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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EMPLOYMENT SKILLS: ROLE OF NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP) 2020

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Abstract

The National Policy on Education 1968, 1986, the Plan of Action 1992 and National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 are the policies initiatives by the Government of India which governs the education system in India. These policies have striven to empower the human resources and also played an effective role in bridging social hierarchies. The paper analyses these educational policies to highlight the importance of vocational education and the various initiatives promoted by the government to increase the employability and entrepreneur skills of the human resources. The National Education Policy 2020 is discussed in the paper with special focus on the vocational education at the school and higher education level. The Skill Enhancement Course introduced in University of Delhi in the academic year 2022-23 is discussed in the paper to show the endeavour of the NEP 2020 to promote and streamline vocational education with the mainstream education. The paper argues that the policy initiatives of government have continuously promoted vocational education and made various efforts to mainstream it with other academic disciplines.

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Introduction:-

The National Policy on Education 1968, 1986, the Plan of Action 1992 and National Education Policy 2020 has emphasized the role of vocational and technical education to generate employment and entrepreneurs. The education policies has seek to relate with the constant changes and prepare the human resources to find opportunities catering to the changing needs of job market. In the recent times the education is powered by digitization and the revolutionary forces unleashed by the fourth industrial revolution that broadly encompasses technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, data analytics, robotics, internet of things, among others, are bound to have implications on the education system and learning processes. Amid such changes several old systems of learning and ways of thinking have become redundant. In a world where 'google' search and tools like ChatGPT can provide 'information' at the click of a button, memorization and rote learning have become redundant. The Indian education system has earnestly strived to evolve and adopt to the changing nature of education and knowledge gathering process and aims to fulfil the gaps of the earlier education policies. The NEP 2020 is major step in that direction which the paper discusses the proposals of the policy in enabling the students to innovate, inculcate problem solving aptitude, skills of employment and entrepreneurship.

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Objectives:-

The thrust of NEP 2020 is to promote a holistic learning at all levels of education and enable learners to choose their preferred profession. It has assured to mainstream the vocational education at par with mainstream education which promote employability and entrepreneurship. The study analyses the NEP 2020 policy document for the below mentioned objectives;

1. To identify and assess the proposals of NEP 2020 which endeavours to enable students for employment and entrepreneurship.
2. To analyse the Skill Enhancement Course (SEC) of University of Delhi in promoting carrier prospects for the undergraduates.

Research Methodology:-

The article is primarily qualitative based on the primary and the secondary resources to present its arguments. The policy document of National Policy on Education 1968, 1986, revised policy of 1986 in 1992 and the National Education Policy, 2020 is reviewed to identify the proposals of the government which promotes entrepreneurial and employment skills of learners. The authors also have presented their first-hand experience in teaching the Skill Enhancement Course (SEC) introduced in the University of Delhi. The secondary sources have helped to assess the progress of NEP and critically review the educational policies of India.

National Education Policy (NEP), 2020

The National Education Policy 1968, 1986 and the Policy of Action 1992 has been criticized for being too theoretical and exam-oriented, leading to a lack of critical thinking and practical skills among students. There has been a significant gap between the education imparted and the skills required in the job market, leading to high rates of graduate unemployment. The quality of education has been a significant concern, especially in rural areas, where it limited the access to education. The Indian education system has also been criticized for its lack of inclusiveness and diversity, leading to social and economic disparities.

The National Education Policy (2020), implemented after 34 years, replacing the 1986 policy (modified in 1992), seeks to radically transform the educational landscape in this country. It aims to equip students with the ability to "move towards real understanding and towards learning how to learn" rather than treating the students as passive recipients of learning and education. This change is being sought by breaking the silos that inhibit the current education system and instead focusing on inter/multidisciplinary education and holistic education in both schools as well as in higher education. NEP seeks to achieve this by promoting student entrepreneurs with the exposure to vocational training in synergy with industry. It seeks to build industry relevant and professional skills by the integration of 'formal' education with 'skills-based education and training'. The partnership with industry will empower the students to bridge the gap between the theory and praxis and enable them to emerge as innovators and inventors. This will also keep the education system abreast of the ever-changing developments happening at break-neck speed in the domain of technological advancement.

The NEP 2020 proposes to promote experiential and holistic education. As the policy documents states, "The aim of education will not only be cognitive development, but also building character and creating holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with the key 21st century skills." This is to be achieved by adopting, what the NEP terms as, cross-curricular pedagogical approach under which Art-integration, Sports-integration will be done. This is besides, offering the students the maximum possible choice to pick and choose from among various subjects at the school level. The rigid categorizations of Science-Commerce-Arts has given way to a flexible structure that strives towards self-discovery by students. The policy also realizes the power of language and this seeks to promote multilingualism along with a focus on the mother tongue in respect on diversified ethnic cultural and cultural exchanges in cult.

The documents notes, that "wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible." This is in consonance with the enormous body of literature proving the utility of instruction in one's mother tongue as contributing towards developing a better and deeper understanding.

Provisions of NEP 2020 to impart Vocational Education at the level of schools

The major thrust of the NEP 2020 has to mainstream the vocational education at par with the other academic disciplines. The document claims that “no hard separations between arts and sciences, between curricular and extra-curricular activities, between vocational and academic streams, etc. in order to eliminate harmful hierarchies among, and silos between different areas of learning”. It also have categorically stated to remove the perception that vocational education is for the school dropouts and has devised a detail plan to re-imagine vocational education. The clause 16 in the NEP 2020 policy document titled as “Re imagining Vocational Education” details the total revamping of vocational education. The importance of vocational education is pronounced throughout the policy document and its capacities to generate employment and entrepreneurs. The introduction of vocational education starts from the primary to the adult education with an emphasis on universal access, availability in local languages and various entry and exit options in the system of education. The states are also “encouraged to develop these offerings in regional languages by establishing new/strengthening existing State Institutes of Open Schooling (SIOS)”.

The NEP 2020 proposes to have ‘specialized schools’ for students who want exit after Grade 10 and enter those schools to complete Grades 11 and 12. The school students will be offered “fun course” on vocational crafts like “carpentry, electric work, metal work, gardening, pottery making, etc.” in Grade 6-8. The schools “will be encouraged to hire local eminent persons or experts as ‘master instructors’ in various subjects, such as in traditional local arts, vocational crafts, entrepreneurship, agriculture, or any other subject where local expertise exists, to benefit students and help preserve and promote local knowledge and professions”. The policy document has proposed to set up a ‘Gender-Inclusion Fund’ to provide equitable vocational education to girls and transgender students or to any other socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. The policy document states that less number of school students who receive vocational education is due to disadvantage for them to move vertically in respect of higher education. Moreover the focus on vocational education was largely on Grade 11-12 and dropouts in Grade 8 and onwards. The policy states that the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) which was set up in 2013 will address the vertical mobility of students from vocational education to mainstream education and in higher education consequently.

Provisions of the NEP 2020 to impart Vocational Education at the level of higher education

The aims of the NEP to ensure that at-least 50% of learners in Higher Education will be benefited from vocational education by the year of 2025. It assures to integrate vocational education with school and higher education in a decades of times. The National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE), is proposed by the Ministry of Education to oversee the integration of all streams of education in respect of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary context. The committee will identify the focus areas and prescribe models and practices of vocational education to be integrated with other main stream education. The proposals of Incubation Centre in Higher Education Institutions with the partnership of Industry is proposed to execute different models of vocational education and apprenticeships in this model.

The policy also has given equal parlance to Vocational Education in entry and exit options for Undergraduate Programmes. It states that “the undergraduate degree will be of either 3 or 4-year duration, with multiple exit options within this period, with appropriate certifications, e.g., a certificate after completing 1 year in a discipline or field including vocational and professional areas, or a diploma after 2 years of study, or a Bachelor’s degree after a 3-year programme”. The policy document has recommended the continuation of B.Voc. degree introduced in 2013 and provisioning other stream students to enter vocational education at any level in higher education. The higher educational institutions will be allowed to run short term courses and proposes to promote ‘Lok Vidya’ i.e., “important vocational knowledge developed in India, will be made accessible to students through integration into vocational education courses”.

Skill Enhancement Course: The Experience of University of Delhi

The University of Delhi has revised the syllabus of undergraduates and introduced a new curriculum based on the NEP 2020 from the academic year 2022-23. The University of Delhi notification number CNC-II/093/1(23)/2022-23 dated 28th March 2023 have passed the curriculum of 109 papers to be taught by the colleges affiliated with University of Delhi. The SEC papers is one of the distinguished feature of the new curriculum to impart skill based education which aims to provide career choices for the student to pursue in future. The Executive Council resolution of the university states that

“The NEP 2020 envisages imparting life skills as well as technical and professional skills as part of holistic education. University of Delhi has prepared various Skill Enhancement Courses in different domains to provide kinds of skills to the students, such as Communication Skills, Computer related skills, Coding skills, financial management skills, etc. with higher degree of hands on learning so as to equip them with the skills of their suitable to the academic path they choose”.

The SEC courses are of 2 credits and has two components of lecture and practical to assess the students. The teachers are allotted two periods only to conduct this course, where most of the SEC papers have no lectures but two periods for practical. The practical part of the assessment has three components namely continuous assessment, end term practical/written exam and viva voice. The teachers have to possess an instrument knowledge of the paper and have to actually situate the contents of the paper to conduct practical. The SEC papers are of interdisciplinary perspective where a teacher has to master the paper beforehand to engage students. The reorientation of the pedagogy and multidisciplinary perspective necessitates more than one teacher for any course where the syllabus and the practical can be completed with satisfactory measures taken by with its outcomes. The teachers also have to rely on un-biased expert's views to collaborate with the industry. The overall objective of the SEC course to expose students to explore their carrier options is gaining currency through the initiation of NEP 2020.

Conclusion:-

The National Policy on Education 1968, 1986, the Plan of Action 1992 and National Education Policy 2020 even though have evolved at various points of time, the importance of vocational education has grown over these periods. The NEP 2020 has gone overboard to treat vocational education at par with mainstream academic subjects and its potential to impart skill based education which would improve the employability of students and empower students to be entrepreneurs. The Skill Enhancement Course (SEC) at the undergraduate level have the potential to motivate students to choose their career options by the training they undergo during the course. The teachers of higher education in the mainstream academic subjects are in a trans-formative stage to accommodate their theoretical knowledge in the social science stream to vocational stream.

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