill development is essential in maintaining the growth of economic trajectory (Vandana Saini, 2015).

Higher education can play a critical role in contributing to the growth and development of the economy by forming basis for knowledge creation and innovation in the curriculum. This needs an educational system that is high-quality, inexpensive, flexible to the demands of the student and the industry, relevant, that serves the needs of the Indian economy and society, the needs of the Indian economy and society, fully realising the benefits of its demographic dividend.

Why the need for Integration of Skill in Higher education?

The introduction of National Education policy-2020 has altered the Indian educational system from learning based approach to a skill-based model. The policy focuses on employability and acknowledges the role of education in providing students with right skillsets. However, this can be done through changes in higher education, by focusing on integrating skill with education. This shift could lead the country into the 21st century skills .21st century skills refer to the knowledge, life skills, career skills, habits, and traits that are important in the curriculum to prepare the students for workforce and adult life. These skills should be weaved into the learning experiences and common instruction.

However, India has the lowest proportion of trained youth in the world. The country faces a demand-supply mismatch, the economy needs more of 'skilled' workforce. There are also many social inequalities that, still hinders the holistic development - lack of opportunity and access to tools in improving their standard of living. Sonali Kanchan and Sakshi Varshney (2015), studies indicates that majority of India's population (both rural and urban) lacks transferable skills. They also showed that, high standard of training and education with a variety of skill development initiatives can close these gaps. Thus, investing and equipping the workforce with appropriate skills is one of the solutions (Vandana Saini, 2015).

Higher education has not proved to be efficient to make youths employable due to low skill quotient. Integrating skills in higher education curriculum, as a part of regular courses is essential in contributing and building our economy and society as well. Skilled workforce with quality higher education has productivity potentials and can significantly contribute to the economic growth and development of the country, (Munro,2014).

India is home to the youngest population in the world, with over 62% in the working age group of 15-59 years. As a developing economy, India holds the key to strong advantage of its demographic dividend. This advantage signifies a huge opportunity for the Indian economy to enhance productivity by effectively investing in the skills-based education and learning of the young population (Afroz,2018). It can transform the vast potentials population through various skill-based education involving work-integrated, experimental learning and skill training and development.

Therefore, it is essential to focus on the youth and provide suitable opportunities to reap its demographic dividend. Investment in skill-based education, learning, and training will help the nation in transforming the labour-intensive economy into a skill-intensive economy. Skill-based education, learning, and skill training are crucial factors for the growth economy, (Nilsson,2010). Further, it is also crucial to incorporated standardised set of skills and values from foundational stage to higher education for developing well-rounded individual, (Anup, 2015).

What are the benefits of integration of Skills?

Lack of skills in the education system is one of the major issues, as it not only leads to several losses of manpower but also erodes the economy. Hence, for a sound economic development, skill-based learning and training should form an integral component for increasing efficiency and productivity. This can be done through changes in higher education curriculum, importantly, by focusing on integrating skill with education and introducing experience-based and practical learning experiences in higher education. Thus, integration of Skill-based learning can provide various benefits for the students:

1. It bridges the skill gap between industry and academia, with the theoretical knowledge and hands-on experience, it equips the students with the practical knowledge competencies making them job-ready upon graduation.
2. It motivates and boosts student morale by incentivizing their work with monthly stipends which in turn can be used to pay off college fees.
3. It enables the students to acquire the knowledge to the latest innovations and prepare them for a technology-driven professional world.
4. It provides an ideal landscape for student assessment by evaluating them in real-time as they perform in the industry with the what they learn on their institutions.
5. It saves time for students as they can pursue full-time in their academic programs alongside working in the industries.

6. It helps in increasing employability through a series of inputs in equipping students with appropriate hands-on skills, which assisting them to be job-ready.
7. Through focused outcome-based learning, uplifts confidence, enhance productivity, and competency of the individuals
8. Equip students with relevant and practical education, preparing them for workforce and to be successful in their careers.
9. It gives a sense of purpose, helping the students develop a deep understanding, develop transferable skills, increase motivation, and prepare for the real world.
10. Building a close collaboration between universities and industries enhances employability, providing students with networking opportunities and exposure to real-world challenges.
11. Integrated programs are designed in consultation with industry experts, ensuring the curriculum is aligned with industry trends. This collaboration ensures graduates have the skills and knowledge required to excel in their respective fields.
12. Integrated programs involve industry professionals as mentors, with their guidance help students find opportunities, enhances professional development, and develop right knowledge of industry expectations.
13. Through the introduction of integrated skill, students can think critically, deeply examine topics and work towards solutions. It further, helps them in developing social competence, thus forming their own identity.

Conclusion:

With the transition of modern-day technology-driven era, traditional classroom-based pedagogies need to transform to a more agile and innovative learning ecosystem. The rapidly evolving economic environment requires up-skilling essential, where work and education are treated as a holistic continuum for developing the required skills and competencies for all. However, we are caught by both a skill gap and a higher education sector struggling to keep up.

Therefore, there is an urgency to take proactive measures in transforming higher education system, creating a model that aligns with the industry demands. Higher education curriculum and pedagogy must be restructured to fit to the world of work. It needs to inculcate skills such as analytical thinking, communication skills and presentation skills.

This calls for urgent attention to the policymakers, teachers, academicians, researchers, industry players, entrepreneurs, and businesses establishment, the necessity to align higher education with skill-based education as an essential part of the curriculum. It also indicates, the need to make constructive efforts to make higher education more adaptable, learner - centred, and inventive to address contemporary industry dynamics and challenges.

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