

National Skills Mission: Why pay an Opportunity Cost?



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Abstract

The paper critically analyses the National Skill Mission so far. It also suggests the way forward. That the results are not as were envisaged is a concern. In sharp contrast to the initial euphoria and *josh* exhibited in 2015 when the National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship was launched, we only hear today, soft murmurs about Skill India. What must be done to revive the India's skill mission?

We are confronted with a huge task of training and providing jobs to 12 million persons annually who join the Indian workforce. In this race to catch up with the ever-mounting target, we perhaps overlooked the finer points of the Skills Policy and National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF).

Preamble

NSQF is an effective facilitating framework to integrate both education and skills. However, there seems to be a unidimensional manner in which we went about implementing vocational education that ensured its outcomes remained ordinary. We are confronted with a huge task of training and providing jobs to 12 million youth annually who join the Indian workforce. In this race to catch up with the ever-mounting target, we perhaps over looked the finer points of the Skills Policy and NSQF.

The most important statement of the Policy on skilling is that education and skills must be imparted together and not treated as separate entities. They are like the Siamese twins and artificially separating them would be disastrous for both. Secondly its success depends upon the collaborative working of as many as 18 Ministries involved in skilling apart from the state governments, school boards, universities and 37 Sector Skill Councils like construction, retailing, hospitality, automobile etc. Earlier the Ministry of Labour and Employment broadly fulfilled this role which has now been passed on to its new *avatar* - the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE).

The National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) which was approved by the government more than a decade ago in 2013 lays down the manner in which general education, vocational education and work would interface across the country. It starts by streaming the students into general or vocational education according to their capacity in class IX in schools as it is done in all countries with successful TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) programmes like Norway, Finland, Germany, US, UK or even China. Unlike the skill certifications and diplomas granted by the MSDE which are stand-alone, under NSQF a person could constantly upgrade his/her skills and get certification which is uniform and valid throughout the country. It seamlessly provides the much-needed pathway between education, skills and job market. Subjects such as reading, writing, arithmetic and science provide with the basics in education. By making him/her part-and-parcel of general education it de-stigmatises vocational education as well. Lastly NSQF lays

strong emphasis on recognition of prior learning which gives school dropouts a second chance.

Ministry of Education (MoE) and its bodies like CBSE, State Boards, UGC and the Universities made no serious effort in understanding the spirit of NSQF leave alone adopting the framework into their curriculum and moulding the new courseware accordingly. Unfortunately, apart from several workshops conducted by AICTE from 2010 to 2014 involving state governments, universities, colleges nothing tangible was done by the others. UGC on its part did not go beyond promoting B.Voc. which is a low hanging fruit as it caters mostly to students from the education stream. Many universities implemented NSQF under B.Voc. as per their understanding. Many others implemented it as any other bachelors' program. They eventually gave up for want of proper guidelines.

More than ten thousand ITI's have failed to deliver, as the trade-based skills they impart are terminal in nature and hence reskilling across sectors is mandatory for better placements. With almost 6 million graduates passing out every year, finding appropriate employment year on year is a challenge. The problem is massively compounded when meaningful employment is to be found for an age group of 25 to 35 which is 5 times as large, every year.

Perhaps this tepid response led MSDE to notify NCVET (National Council for Vocational Education and Training) in Dec 2018 as the overarching regulatory body for Skilling after subsuming bodies like National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) and National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT). This also unfortunately signalled the gradual severance of ties with Education. The focus now remains mainly on Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yajna (PMKVY). After 6 years of the implementation, the PMKVY dashboard says that it has trained 132 million candidates out of which 105 million were certified. The initial target of training 400 million by 2022 still remains far from being realised. Besides those trained are mostly of the lowest levels i.e., 1 to 4. It states a placement performance of 54% which mostly is in the unorganised sector.

To reboot Skill India Mission, the Government needs to take two steps soon. Firstly, set up a National Skills University (NSU) under MSDE / NCVET on the lines of IGNOU with pan India jurisdiction. This would ensure skilling and education remaining together which is also a key recommendation of National Skill Policy 2015. The country does not have the luxury of waiting for the School Boards and Universities to wake up and start implementing NSQF. We have a small window of only 20 years to reap the demographic dividend. IGNOU's story of making India a world leader in distance education in a very short time in the 1980s is a positive inspiration. NSU can affiliate all Skill Centres in the country through provision of its Act and set standards for them.

Secondly, Skilling is too serious a matter to be left to the ministries which sometimes can be rigid. In order to jumpstart Skill India, the PMO need to do a *Gati Shakti* on Skill India like it is doing for infrastructure development bringing 16 ministries together primarily with a view to "breaking down silos". Incidentally the PM also happens to be the Chairperson of National Council for Skill Development. His

intervention will be crucial not only for securing the much-needed funds on a large scale for upgrading infrastructure in schools for vocational education but also in bringing about the much-needed synergy amongst the various organs of the government. This model then needs to be replicated in the States as well where the Chief Minister / Chief Secretary could play a critical role in generating synergies between the departments, skills and education which alone can heal Skill India in the long run.

Background Notes

- India had a population of over 1.267 Billion and a workforce of 474.1 million out of which 336.9 million were rural workers and 137.2 million were urban workers as per the last survey of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) conducted in 2011-12. To be able to provide meaningful employment to casual workers and the unemployed, is a daunting task and is even more challenging with the population growing at approximately 1.5% every year.
- As per the last three NSSO surveys, the estimated number of unemployed persons varied from 1.08 crore during 2004-05, to 0.95 crore during 2009-10 and 1.06 crore during 2011-12. However, the unemployment rate growing at 8.8%, poses a great challenge. In India, the unemployment rate measures the number of people actively looking for a job as a percentage of the labor force.
- In terms of demographics almost 35% of Indians are younger than 15 years of age, and almost 50% falling below 25 years of age. The median age of India is 24 years, which makes it one of the youngest populations in the world. This in itself throws up huge challenges in terms of demands on the education and employment systems. Adding to the unemployment figures, dropout rates too greatly stress an already stressed system.

The current implementation Challenge

The National Higher education GER (Gross Enrolment Ratio) is about 26. It means 74 to every 100, though eligible to go to colleges, are sitting out either due to financial constraints or lack of interest in the current delivery of education. Both groups, those who go to college and those who do not, need skills. One reason why the Skills paradigm seems to be failing is the low hanging fruit syndrome. Everyone wants to skill those in colleges than those outside it, since placements are easy for them. The moot question however, is which of the two really help in placements? In a supply driven market, though work specific skills training must be an industry driven activity, it is seldom seriously done for want of standards and adequate finance.

The current skills paradigm as it is implemented, could go the ITI way if the skills are not institutionalised within the education system. On the other hand, if the traditional universities were to create their own curriculum and systems of evaluation for the award of certifications, major disparities would creep in since each of them is autonomous. Besides, skills implemented at various certification levels and sectors, are of different credits making the award of a degree or diploma difficult. The AICTE document on skills of 2013 however, does rationalise the credits vs skills challenge. What must be done in future?

A National Skills University (NSU), modelled as a section 25 company or a society similar to IGNOU, anchored in the Skills Ministry, with regional offices and model skill centres in each district could be an answer. Functioning under the umbrella of NCVET, it can work closely with the Sector Skills Councils (read industry partners) to develop teaching pedagogies, learning methodologies, evaluation systems, conducting “Training the Trainers programmes” and developing accreditation models for trainees, trainers and training centres. It must affiliate all skill centres throughout the Country through provisions in its Act and must set standards for curriculum. It could conduct skills research in both traditional and emerging sectors.

Skills only, or skills and education through various certification levels as envisaged in NSQF could be conducted through NSU or its affiliates. Of course, higher certification levels would require higher order skills in the same sector. The NSU could create an enabling and facilitating regulatory framework under the “Make in India” blue print. If further, the NSU becomes a part of Dublin and Sydney Accords, an effective revenue model too could evolve not to speak of various supply chains that would spew out.

Setting such goals as leading the World of Skills, the NSU can collaborate with other countries and work closely with the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Germany based Community Colleges and their regulatory systems. Countrywide placements could be aggregated through collaborations with the industry bodies. With Aadhar linked Labour Management Information System (LMIS) the Country stands to gain.

Creation of a corpus with funding from the State Governments, the Centre and CSR initiatives of the industry, creation of Skill bonds, for possible soft loans, scholarships to fund the needy could all be ideas worth exploring.

Skills Void & Implications

- A survey of graduate students across the country, conducted by Aspiring Minds says that India produces 50 lakh graduates every year. However, we are unable to bring marketable workplace skills to the table.
- The above results in excessive demand for white-collar jobs that are unavailable in the numbers required. This skewed demand–supply situation also means that individuals are forced to accept jobs that are below their aspirations and are being paid less than commensurate remuneration, thus contributing to the already growing miasma of discontent and dissatisfaction.
- Jobs are not growing at the same rate as the potential workforce and thereby breeding unemployment, which in turn breeds discontent.
- Should the current situation be allowed to fester which could potentially lead to issues such as disaffected youth, increase in the rate of crime and anti-social activities to the extent of terrorism?
- Before these issues snowball into numbers that become unmanageable and circumvent all other efforts to put India on the path of progress and contribute

towards disintegration of the social fabric of India via a social and economic backlash, this issue needs to be expeditiously and effectively addressed.

- Like their male counterparts, a prevalence of low skill levels among women causes rise in unemployment rate for women

Current Scenario of Vocational Education and Training in India

1. Centre and various States have notified Skill Training Centers both in the private and the public sector.
2. Students enroll for level-based training in various sectors.
3. Most Occupational standards and training manuals are available only till level 4.
4. Most training imparted are modular and are limited to 100 to 150 hrs. at a certain level.
5. The training cost is reimbursed to the extent of 60/70% for completion and the remaining released on placement.
6. The Skill training centers do not make proactive effort in placing the trainees. In fact, many of them make their projections/proposals on 60/70% of the project cost.
7. Placement is extremely difficult since the levels of training are not connected to job roles in the industry.
8. Importance to statistics with effective implementation rendered ineffective.
9. Where B. Voc. is conducted, two skill courses are allowed to be chosen from a menu of courses with the rest conducted similar to B.Sc. program.
10. Several Colleges allow students only the skill courses that they can run, thus completely disallowing the choices, which has rendered the B. Voc. program itself redundant.

Opportunity

- With the current low levels of productivity, employment and income, we need to exploit any and all opportunities to progress in these areas. Upgrading work place skills just provides such an opportunity to address these areas of concern.
- Also, with most of the developing economies having a sizeable ageing population that is leaving a void as they move out of the workforce, we see a huge opportunity for the Indian Citizens being potential front-runners in filling the gap. According to a recent newspaper report these numbers in the coming few years are as large as 8 million in Japan, 17 million in USA and almost 4% of the entire European population base. Should India not look at exploiting this, we could see this opportunity pass on to countries like China, Sri Lanka, etc.
- Massive increase in GER
- Linking skills to job roles

- Creation of new supply chains and new job markets.
- Massive employment generation

The Implementation Plan: How must the Skill Mission be run for success?

1. Integrate Education and Skills as in Annexure A for those in schools and colleges, Annexure B for those who are outside schools and colleges and Annexure C for pathways.
2. Integrate skills with life skills for others
3. Training must be imparted by grouping skills rather than imparting modular skills at a certain level
4. Define Job roles at various levels
5. Interaction with Industry for internships and placements
6. Setup National Skills University
7. Conduct Skill enrolment Mela's across the Country.
 - 10 Regional Melas
 - Mela preferably in Pragati-Maidan like places
 - Mela to have multiple stalls for groups identified as Trainers, Institutes, Industries, Various Authorities, SSC, Placement agencies, Online student registration counters
 - Central podium for lectures and information dissemination
 - Each Mela to run for at least 5 days.
 - Students to be registered on the spot in different sectors and specializations
 - Massive online campaigns, Social media to be used
 - Print and electronic media to be mobilized
 - Placement agencies to be mobilized
 - Classes and Training to begin in 3 months
8. Skill Workshops in all the States and Union territories for all stake holders
9. Entrepreneurship Workshops in all States and Union territories
10. Make a Blue Print for Corpus required for funding of Skills Education and Training.
11. Planned meetings with certain selected Industries, Institutes, developers, EME Schools, DRDO labs for plan of action for Make in India Campaign
12. Trainer Supply Chains to be identified and made operational
13. Skill Studies to be initiated

14. Develop a Comprehensive Website for LMIS that is interactive and Dynamic with payment gateways and spot registration facilities for both trainees and Trainers.

Annexure A: Vocational Education Framework options for students who opt to be in schools and colleges

General Scheme of Studies

Certificate Level	Normal Qualification	Case I		Case II	
		Vocational Qualification	Certifying Body	Vocational Qualification	Certifying Body
8-9	1 st and 2 nd Masters	PG Degree	Traditional University today and NSU when it is setup.	PG Degree	University
7	3 rd yr. bachelors	Advanced Diploma	Board of Technical Education today and NSU when it is setup.	Degree	University
6	2 nd yr. bachelors				
5	1 st yr. bachelors	Diploma	Board of Technical Education today and NSU when it is setup.	Grade XII	School Board
4	Higher Secondary School Grade XII				
3	Higher Secondary School Grade IX				
2	Secondary School Grade X	Grade X	School Board	Grade X	School Board
1	Secondary School Grade IX	Grade IX	School Board	Grade IX	School Board

There shall be Seven Certificate levels to a Degree; each level will have following distribution for General and Vocational education –

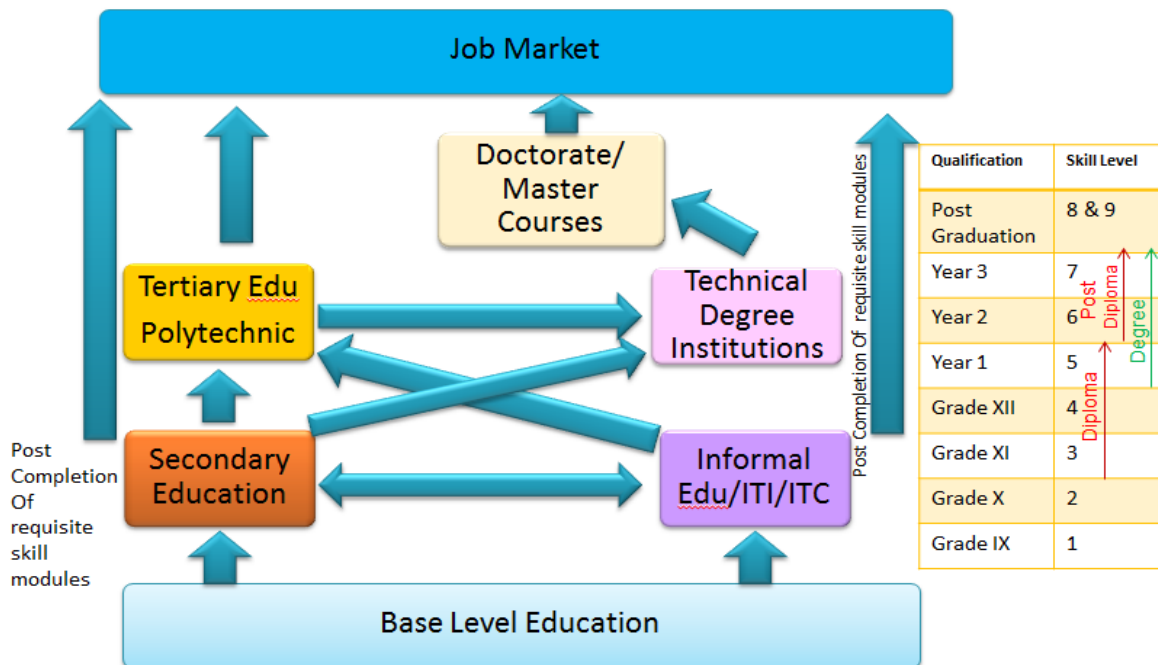
Certificate Level	Contact Hours for Vocational & General Education	
	Vocational	Academic
1	200-300	700-800
2	200-300	700-800
3	300-400	600-700
4	300-400	600-700
5	400-500	500-600
6	500-600	400-500
7	600-700	300-400

Annexure: B: Vocational Education Framework options for students who have dropped out of schools and colleges

NSQF Certification Level	Community College Level	Competency Based Vocational Skill Building (in hrs)	General Education (in hrs)	Total (in hrs)	Who is eligible	What will be given (Certification) and who will provide
I	I	200	Communication Skills (250)	1000	Any	Polytechnics will conduct and Board of Technical Education/Affiliating University will certify level I
II		300	Basic Sciences (250)			
III	II	400	Communication Skills (100)	1000	Above and any provided the skills at I are certified	Polytechnics will conduct and Board of Technical Education/Affiliating University will certify level II
IV		400	Basic Sciences (100)			
V	III	600	Computing skills (200) Any Foreign language or any other Indian language other than native: (200)	1000	Above and any provided the skills at I, II are certified	Polytechnics will conduct and Board of Technical Education/Affiliating University will certify level III
VI	IV	700	Basic	1000	Above	Polytechnics

			accounting and Book Keeping skills (150) Entrepreneurial Skills, Setup small business etc. (150)		and any provided the skills at I, II, III are certified	will conduct and Board of Technical Education/Affiliating University will certify level IV
VII	V	800	Presentation, grooming and finishing skills (200)	1000	Above and any provided the skills at I, II, III, IV are certified	Polytechnics will conduct and Board of Technical Education/Affiliating University will award Community Skill Diploma

Annexure C: Pathways and flexibility of NSQF Fig. 1C



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