

By Invitation

Skill Development in Higher Learning Institutions: A Micro Analysis

G. Palanithurai

Presently efforts are on to increase the enrolment rates in higher learning institutions. But equal attention is not given to make them employable. The enrolled youth in higher learning institutions have developed aspiration to make themselves to be employable and yet opportunities are less as there is a gap between the policy of the government and the implementation in the higher learning institutions in terms of skilling the youth. There should be consciousness on the part of the leaders of higher learning institutions in skilling our youth to get the advantage of demographic dividends. Equally, state governments have to create an enabling environment to integrate the skilling process with the academic programs in higher learning institutions.

G. Palanithurai is Professor, Rajiv Gandhi Chair for Panchayati Raj Studies, Gandhigram Rural Institute – Deemed University, Gandhigram Email: gpalanithurai@gmail.com

Introduction

21st century opportunity for India to achieve greater economic prosperity lies in making use of the youth and the working age population. To utilize this new opportunity of demographic dividend effectively India needs to impart adequate and appropriate skills to our youth. India has missed many opportunities in the past but can not afford to miss this one as it would create more pressure on the state and society. It requires vision, mission, commitment, strategies, institutions, resources, synergy, political and administrative will and a movement. The task is very complex and the assignment is huge and hence to achieve the same leadership is crucial and critical. Leadership from the office of the Prime Minister to the Gram Panchayat plays a critical role in transforming India by skilling and empowering our youth population. Everyone at the operational level needs awareness and consciousness, more particularly strategic action with a sense of commitment. At every level a clear understanding and concrete actions are the imperatives. In India we have a policy (Ministry of Labor & Employment,

2009), a coordination board¹, a framework², financial allocation³, and a target⁴ for skilling our youth. And yet we find the whole exercise of skilling our youth and preparing them for a new challenge is tardy and slow. A total target of skilling 72.82 lakhs was accepted by various central government Ministries, and the NSDC, for the year 2013-14. Table 1 shows the allocated targets and the latest status of achievements reported by the National Skill Development Agency.

All exercises meant for skilling our youth are moving in snail's pace. There are many stakeholders in this exercise. What we need is more synergetic action by coordinating different agencies and stakeholders. Of all, the end users are the youths in the educational institutions. The present article tries to analyze the role of higher learning institutions in skilling the students and how this process of skilling is being viewed by the stakeholders. In this article we focus on the

students coming out from the arts and science stream of higher learning institutions as they constitute still 56% of the total students passing out from the total higher learning institutions.

The Problem

Obviously our youth have not been properly trained in skills needed to the market.

On the one hand we have adequate youth for employment and on the other the market faces shortage of workforce for its transactions in India. This gap between supply of and demand for workforce is due to the failure in preparing the youth for the labor market. Obviously our youth have not been properly trained in skills needed to the market. Now as our economy grows, to sustain the economy, it is felt that the workforce has to be adequately skilled. Against this background increasing realization has come to all stakeholders that skilling of our youth should become a development movement in India. To transform the youth into a capacitated workforce, they have to be trained and more particularly in skills needed to the market. While preparing the youth for the market adequate care has to be taken to suit the requirements of the market, and by which the skill gap has to be reduced. The skilling process takes place through educational institutions from the school to higher learning institutions. Since independence our education system did not give much attention to the development of skills. Despite the arguments of M.K.Gandhi on skill based learning our

¹Prime minister's National Council for Skill Development was established to coordinate and supervise the entire activities of skill development in the country. Yet another National Skill Development Coordination Board was established to coordinate the activities of seventeen ministries and the private sector initiatives through National Skill Development Corporation.

²National Vocational Education Qualification Framework (NVEQF) was evolved and it is in place at present

³National Skill Development Fund has been set up with 25 billion rupees in the corpus

⁴The 500 million workforce have to be trained through institutions of which 350 million have to be trained by the 17 ministries and 150 million to be trained by the private sector initiatives through NSDC.

Table 1 The Allocated Targets & The Latest Status of Achievements.

S. No.	Ministry / Organization	2013-14 Target (Persons)	Cumulative Achievement by End-June 2013	
			Number	% of Annual Target
1	M/o Labour & Employment	14,00,000	1,80,000	12.9%
2	M/o Agriculture ¹	12,00,000	1,71,935	14.3%
3	National Skill Development Corporation	10,00,000	53,473	5.3%
4	M/o Rural Development ²	8,00,000	79,593	9.9%
5	M/o Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises ³	6,50,000		
6	D/o Higher Education (MHRD)	5,44,000	36,044	6.6%
7	D/o Electronics & Information Technology ⁴	5,10,000	2,00,690	39.4%
8	M/o Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation ⁵	4,00,000	7,812	1.9%
9	M/o Women & Child Development ³	1,50,020		
10	M/o Textiles ⁶	1,50,000	6,408	4.3%
11	M/o Social Justice & Empowerment ³	1,21,400		
12	M/o Tourism	67,300	11,601	17.2%
13	M/o Tribal Affairs ³	60,000		
14	M/o Home Affairs ³	58,000		
15	M/o Road Transport and Highways ³	56,000		
16	M/o Chemicals & Fertilizers	39,000	12,000	30.8%
17	M/o Commerce and Industry ³	35,000		
18	D/o Heavy Industry	30,000	6,752	22.5%
19	M/o Minority Affairs ³	5,000		
20	M/o Development of North Eastern Region ³	4,000		
21	M/o Food Processing Industries ³	3,000		
TOTAL		72,82,720	7,66,308	10.5%

¹ Targets subject to discussions based on inputs received from the Ministry

² Target set for RSETIs MORD as 3, 00,000. As per the quarterly report it is 2, 92,050. Need to resolve this with the Ministry.

³ Ministries have not reported the data

⁴ Target set for the D/o Electronics & Information Technology for 2013-14 as 5,00,000. As per the quarterly report it is revised as 5, 10,000

⁵ Target was revised downwards from 6 lakhs to 4 lakhs by the Ministry

⁶ Target set for Ministry as 1, 50,000. As per the quarterly report figures it is 92,648. Need to resolve it with the Ministry.

educational pandits started paying attention on liberal education oriented to acquire knowledge. Adequate opportunities had been given to test the education system evolved by M.K.Gandhi. Even the fourteen Rural Institutes created for experimenting the Gandhian framework of

education have been merged into the liberal education system in India (Palanithurai, 2012). Realization came at a later stage that skilling is an imperative need and governments took efforts to catch up. This skilling exercise is also for industries and service sectors.

The students coming out from the arts and science stream do not focus their attention either on industry or service sector for their employment. They rely on government and educational sectors.

Despite the earnest efforts on the part of the educational institutions the products coming out from the academic institutions are of poor quality in terms of precise skills needed to industry and other sectors. It is more obvious from the lamentations of the business leaders that the skill levels of our students are poor and unsuited to the industry and service sectors. This is about the conditions of the technical institutions. There is yet another segment in higher learning system called Arts and Science stream which is still predominant in the education sector. In the total human power coming out from the education sector, 56% of them are from the Arts and Science stream (Palit, 2009). But the students coming out from the arts and science stream do not focus their attention either on industry or service sector for their employment. They rely on government and educational sectors. It is only after globalization their attention was drawn towards industry, and service sectors.

Transforming this segment of the students from arts and science stream into a productive workforce will certainly help the economy to grow, reduce unemployment rate and mitigate the social unrest in the society. But skilling of the students of arts and science stream of higher

learning institutions is a difficult and stupendous task and yet it has to be done. Against this background it is proposed to investigate the skilling process of the students of arts and science stream in conventional universities from the stakeholders' point of view.

Methodology

To get answer to the above questions a focused group discussion was conducted in a higher learning institution (Gandhigram Rural Institute – Deemed University, a centrally funded Deemed University located in a rural setting) among the students who are pursuing postgraduate programmes in social sciences. The discussion was about their perception of the skills required for the market; the skills needed for them to be made employable and the system and processes needed to this task. The whole discussion was held in different spells and in different settings. While conducting the focused group discussion, care was taken to brief the context and issues of skilling youth. While drawing student, both boys and girls for discussion, care was taken to involve substantial numbers from marginalised communities.

Background

Before analyzing the responses of the target group it is necessary to give the background of the whole issue of skilling youth. Government of India has realized the potentials of youth and the market and taken the appropriate policy to transform the youth force into a workforce to cater to the needs of the labor market. Elabo-

rate strategies have been worked out to realize the targets. Appropriate institutional supports are sought. Resources have been allocated and for this task financial institution has been created. Prime minister is coordinating the skill development initiatives in the country through National Council on Skill Development. It fixed the target of skilling 500 million people by 2022. Next to the Council, there is the National Skill Development Coordination Board. The role of the board is to work out the strategies to implement the decisions of the Prime Minister's National Council for Skill Development and create comprehensive guidelines to realize the basic objectives of skill development. National Skill Development Corporation has been created. It is a public private joint venture with 49% percentage equity held by the government. A large number of initiatives are taken and responsibilities have been entrusted to different agencies to build the skill among the youth to make them as employable labor force. It is a known fact that the present capacity of institution is to train 3.1 million. But 12.8 million people join in labor force every year.

Here it is to be seen that 93% of the workforce are in unorganized sector in India. Further skill development takes place both formally and informally. Yet achieving this huge target is problematic in India. The responsibility lies with different agencies. Central government, state governments, educational institutions, industrial houses, civil society organizations and media have responsibilities and they have to discharge them in a synergetic way. All those who work in

the skill development domain have to work synergistically and systematically to make use of the new opportunities. The whole exercise has to be conducted in a mission mode. Further they have to work in close coordination with labor market. Apart from the above all the activities have to be carried out in a sustainable way.

The skill base of the Indian economy is very low compared to in developed economies of the world.

A realistic estimate is that the skill base of the Indian economy is very low compared to in developed economies of the world. Vocational training capacity is also low. To manage the above, a new initiative has been taken at the central government level. We have the Skill Development Policy 2009, National Council for Skill Development, National Skill Development Coordination Board, National Skill Development Council, seventeen ministries' initiatives for skill development, National Skill Development Fund, Skill Sector Council and National Vocational Education Qualification Framework. Efforts have been on to coordinate government, industry, trade unions and civil society. In the whole process a marked departure has been made to pursue the goal of achieving skill development from output to outcome oriented which is considered as a significant step in the right direction. The role of state governments, industry, educational and training institutions and banks are crucial to make the target to be achieved in or-

der to get the advantage of the demographic dividend. The challenges before the new skilling process in the new context are complex and difficult in view of the complex nature of the governance arrangement. Making every stakeholder in the process aware and conscious of the imperative need and the opportunities is the first task. Secondly, comes the need to bring a coordinated action among the institutions involved in skilling our youth. Thirdly, the perception of the stakeholders about vocational education has to be changed. Fourthly, the poor respect and unregulated wage pattern for skilled workers in the unorganized sector turns

our youth towards liberal education and hence the problem has to be addressed effectively. Fifthly, the low capacity of the existing institutional arrangements in skilling youth needs collaborative institutional arrangements to increase the efficiency and effectiveness in skilling youth. Finally, people perception about professionalization of tasks and works in everyday life has to be created. Against the above background, the new exercises of skilling has to take place. Estimates have been made as to how much work force is needed in India skill wise in the coming years (Table 2).

Table 2 Incremental Skill Gap across Various Industries in India in 2022

Industry	Incremental requirement (in millions)
Building and Construction Industry	33.0
Infrastructure Sector	103.02
Real Estate Services	14.0
Gems and Jewellery	4.6
Leather and Leather Goods	4.6
Organized Retail	17.3
Textiles and Clothing	26.2
Electronics and IT Hardware	3.3
Auto and Auto Components	35.0
IT and ITES	5.3
Banking, Financial Services and Insurance	4.2
Furniture and Furnishings	3.4
Tourism and Hospitality Services	3.6
Construction Material and Building Hardware	1.4
Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals	1.9
Food Processing	9.3
Healthcare	12.7
Transportation and Logistics	17.7
Media and Entertainment	3.0
Education and Skill Development Services	5.8
Select Informal Employment Sectors (Domestic Help, Beauticians, Security Guards)	37.6
Incremental	34.7

Sources: IMaCS (2008); Aon Hewitt (2011), National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) cited in Chenoy (2011).

A Micro Analysis

In this context, a small exercise has been undertaken in a centrally funded deemed university (Gandhigram Rural Institute-Deemed University). Students who are pursuing social science stream are drawn from departments for interaction. Almost all the participants are first generation students from their families to pursue higher education. All are stipend holders belonging to socially deprived communities. But they are above average students in terms of their studies. Before initiating the discussion, a detailed briefing was done about the context, new opportunities, new policy and the initiatives to be taken.

First, their aspiration was taken up for discussion. Many respondents informed that they come to studies in social science stream not out of passion. Their financial condition did not permit them to join in technical programmes in engineering colleges and hence they have joined the social science programmes. They informed in the discussion that there is a widely prevalent view among the people that technical education gives job opportunities with high salaries. In every village one could see the impact of technical education in many of the families. People picked up the perception from seeing the reality. Of course, general education also provided such job opportunities but not to the level of technical education. Their immediate concern is to get an employment opportunity. Their focus is to undertake service commission examination and get some jobs in the government. Many of them told that they are

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planning to write group four examination. They are post graduate students and yet could not fix their goal. When they are drawn towards skill development issues in the discussion they openly admitted that they could not see anything tangible in the campus barring a few skill oriented certificate courses. They are also output oriented and not outcome oriented. In the evening a few certificate courses and diploma courses are being offered. Many of the students believe that those are additional qualifications. But in reality they have not increased the employability of the students. The students argued that skill related courses should be given by those who have trade related skills. Hence they argued that in every Arts and Science College and in every general university, skill oriented technical institutions have to be started. When the skill gap was discussed with them, they started arguing that the university system is neither addressing the needs of the society, nor the industry and nor the students. Every segment is working in isolation. The students have informed that many of the teachers working in higher learning institutions are not able to inform the students about the current labor market conditions because the teachers are not knowledgeable about the current state of affairs.

But every one of the participants has indicated that they have a few skills but they are not market oriented. They ac-

quired the skills through informal training which are need based. Further, some of the participants informed that they acquired these skills from their they earn money parents. It was interesting to note that with the available skills while they are doing program in the higher education institution. Table 3 explains the students earning capacity by using their skills acquired from informal training sources and also their parents. But to win over poverty they earn money and spend

for their education. They made it very clear that they want to learn more skills but there is no institutional mechanism available within the college and university system to acquire them.

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Table 3 Earn While You Learn

Sl.No	Nature of Work	Average Earning Per Day(Rs)	AverageDays Per Month	Per Month Earning (Rs)
1.	Helper to electricians	350	6 days	2100
2.	Waiter in catering	450	5 days	2250
3.	Mason	600	6 days	3600
4.	Kitchen assistant	350	6 days	2100
5.	Gardener	250	4 days	1000
6.	Night watchman	200	8 days	1600
7.	Toilet cleaner	300	6 days	1800
8.	Helper to mason	250	6 days	1500
9.	Helper to carpenter	250	6 days	1500
10.	Call driver	600	4 days	2400
11.	Painting	500	4 days	2000

Source: Computed

Further, they argued that if facilities are available in the university system, they can formally acquire more sophisticated skills of the national and international standards. The students have posited certain questions of which one is very important. Why the university system has not been contextualized in terms of integrating vocational education and training system with liberal education offered? Despite policy pronouncements and resource allocation, why higher learning institutions have not acted fast to make use of the new opportunities?

There are a few skills which are being offered in the university system although much below the desired quality standard. In order to increase the salability of the students, their skill levels have to be enhanced. The students in the arts and social science branches are having a clear cut demand. What they demand is that the academic programs have to be conducted in the morning hours from 9 a.m to 1.30 p.m. Afternoon (2.30 p m to 7.30 p m) students should be given option to go for vocational education. The university system either has to create a

community college or it should have to tie up with industrial training centers or polytechnic colleges. An undergraduate student can acquire a few skills which are in demand in the market. Focus could be given on the skills which are required for the unorganized sectors.

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What is the immediate requirement in arts and science colleges is the next question on which interaction took place.

Students need awareness about social entrepreneurship for which all colleges and all universities should have their centers for entrepreneurship. Students should be motivated to acquire a few skills for which the center for skill development or community college has to be created in every university and in every college. Otherwise a meaningful MOU has to be signed between a polytechnic and the college for imparting a few skill sets. Market oriented skills have to be offered in the community colleges. In order to enable the students to acquire skill sets, the main program has to be conducted in the morning hours and skills have to be offered in the evening. The skills desired for them are given in Table 4.

Table 4 Required Skills Set as per the Demand of the Students

Sl No	S.no	Skills Needed
1	18	Communication
2		
3	19	Secretarial assistance
4	20	Statistical analysis
5	21	Report writing for news papers
6	22	Natural beautification
7	23	Artificial beautification
8	24	Hair clipping
9	25	Sales and service
10	26	Cell phone repairing
11	27	Photography
12	28	Legal assistance
13	29	Mansontry
14	30	Accounting
15	31	Painting
16		
17		

Source: Computed

The above skills are projected by the students based on their own cursory analysis and understanding of the labor market. While interacting with them, they

informed that they need more of counseling rather than teaching from their teachers. Teachers' guidance will help them to move in their career ladder.

Table 5 Demand for Soft Skills by the Students

Sl No	Skills Needed
1	Personality Development
2	Communication skill
3	Presentation skill
4	Leadership skill
5	Career Planning skill
6	Problem Solving skills
7	Contact Resolution skills
8	Critical Thinking skills
9	Mentoring skills
10	Public Speaking skill
11	Development Reporting skill
12	Proposal Writing skill

Source: Computed

The skills they acquire should be certified by the sector skill councils for increasing their employability instead of issuing certificate in the university itself. National employment portal has to be created and the available skill force coming out from the colleges have to be put in the portal and thus the employers are facilitated to look for candidates and come to colleges for recruitment. The higher learning institutions have to be reoriented and repositioned.

Integrated Analysis

The proliferation of engineering colleges in higher education in India reveals that the skilled human power has gone unexpectedly on the higher side. Apparently it is true. Even then only 20% of the students coming out from the technical institutions are having the needed skills to suit the requirements of the industry. There is yet another reality that in higher education system 56% of the students are from the arts and science

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streams. It is a paradox that when the quantum of enrollment rate increases in higher learning institutions, the labor market faces severe shortages of skilled human power. It reflects the reality of skill gap. It is to be admitted that the institutions have not produced skilled students needed to meet the market requirements. At the same time students' aspiration level is high to acquire skills needed by the market. But the facilities and schemes available in the arts and science colleges and general universities are inadequate to meet the requirements of either the students or the market. Students have expressed certain categorical demands through their interaction. These are:

- a. Arts and science colleges have to run academic programs from morning 9.00 to 1.30 noon every day and they are to be allowed to undergo skill training in the evening to make the students employable.
- b. Every arts and science college and general university should have community college which should train students in skills. The community colleges have to offer skills which are required in the labor market.
- c. In the absence of community colleges an MoU has to be signed with the near

Table 6 State-wise Distribution of India's Technical Training Institutions

States/Union Territories	Arts, Science & Commerce	Engg. Tech. & Architecture	Medical colleges	Teacher training colleges	Polytechnics	Others	Total
AndhraPradesh	1,603	278	311	343	140	93	2768
ArunachalPradesh	10	1	1	2	1	1	16
Assam	348	4	10	40	9	28	439
Bihar	800	10	28	15	12	36	901
Chhattisgarh	334	16	20	4	10	51	435
Goa	23	5	7	2	5	7	49
Gujarat	518	45	90	125	73	283	1,134
Haryana	168	45	35	37	34	18	337
HimachalPradesh	95	6	12	30	6	29	178
Jammu & Kashmir	65	5	6	127	12	19	234
Jharkhand	113	11	7	8	8	23	170
Karnataka	930	134	423	68	179	146	1,880
Kerala	189	99	125	21	56	82	572
MadhyaPradesh	712	74	97	21	44	147	1,095
Maharashtra	1,018	193	345	255	194	414	2,419
Manipur	58	1	1	6	1	4	71
Meghalaya	54	1	0	3	1	3	62
Mizoram	26	1	0	2	2	1	32
Nagaland	41	0	0	4	2	22	69
Orissa	702	45	58	13	31	92	941
Punjab	232	53	61	47	18	49	460
Rajasthan	751	50	34	111	17	113	1,076
Sikkim	3	1	2	2	2	1	11
Tamil Nadu	693	269	198	160	209	116	1645
Tripura	14	2	3	1	2	6	28
Uttar Pradesh	1,637	114	93	121	107	702	2,774
Uttarakhand	87	12	20	1	24	28	172
West Bengal	374	60	68	66	40	35	643
A&N Islands	3	0	0	1	2	1	7
Chandigarh	12	7	4	3	1	1	28
Dadra	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Daman & Diu	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
Delhi	68	20	24	10	23	64	209
Lakshadweep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Puducherry	17	5	9	19	5	4	59
India	11,699	1,567	2,092	1,669	1,272	2,619	20,918

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

- by ITIs or polytechnics in which the students from the arts and science colleges have to be trained in skills.
- d. A common web portal has to be created to put the names of qualified students in terms of skills to meet the market needs.
- e. The certification process has to be changed and the skill sector council may be authorized to do that.

- f. Higher learning institutions have to be oriented to change the mode of transaction from output to outcome.
- g. Like the Western countries, wage rates have to be fixed for skilled works and thereby we can make the society to recognize the skilled workers value.

Conclusion

First and foremost, skill development consciousness has to be created among the people and the students. At present there is inadequate awareness on skill development among the students and the teachers. There is no initiative at the institutional level for skilling the youth. This has to be addressed immediately. Secondly, all the arts and science colleges have to have community colleges. Otherwise the colleges have to sign MOUs with the industrial technical institutions and polytechnic colleges. This kind of initiatives will help the students of arts and science colleges to acquire skills needed for the market from the ITI and polytechnic institutions. Private institutions which are having both technical and arts and science colleges should adopt a flexible arrangement of allowing students to move from arts and science colleges to technical institutions to acquire skill. Thirdly, students have to be prepared to acquire a skill set to increase their employability. Fourthly, the working hours of the colleges have to be changed. In arts and science colleges office hours have to be fixed in the forenoon. In afternoons, students have to be allowed to go for skilling. A new awakening has to be cre-

ated among the students that adding skills will benefit them to increase their employability. Fifthly, standardization of skills has to be done and in the same way certification process has to be done meticulously to increase rigor in certification. Sixthly, a national employment portal has to be created for the visibility of available workforce on different skills to enable the employer to locate the workforce needed by them. Seventhly, wages have to be standardized with an objective of removing stigma on the laborers. Eighthly, needed system has to be created for the workforce who are working in unorganized sector to protect their interests. All these works will have to be carried out in a war footing by integrating all the agencies involved in skill development in India.

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