

Skill-based education

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The belief that modern education should combat all types of exclusiveness has been one of the main causes behind the emergence of new ways of imparting and extending education. The offshoot of such a belief is inclusive education, which can in fact, bring about a positive social transformation in the 21st century society. Skill-development in the present context, has been seen as the most vibrant issue in nearly all educational policies of current times, which is also because of the fact, that for the long-term benefits of the nation as well as of the individuals, there is an urgent need of skill-based quality education. Moreover, a country like India, having a rich demographic dividend with 54% of population below the age of 25, and 66% people under the age of 35, has been able to receive an international focus. It means that the young age of the population, the number of school-going people within that age group, and the level of work force within this period, are considered assets for the whole country. If proper skill-based education could be given to this group of population, then it could contribute a lot to enhancing the positive social transformation through the creation of a knowledge-enabled population. Therefore, it is the right time to provide the skill-based learning opportunities to all individuals aspiring for education, and thus making them productive citizens in a globally transformed society.

In common educational parlance, skill development means development of knowledge, attitude and skills of an individual so that he or she can promote social and economic development. It also means to ensure development of quality of life, and enlargement of people's choices. However, the fact is that education is the only way to develop the life skills and soft skills of the masses, or the common people in terms of developing their knowledge, attitude and skill. In this connection, the Government of India has taken several initiatives for launching various skill-based programmes from time to time after eval-

uating the prevailing educational system in the country. For making a skill-enabled population, the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India, in December 2013, notified National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF), which is being facilitated by the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA). However, the result is yet to be seen.

In a larger perspective, apart from the conventional mode, the ODL institutions, because of its wider reach and inherent flexibility, may also adopt the NSQF with an actionable goal. Because, the NSQF provides the outcome based-approach, which is very much essential for assessing the acquired knowledge of the people immediately. Again, it may also be helpful to the institution, the students and the employers to get themselves self-assessed regarding the progression pathways in terms of their competency level i.e. what they can do and cannot do after taking the courses under NSQF. Besides these, the courses under NSDA are the only ones through which uniformity in terms of course duration, curriculum, entry requirements as well as title or degree across the country can be established. The most interesting benefit of these courses is that they facilitate the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) through which people, irrespective of their age, sex, and geographical distance, can get formal recognition of their traditional skills so that they can use their informal skills into a productive form later. The NSQF can also help in the alignment of the Indian qualifications to international qualifications in accordance with relevant bilateral and multilateral agreement.

The fact is that the 12th Five Year Plan has also laid particular emphasis on higher education, and has subsequently stated that higher education is critical for developing a modern economy and vibrant polity, because, higher education equips young people with skills relevant for the labour market, and provides opportunity for social mobility. It prepares all the people of the nation to become responsible citi-

zens who value a democratic and pluralistic society. However, despite having such policies and programmes, in India, only 5% of the population within the age group of 19-24 required some sort of skills through vocational education, while the corresponding figure for a country like Korea is as high as 96%. Therefore, it is an urgent need to redesign the policies and give adequate stress on implementing the various skill-based schemes in a proper and justified way. In this regard, a reference may be made to the National Knowledge Commission (NKC) that has recommended for expansion and redesigning of vocational education and improvement of its quality throughout the country.

Education is the only way through which the four basic objectives can be achieved i.e. learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together. Only skill-based education can help the people to achieve these four objectives by developing the competencies in terms of knowledge and critical thinking skills (learning to know), practical skills (learning to do), personal skills (learning to be), and social skills (learning to live together). So, the relevance of skill-based education can also be understood in terms of an individual's acquisition of knowledge, enhancement of skills, development of attitudes, values etc. In today's society, there is a growing demand for Human Capital, and enhancement of manpower. In this context, we need functional education that helps us to get sustainable living. The practical skills are the manual skills under learning to do, and the other psychosocial life skills are the skills under learning to know, learning to be and learning to live together. In fact, life skill education acquaints the learners with those skills, which are of utmost necessity in both general and specific contexts.

In this connection, apart from the conventional system of education, Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Open and Distance E-Learning (ODEL) system should be adopted for starting a new frontier for socio-economic development in the state through the provision of a skill-based education.