

ROLE OF SKILL ENHANCEMENT COURSES IN PROMOTING VOCATIONAL COMPETENCIES AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Education keeps changing to meet the ever-changing demands of society, impacting global policy frameworks. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes a comprehensive approach to foster multidisciplinary learning and innovation, is a watershed moment for higher education in India (Malik,2023) .The NEP seeks to provide aspiring students the tools they need to succeed in a world that is becoming more and more competitive by supporting flexible curriculum and encouraging critical thinking. Education is always evolving to satisfy society's changing demands, which has an impact on worldwide policy frameworks. The NEP aims to give prospective students the tools they need to succeed in an increasingly competitive society by promoting flexible curricula and encouraging critical thinking. The present qualitative research examines the role of SEC courses in enhancing vocational abilities among college students

under the NEP 2020. The study took a qualitative research technique, conducting semi-organized focus group discussions and interviews with undergraduate students and teachers from higher education institutions. The results show that SEC courses significantly enhance practical learning, confidence, communication skills, teamwork, entrepreneurship, and career preparedness. Participants also identified obstacles such as a lack of infrastructure, insufficient practical experience, a scarcity of trained teachers, and small business involvement. The study indicates that SEC courses have innovative potential for improving vocational education and employability if conducted successfully and with adequate institutional support.

Keywords: Skill Enhancement Courses, Vocational Competencies, Qualitative Study, NEP 2020, Higher Education, Employability

Introduction

Education is vital for developing well-rounded and empathetic persons. It seeks to develop critical thinking skills, compassion, courage, resilience, and a scientific and creative attitude, all while imparting strong ethical principles. The ultimate goal is to develop responsible and proactive citizens who contribute to creating a fair, diverse, and inclusive society that aligns with the ideas of our constitution. Traditional higher education in India has frequently prioritized theoretical learning, resulting in limited employability and practical experience for graduates. To address these challenges, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 enacted significant reforms that encourage multidisciplinary learning, experiential education, vocational integration, and skill development (Khanna, 2023). Skill Enhancement Courses (SEC) has emerged as an important curricular component for NEP 2020. SEC courses are designed to provide students with practical abilities, occupational competences, communication skills, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and industry-specific information. These courses emphasize experiential learning and help students prepare for jobs, self-employment, and lifelong learning. Vocational competencies are the practical and

professional skills required to work effectively in occupational settings. SEC training help to bridge the gap between theoretical education and industry demands. The current study qualitatively analyzes students' and teachers' experiences and perceptions on the effect of SEC courses in fostering vocational abilities among college students (Kaur, 2020). The growing unemployment rate among graduates, as well as the mismatch between academic education and industrial requirements, has boosted the demand for skill-based and vocational education. NEP 2020 emphasizes the significance of incorporating vocational learning into higher education to improve employability and workforce preparation.

Vocational competences are the practical, technical, and professional abilities required for successful engagement with occupational and workplace environments (Pathak, 2020). SEC courses seek to bridge the gap between academic learning and industry requirements by preparing students for employment, competence, and professional advancement. The current qualitative study aims to investigate how SEC courses help to vocational developing skills among college students.

Skill Development Courses (SECs) are skill-based curricula included in all subjects, and their objectives are to provide practical training, efficiency, skills, and competency development. Skill Enhancement Courses are value-based and skill-oriented courses designed to enhance students' practical abilities and employability (Kaur,2020). These courses focus on developing competencies relevant to industry needs and societal demands. SECs are generally introduced in higher education institutions as part of multidisciplinary and vocational education reforms. Examples of Skill Enhancement Courses include: Cyber Security, Vermiculture, Income Tax etc. SECs aim to provide hands-on learning experiences and practical exposure that enable students to apply theoretical concepts in real-life situations.

Review of Related Literature

Rajkhowa (2025) emphasizes that by encouraging practical learning and industry-linked training, vocational education under NEP 2020 overcomes the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world skills.

Sonia Sharma (2024) emphasized that by incorporating collaborations between companies, digital learning, and vocational education into higher education, skill

development programs under NEP 2020 increase employability.

Tamta and Adhikari (2024) performed a study on the level of awareness about vocational programs among Nainital district undergraduate students in the context of NEP 2020. Data from 60 undergraduate students at government colleges were gathered using a descriptive survey method. The data revealed that students had a modest level of knowledge about vocational programs, with variation between institutions. The study indicated that increased awareness campaigns and institutional assistance are required to effectively execute vocational education under NEP 2020.

Kaur (2024) conducted the research on National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: Skill Enhancement through Vocational Education. The study emphasized that NEP 2020 promotes skill enhancement courses through practical education, internships, and industry collaboration. The researcher concluded that skill enhancement courses help close the gap between academic knowledge and employability skills while preparing students for the modern workforce.

Ms. Ankita Rajput and Dr. Gautam Prasad (2023), in their research "Role of

NEP 2020: shaping the Skill development Education towards self-reliant India” mentioned that the curriculum should comprise of practical application of theoretical lessons; internship programmes and field based products should be emphasised; new courses with prime focus on skills like problem solving, analytical thinking should be developed; Use of ICT should be encouraged to make student feel futuristic education environment system.

Dr. Rekha Pathak(2020) conducted a study on “ NEP 2020: A road map to Vocational Development” in which the researcher focused on the current status of Vocational Education in India and tries to provide a review on the challenges in vocational development programs w.r.t NEP 2020. The main recommendations of the study are- establishment of National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) , Short term internships with crafts- artists, and professionals was suggested, Training programmes, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship should be encouraged.

Aithal Shubhrajyotsna& Aithal P.S. (2020) in their research "Analysis of the Indian National Education policy 2020 towards achieving its objectives,” suggested that to reduce self-dependency after 18 years

of age, students should develop skills in their interested area and be involved in some kind of economic productive activity, thereby reducing their dependency on parents. This can be possible through vocational training and building their confidence while learning. In addition to core, non-core, and elective subjects, the undergraduate program should be structured so that there will be two skill-based subjects focused on employability skills and entrepreneur ability skills, respectively. This will strengthen the earn while you learn vocational training model at the higher education level by offering additional credit to Academic Baccalaureate of Credits (ABC). These skill-based disciplines should be evaluated internally continuously rather than through semester-ending tests. An innovative model like this gives kids the confidence to pursue a career in entrepreneurship.

Research Methodology: The research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. The basis for it is secondary data collected from Research papers, Books and articles, Government documents, Policy documents for NEP 2020, UGC regulations, Internet-based learning materials, Reports and dissertations published.

Role of Skill Enhancement Courses in Promoting Vocational Competencies

- **Development of Employability Skills:** SECs help students in developing industry-relevant skills that boost their employability. Courses in communication, information technology, and soft skills educate students for job interviews, workplace contacts, and professional responsibilities.
- **Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice:** Traditional academic programs tend to concentrate on theoretical topics. SECs give students practical experience through projects, workshops, internships, and fieldwork, allowing them to apply classroom information in real-world situations.
- **Promotion of Technical and Digital Competencies:** In the digital age, technological abilities are required in practically every profession. SECs in ICT, coding, digital marketing, and data management assist students in developing technology skills required in today's job economy.
- **Encouraging Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment:** SECs encourage entrepreneurial skills by teaching students about the organization planning, financial management, creativity, and leadership. This pushes students to be employment producers rather than job seekers.
- **Enhancement of Soft Skills and Personality Development:** Soft skills, in alongside technical knowledge, are critical to vocational success. SECs improve Communication skills, Leadership Qualities, Teamwork, Emotional intelligence, Decision-making abilities. These skills are necessary for career advancement and professional connections.
- **Supporting Experiential and Lifelong Learning:** SECs prioritize experiential learning through Courses include internships, field visits, and simulations, Laboratory work, Community engagement. This strategy encourages constant learning and adaptation, both of which are essential in today's rapidly changing workplace.

- **Alignment with Industry Needs:** SECs are frequently established based on current industry demands and labor market trends. Collaboration with industries enables colleges to provide current and relevant skill training.
- **Contribution to Holistic Development:** SECs promote students' overall development by combining cognitive, social, emotional, and vocational elements of learning. They assist pupils in developing self-confidence, responsibility, and productivity as members of society.
- **Lack of Infrastructure:** The less fortunate infrastructure found in many colleges and universities are one of the main obstacles to establishing SECs. The following are necessary for skill-oriented education: Well-equipped labs, Training facilities and workshops, Digital tools and computers, Internet access, Resources for modern teaching and learning .However, these facilities are lacking in many institutions, particularly in rural and impoverished areas. As a result, students don't get the hands-on instruction and real-world experience they need to improve their skills.
- **Shortage of Skilled Trainers:** Faculty members with the necessary training and experience are crucial to the successful implementation of SEC. There is a lack of trainers with the following qualities in many institutions: Technical proficiency, Experience in the industry, Useful teaching techniques, Understanding of new technology. The demands of competency-based education are frequently not addressed by conventional teaching techniques. Students might not learn important

Challenges in Implementing Skill Enhancement Courses

Although the fact that Skill Enhancement Courses (SECs) are crucial in helping students builds their employability and practical skills, there are a number of obstacles to their successful implementation in higher education. The quality, accessibility, and results of skill-based education are restricted by these barriers. The quality, accessibility, and results of skill-based education are restricted by these barriers.

industry-oriented skills in the absence of qualified instructors.

- **Limited Industry Cooperation:** Successful skill development initiatives require close cooperation between academic institutions and business sectors. Nevertheless, a lot of universities lack strong industry connections, which limit Possibilities for internships ,Industrial visits, apprenticeship programs, and placement assistance exposure to the real world. SEC curricula may grow out of date and detached from the demands of the job market as a result of inadequate industry involvement.
- **Assessment Challenges:** It is harder to evaluate skill-based learning than theoretical knowledge. While SECs demand competency-based evaluation techniques like the following, traditional examination systems mostly concentrate on memory and written tests, Real-world examples, Portfolios of project work, Evaluation based on performance, Constant assessment. Many institutions lack the necessary tools and qualified evaluators to

properly evaluate practical competencies.

Suggestions for Effective Implementation of Skill Enhancement Courses (SECs)

To ensure that Skill Enhancement Courses (SECs) effectively cultivate vocational competences and employability among college students, educational organizations, industries, and policymakers must collaborate to improve the quality and relevance of skill-based education. The following measures can help with the successful implementation of SECs.

- **Strengthening Industry–Academic Collaboration:** Educational institutions ought to collaborate with companies to develop relevant curricula, provide expert lectures, and provide practical experience in line with market demands. Such partnerships provide students with real-world exposure, improve workplace readiness, reduce the gap between education and employment, enhance employability opportunities, and familiarize students with current technologies and professional practices.
- **Providing Regular Faculty Training:** Regular faculty training is

crucial for the successful execution of Skill Enhancement Courses. Teachers should continue their professional development with refresher courses, industry training programs, workshops on new technologies, digital teaching skill development, and competency-based pedagogy training. Well-trained faculty members can provide more practical advice, improve teaching quality, and create relevant skill-based learning experiences for students.

- **Improving Institutional Infrastructure:** Skill-based education needs proper infrastructure and technical resources. Institutions should enhance laboratories, workshops, computer labs, internet access, smart classrooms, simulation equipment, and digital learning resources to facilitate practical and experience learning. Modern infrastructure promotes hands-on training and the general efficacy of skill development programs.
- **Introducing Internships and Apprenticeship Programs:** Internships and apprenticeships give students with hands-on work

experience and professional development opportunities. Educational institutions should engage with businesses to provide internships, apprenticeship programs, fieldwork, on-the-job training, and community-based projects. These chances allow students to apply their academic knowledge in real-world circumstances and gain workplace competencies.

- **Promoting Entrepreneurship Incubation Centers:** Entrepreneurship incubation centers assist students in transforming their creative ideas into feasible company opportunities. Colleges should set up incubation and innovation centers to offer mentorship, startup support, technical and financial support, business training, and networking possibilities. Such initiatives inspire students to be entrepreneurs, self-employed, and creative thinkers.
- **Integrating Digital Learning Resources:** Digital technology is now a crucial component of contemporary schooling. Online learning platforms, virtual labs, e-learning modules, MOOCs, digital accreditation, and blended learning

approaches should all be used into skill enhancement courses by educational institutions. Accessibility, adaptability, and students' exposure to cutting-edge technology and worldwide knowledge are all enhanced by digital learning.

- **Career Counseling and Guidance**

cell: To improve knowledge of professional opportunities, employability skills, and vocational education, regular career advisory and counseling programs should be established. Effective counseling boosts students' motivation for skill-based learning and assists them in making well-informed career decisions. Educational institutions should also set up Student Support Cells to offer academic advice, career counseling, mental health support, and details on training, internships, and job opportunities.

- **Curriculum Modification Based on**

Industry Needs: Future skill requirements, market trends, and emerging technologies should all be incorporated into skill enhancement courses on a regular basis. Curriculum updates guarantee that

students gain the pertinent, industry-focused skills necessary for employment and career advancement.

Successful implementation of Skill Enhancement Courses is critical for cultivating vocational competencies, employability skills, and entrepreneurial talents in college students. Industry-academic partnership, faculty development, facility enhancement, internships, competency-based evaluation, entrepreneurship support, and digital learning integration can all help to improve SEC quality and impact. These efforts will serve to produce a competent, confident, and job-ready workforce that is consistent with the vision of the National Education Policy 2020 and the changing needs of society and industry.

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