

Skill Development in Higher Education: A Study with Reference to B.Voc. Degree Programmes in Maharashtra

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Abstract: *University Grants Commission in its guidelines provided to universities and colleges upon the introduction of B.Voc. Programme says that the graduates from Indian Higher Education System must be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills for the economic growth in present times. Further it expresses the need that the requirements of the industries need to be considered while framing the curricula in higher education in the most innovative and flexible manner in order to create the well trained and holistic graduates. From this we can infer that as the graduates step out from our universities and colleges, they should be well trained and qualified in terms of both knowledge and skills to meet the industry needs. This is in accordance with the rapidly advancing technology used in the production of goods as well as services to the public offered by the industries. The present system of higher education may not be able to produce desired outcome unless revolutionised by all means. If this has to be reflected in the curricula, research and comprehensive studies need to be done in order to gauge the industry needs, workforce required by them, knowledge and skills needed for existing jobs, resources required for such training and instruction. Govt of India had issued a notification for National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF). For the further development the sector skill councils established under Nation Skill Development Corporation have to develop Qualification Packs (QPs) and National Occupational Standards (NOS) required for the available job roles in various industry sectors like electronics, technology, banking and finance, health, beauty and wellness, retailing etc. The underlying objective was to incorporate the well formulated competencies required for the specific job roles in curricula of higher education for creating employable graduates. This may lead us to think that the curricula of the existing conventional degree programmes like Bachelor of Arts or Commerce may be subjected to high level of transformation to meet the objectives. However, no such steps were taken to modify the existing undergraduate programmes. Rather a new initiative in the form of Bachelor of Vocation (B.Voc.) degree was taken by UGC in 2014. This new programme was launched by UGC as a part of Skill Development in Higher Education in colleges and universities and the institutions recognised by UGC under 2(f) and 12(B) of UGC Act, 1956 were eligible to adopt the new programme as per UGC guidelines.*

Keywords: B.Voc. Vocational Education, Higher Education, Skill Development, National Occupational Standards (NOS), Qualification Pack (QP), On Job Training, NSQF Level

1. Introduction

1.1 Financial Assistance

Financial allocation was made by UGC within the ceiling of 1.70 crores for the period of three years under different heads initially for two courses and further the grant of 25 lakhs for one Assistant professor for each additional course making a total of 2.2 crores for maximum four courses.

Financial assistance included one-time start up assistance for the development of infrastructure, remuneration of contractual faculty/adjunct or visiting faculty and nodal officer, operating expenditure for hiring services, travels, field visits, repairs and maintenance of equipment, organizing seminars, workshops etc.

An Advisory Committee comprising of representatives from the affiliated university, relevant industry partners, relevant sector Skill Councils and nodal officer for the effective governance of all the aspects of finance, coordination and overall conduct of the approved B.Voc. Scheme. For instance, the university running the B.Voc. Scheme will have the Vice chancellor or his nominee as Chairman and nodal officer as a member secretary.

Advisory Committee has been suggested to review the courses as and when required but at least once in six months and also to ensure the timely submission of information to

UGC and uploading data in SDMS. Nodal officer has to submit quarterly report to UGC and also to NSDC.

1.2 Curricular Aspects of B.Voc.

- 1) UGC recommends that the B.Voc. Curriculum must be necessarily aligned to Qualification Packs (QPs)/National Occupation Standards of selected job role within the industry sector.
- 2) The curriculum will contain the general education component 40 percent and skill component 60 percent. For the skill component the model curriculum developed by the respective sector skill council can be adopted or adapted in consultation with the industry partners.
- 3) In case the model curriculum is not available for the selected job role the institution can develop the curriculum in consultation with the relevant sector skill council and industry partner. In such case, curriculum has to be aligned with National Occupation Standards.
- 4) Special training should be conducted for the students who have not done any prior training of NSQF level 4 at 10 + 2 level for the first semester of the degree. Similarly, such training should be also provided to the students who have completed formal training of NSQF level 4 at 10 + 2 level in another sector but now have opted for admission in different sector.
- 5) For both these categories of the students, assessment has to be done by Sector Skill Council for the selected job

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role for NSQF Level 4 and certified for the same before they enter the second semester of B.Voc. Degree.

6) The three year degree programme has multiple levels of qualification as shown below.

Entry Qualification	SEM I	SEM 2	SEM 4	SEM 6
10+2 with NSQF level 4 in the same sector		Diploma NSQF Level 5	Advanced Diploma Level 6	Degree NSQF Level 7
10+2 with NSQF level 4 different sector	NSQF level 4 assessment and certification to be done by sector skill council	Diploma NSQF Level 5	Advanced Diploma Level 6	Degree NSQF Level 7
10+2 with NO NSQF level 4 training	NSQF level 4 assessment and certification to be done by sector skill council	Diploma NSQF Level 5	Advanced Diploma Level 6	Degree NSQF Level 7

- 7) Further, it is also possible to exit the programme at the given NSQF levels for employment and join back at the next higher level of the same sector when the candidate wishes to do so.
- 8) In order to successfully execute this, there has to be a job role at every NSQF level for the facilitation of employability and industry acceptability.
- 9) UGC recommends that adequate attention should be given to practical work, on job training, project work and student's portfolio in curriculum design.
- 10) Apart from the skill component, the institutions should carefully plan the general education curriculum which is supportive of the skill based core subjects. Subjects like IT Skills, Soft Skills and language proficiency and literature can be included in the general education. Further it is suggested that the Board of Studies of University or autonomous college should decide the general education curriculum as per university norms whereas the skill components will conform the QPs/NOS.
- 11) UGC has also specified the desired outcomes in terms of level descriptors that the students shall meet at the end of level 5, 6 and 7 of NSQF. These level descriptors are entailed to the professional knowledge, professional skills, core skills to be acquired by the student and the student's readiness to carry out the job responsibility at every specified level of NSQF.

The flexibility of multiple exit points with certification offers an added advantage to the students who would like to try their hands on the job in the industry and also to join back later at the next level of vocational education.

Also, the advantages of pursuing a Bachelor's degree in terms of very important qualification criteria for the entry to government jobs, for appearing for competitive exams and also for vertical upward mobility to post graduate degree and research have been assured by UGC by taking important decisions.

The academic equivalence of B.Voc. degree at par with the traditional degrees is emphasized by UGC order (D.O.No.F.2-7/2014(CC/NVEQF)/Misc, 3rd August, 2016) which clearly indicates Bachelor of Vocation (B.Voc.), a Bachelor level degree specified by UGC under section 22(3) of UGC Act, 1956 and notified in official Gazette of India dated 19th January, 2013 be recognised at par with the other Bachelor level degrees for competitive exams conducted by Union/State Public Service Commission, Staff Selection Commission or other such bodies where the eligibility criteria is "Bachelor Degree in any discipline". It also states that the students with B.Voc. Degree should be considered eligible for the trans disciplinary vertical mobility into such courses where entry qualification is a Bachelor Degree without specific requirement in a particular discipline.

1.3 Colleges approved by UGC for implementation of B.Voc.

In 2014, total 127 institutions were approved for the implementation of B.Voc. The total financial grant-in-aid sanctioned was 23,495 lakhs. In the state of Maharashtra, the number of such approved institute was 84 out of which 35 were from Pune. In 2015-16 under DDU KAUSHAL Kendra scheme, 48 institutions were approved with financial grant-in-aid to run B.Voc. Degree programmes. Besides, 16 more institutes were approved as DDU KAUSHAL Kendra under self financed category. Thus, the number of institutes approved for running B.Voc. in various trades have increased with new additions till 2020-21. UGC had approved 80 trades/vocational sectors for B.Voc. Degree till 2014-15. However, institutes were recommended to identify new trades foreseeing the employability opportunities.

Summarily, it can be said that government has left no stone unturned while making B.Voc. Programme powerful while reinforcing is academic content, employability potential and also the financial support. Gradually, the trend seems to percolate among the youth to turn towards vocational education. But at the same time, qualitative aspect needs to be studied in order to gauge the effectiveness of B.Voc. and whether it is really going in the direction to achieve the pre-defined objectives of creating well trained, talented job-ready graduates.

1.4 Present Day Scenario of B.Voc. Programmes

As per AISHE report the students' enrollment is on rise from 544 in 2013-14 to 33263 in 2018-19. Vocational education is being accepted by the students as a need of the present hour and also thinking of the job opportunities in certain sectors.

1.5 Hypotheses

The present research focuses on the following hypotheses to be tested in the light of data received through the descriptive studies.

- 1) Curricula that are modulated to develop knowledge competencies and skill competencies are being implemented in the suitable manner.
- 2) Industries are involved to ensure the present day requirements of knowledge and skills and also to provide support for on job training, internship, later opportunities for placement at least to the deserving candidates.
- 3) All facilities including laboratories, equipments, and qualified trained staff are made available.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

- 1) 50 percent of the total colleges responded have received only half the amount of financial grant-in-aid from UGC.
 - 2) Eligibility criteria of 80 percent B.Voc. institutes is 12th pass from any discipline. Only 10 percent of the institutes have allowed only HSC vocational students from respective trade for admission to B.Voc.
 - 3) 40 percent institutes run more than three B.Voc. programmes.
 - 4) All the institutes who responded to survey are government aided institutes included colleges and university centres.
 - 5) 70 percent institutes have claimed that they run special NSQF level 4 programme for the students who have not come from HSC vocational background in the relevant trade. However, only 80 percent of these call for NSQF level 4 assessment by Sector Skill Council. Actually, this has been stated in UGC guidelines that the prior training should be provided to the non-vocational students and that the assessment should be conducted by Sector Skill Council at the end first semester.
 - 6) 90 percent institutes provide certificate, diploma and advanced diploma at specific exit levels of the degree programme.
 - 7) There is not a very great demand for B.Voc. degree yet from the students as only 30 percent institutes have admissions to the fullest intake capacity.
 - 8) Responses show that the trend of admission in B.Voc. is on decline for the existing programmes.
 - 9) Some institutes have ceased a few B.Voc. programmes due to lack of funds and low response to admission.
 - 10) 80 percent institutes have designed their own curriculum based on the model curriculum given by sector skill councils.
 - 11) 80 percent institutes have appointed teaching staff for skill components in the curriculum. Only 10 percent institutes have tie up with industry partners for teaching skill related content of the curriculum.
 - 12) 44 percent institutes have industry partnership for OJT and internship.
 - 13) 50 percent institutes claim that they have received support from industries for placement. Rest of the institutes arrange only industry visits or field work.
 - 14) There is a very short duration allowed by the industries for internship or OJT.
- competency mentioned in the QP has to be acquired by the student. However, the syllabi are just like the list of the units and subunits to be taught customarily like other conventional courses. Consequently, the teaching in B.Voc. programmes does not become competency based teaching.
- 3) The most important aspect is the teaching of skill components by industry based resources persons. But it is evident from the above data that most of the content is taught by the academicians. This condition may keep the students deprived from getting the knowledge of the current state of technology, operations, skills in the industry or market.
 - 4) Another important aspect is of on-job-training. This will definitely require support from s industry. The industries should accept the institute proposals for the on-job training of the students. But, this is not the case and thus the students are deprived from getting the hands on experience of the jobs. The major key to success of vocational course is missing.
 - 5) Skill Development Centre of Savitribai Phule Pune University has introduced B.Voc. in Retail Management Programme in collaboration with Maruti Industries. This includes training by Maruti Industries at their Retail showrooms from 3rd Semester onwards and the trainee students are paid a stipend amount of Rs. 8000 and Rs. 9000 from second year and third year onwards. This model can be tried in other trades of. B.Voc. programmes.
 - 6) Colleges and University Centres should involve industries in all aspects like mentoring, OJT, internship, and placement. They should evolve comprehensive industry-academia model for executing the course in rigorous mode which will facilitate the required work-based training with the sound academic as well as industry support.
 - 7) National Education Policy (2020) envisions reimagining the vocational education in coming decade. Vocational education has to be integrated in higher education in phased manner. Higher education institutions (HEIs) should join hands with private industry or NGOs for offering vocational education. The courses should be offered on the basis of skill gap analysis and local needs. HEIs will be allowed to conduct short term training courses in various skills including soft skills.
 - 8) Taking cognizance to above mentioned point, approach to offer vocational education can be modified to a great extent.

3. Conclusion

- 1) The model curriculum gives the knowledge and skill parameters sourced fro National Occupational Standards and qualification pack for specific job role. The content of the curriculum and that of each syllabi in the curriculum is thus prepared by the institutes. But when it is approved by the university Board of Studies, there is no cross-examination to ensure that all the criteria in NOS have got enough representation in the content. Thus, the curriculum may not exactly fulfill all the criteria required for a specific job role for which the students are being trained. This will not ensures the desired outcome after the completion of the degree programme.
- 2) The syllabus content has to be taught by the teachers in such a way that each and every knowledge and skill

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