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Developing 21st Century Skills in Indian Youth: Obstacles and Possibilities on the Path to Viksit Bharat by 2047

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Abstract: ***India's goal of becoming a developed country (Viksit Bharat) by 2047 depends a lot on turning its large youth population into a skilled, creative, and competitive workforce on the world stage. This paper gives a full look at the skills needed in the 21st century, the current state of education and skills in India, the main problems that young people face when trying to learn new skills, and the ways to get around these problems. The conversation ends with suggestions for policies that will give Indian youth the power to drive national progress.***

Keywords: Education and Skills, Youth, Viksit Bharat

1. Introduction

India wants to be one of the world's top economies by 2047, when it will celebrate 100 years of independence. It wants to have fair growth, strong technology, and social harmony. India's youth play a big part in this vision. They are one of the biggest and most active groups of people in the world. The needs of the 21st century, on the other hand, are very different from those of the past. The fast pace of globalization, digital transformation, automation, and the knowledge economy means that people need skills that go beyond what they learn in school. To be successful, both personally and nationally, you need skills like critical thinking, digital literacy, creativity, leadership, and cross-cultural communication.

India has a long and interesting history of education and learning. Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, Vallabhi, Odantapuri, Punnagari, Pataliputra, and other places were at their best, drawing scholars from all over the world. They were trying to bring in knowledge and education from every direction. India was a shining star of advanced civilization on the world stage at that time, and it thrived for hundreds of years. The Indian economy was at its best. There was a lot of demand for Indian goods in world markets. India was a big place to trade gold, silver, spices, and silk. India was once called the "golden bird." It was a rich country because it had fertile land, lots of natural resources, and many trade routes. People came from all over the world to study and travel here because of the rich culture, which includes art, science, and literature.

The education system is the most important part of any country's progress. A strong and competitive economy needs a well-educated population to grow. People are more productive, creative, and innovative when they learn new things and improve their skills. This makes the country more competitive and helps it move forward technologically. Education can end illiteracy, and skill can end poverty and unemployment. It can also help the country get better workers. Education improves cognitive skills and helps people learn how to solve problems. The economy of the country is very dependent on how many skilled young people there are. Young people with skills are better able to work more efficiently in today's changing job market. Education and skill not only help people move up in society and the economy, but they also create a lot of jobs. By investing wisely in education and skills, a highly skilled workforce can be ready to better meet the needs of today's industries. This will help the country reach its goal of becoming a developed nation more quickly.

The National Education Policy 2020 says that the Indian education system's main goals are to make it accessible, equal, high-quality, relevant, and efficient. These goals will help the country get ready for a knowledge-based economy. The Indian government has started many programs, like the Prime Minister's Skill Development Scheme, the National Innovation Campaign, Make in India, Start-up India, and others that will make the country a place where education and skill are the most important factors in development. This kind of education and training will lead to more jobs, spark scientific innovation and creativity, and move the country forward on the path to development. India has 145 million people, and 65 percent of them are young. This is the most powerful youth force in history. Their hard work, research, and use of technology will be the miracle of the 21st century that will bring the world to Developed India in 2047. But things have changed a lot in the last few years. India has made a lot of progress in most areas of society and the economy over the past 70 years. For example, literacy rates have gone from 12% in 1947 to 77.7% in 2023, and life expectancy has gone from 32 years in 1947 to 70 years in 2023. India's economy has grown faster in the last ten years, going from the 10th largest in 2014 to the 5th largest in 2023.

The following points can help us understand how to build a strong India by 2047:

- **Quality of education**: It is important to raise the level of education at all levels, from primary school to college. This includes better training for teachers, a new curriculum, and a stronger foundation.
- **Equality and inclusion**: Making sure that all kids, no matter how much money their parents have, can get a

good education. Girls' education and the education of children with disabilities need to be given extra attention.

- **Skill development**: Linking education to the needs of the job market links the needs of the industry with new technological advances and vocational training. We need to focus on entrepreneurship, green energy, IT, healthcare, and practical training. To do this, we will need to offer different types of courses in different fields. People will need to go through training and internships to get real-world experience.
- **Better research and education**: The New Education Policy 2020 has been put into place to encourage better research and education. The goal is to make sure that students get a good education and that researchers have a good place to work. To reach the goal of a developed India by 2047, the focus is on making changes to the education system and raising the quality of teachers.
- **Encouraging technical and scientific research**: The government has started programs like "Mission Innovation" and "Start-up India" to encourage progress in science and technology. These programs aim to encourage technological innovation and help India's scientific and technological landscape grow and develop.

NITI AYOG says that India is close to becoming the world's third-largest economy by 2047 because it has a large workforce, is in a good geopolitical location, and is changing its economic policies. India's population of more than 1.45 billion people is a demographic dividend that can lead to economic growth, new ideas, and more work. Because it is located in the Indian Ocean, the country has a lot of power in the Indo-Pacific region. This makes it an important player in world trade, security, and diplomacy. But to make this vision a reality, we need to change our way of thinking and hire skilled workers who can make big changes to the economy that encourage innovation, productivity, and competition.

1.1 Vision for Learning

The goal of Viksit Bharat 2047 is to make India a world leader in knowledge, innovation, and inclusive development by the year 2047. The main goal is to make sure that everyone, no matter their gender, region, or economic status, has access to a good education. This means that everyone should be able to read and write and go to school. The vision focuses on skill-based and job-oriented learning to give students the vocational skills they need and encourage strong connections between industry and academia. This will help prepare a workforce that is ready for global opportunities and the fast-changing job market of the 21st century. Technology will be very important, with a focus on digital classrooms, AI-driven learning, and EduTech solutions that will help close the gap between urban and rural areas and make personalized, hybrid education models possible. The vision also aims to make India a global leader in research by improving funding, infrastructure, and academic freedom, encouraging innovation hubs in universities, and making India a global leader in research. Equity and inclusion are very important, and there is a promise to get rid of differences between people based on gender, caste, region, and language. This is in line with NEP 2020, which says that education should be available in people's first languages and local languages. The plan calls for building world-class universities, bringing in international students and faculty, and raising Indian institutions to the top of the global rankings in order to make India more competitive on the world stage. One of the main goals is to help teachers grow professionally by using AI for training and evaluation, as well as by recognizing great teaching. In general, Viksit Bharat 2047 wants to create an education system that is skill-based, innovative, globally competitive, and ready for the future.

1.2 Understanding 21st century skills

21st-century skills are a group of skills that help people do well in a world that is changing quickly and is driven by technology. There are usually four main groups of them:

1.2.1 Important Topics and Themes for the 21st Century

It is still very important to be good at subjects like math, science, languages, and social studies. But knowledge needs to be put in context by using themes like global awareness, financial literacy, health literacy, civic literacy, and environmental awareness. Climate change might now be a part of science classes, along with other scientific ideas, to teach students to be responsible for the environment.

1.2.2 Skills for Learning and Innovation (The "4 Cs")

- **Critical Thinking**: The skill to look at, judge, and combine information, figure out problems, and make smart choices.
- **Creativity**: It means coming up with new ideas, thinking "outside the box," and being able to change.
- **Collaboration**: It means being able to work well with others, even if they are from different backgrounds or cultures.
- **Communication:** It is being able to clearly express your thoughts, active listening, and using different forms of media to do so.

1.2.3 Skills in Information, Media, and Technology

In today's digital world, it's important to know how to use technology, media, and information. Being digitally literate means being able to use computers, the internet, and other digital tools to find, analyze, and make information. Media literacy is the ability to understand, judge, and critically analyze media messages and the reasons behind them. ICT literacy also includes using information and communication technology to solve problems and make decisions.

1.2.4 Skills for Life and Work

Personal and professional growth both depend on having good life and career skills. People who are flexible and adaptable can easily switch roles, jobs, and environments. Being a leader and being responsible means taking charge, leading teams well, and acting ethically in everything you do. Productivity and accountability stress the importance of keeping good work habits and always getting good results. Also, social and cross-cultural skills help people understand and respect differences, which makes it easier for people from different backgrounds to work together.

2. The Present Situation in India

2.1 People and Chances

India has the largest youth population in the world, which is a demographic advantage with a lot of economic potential. The United Nations Population Fund-UNFPA (formerly known as the United Nations Fund For Population Activities) says that 68% of India's population is between the ages of 15 and 64, which is the working age group. The reports also say that 26% of the people are between the ages of 10 and 24. If this young group gets the right education and training, they can really help the economy grow. A young and skilled workforce can boost productivity and encourage new ideas, which can speed up development. Also, Indian youth's ability to adapt to new technologies can speed up the digital transformation process, letting the country skip over traditional stages of technological progress. India could also become a global leader in human capital if it focuses on the right things, especially in fields like IT, healthcare, and services.

2.2 Study of the Education System

The Indian education system has made a lot of progress in terms of enrollment and infrastructure, especially since the Right to Education Act (RTE) was passed in 2009. Even with these improvements, the system still has major problems to deal with. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2024) says that even though more than 98.1% of kids between the ages of 6 and 14 are in school, many of them have trouble with the basic reading and math skills that are expected of them at their grade level. The widespread culture of rote learning prioritizes memorization over conceptual comprehension and application, thereby obstructing the cultivation of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Also, vocational training is still limited, with only about 5% of the workforce having received formal vocational education (NSDC, 2022). This shows that there is a gap in skill development that is important for meeting the needs of the labor market.

2.3 Government Programs

India has started a number of important programs to close skill gaps:

- **Skill India Mission:** Launched in 2015, aims to train over 400 million people in various skills by 2022.
- **Digital India:** Promotes IT literacy and digital infrastructure, targeting both urban and rural youth.
- **Start-up India:** Encourages entrepreneurship among youth, providing mentorship and financial support.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:** Emphasizes holistic, multidisciplinary education, vocational training, and skill development from early grades.

3. Obstacle to 21st century skills

3.1 Out dated Curriculum and Pedagogy

The continued use of rote learning as the main way to teach students makes it much harder for them to learn how to think critically, be creative, and use what they learn in real life. Traditional lecture-based methods are still common, but they often lead to passive learning, where students aren't very engaged and their analytical skills aren't very strong. For instance, science education often emphasizes note-taking over experimentation or project-based learning. This lack of progress in teaching is made worse by the fact that teachers aren't getting enough training. The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE, 2020) says that current teacher education programs are often out of date and too theoretical, giving students' too little exposure to new teaching methods, digital tools, and hands-on learning methods. Also, standardized tests are the main way that assessment systems measure students' understanding of concepts or their ability to use what they know in real-life situations.

3.2 The Digital Divide

Even though a lot of people in India use smartphones, there is still a big digital divide, especially between people who live in cities and those who live in rural areas. IAMAI (2023) says that only 37% of rural households have internet access, while 67% of urban households do. This difference also applies to device ownership. Many students, especially girls and those from underrepresented groups, do not have their own computers or smartphones. Digital literacy is still a big problem. Even when devices are available, both students and teachers often don't have the skills they need to use digital technologies effectively for learning (UNICEF, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic made these differences even worse because millions of students in rural and low-income areas couldn't take part in online classes.

3.3 Socio-Economic Barriers

Socio-economic factors continue to make it hard for everyone to get a fair chance at education and skill development. Economic hardship often forces young people to drop out of school to help their families make ends meet, which makes it harder for them to learn important skills. Disparities based on gender make it even harder for girls in rural areas to get an education because they have to deal with things like early marriage, household duties, and limited mobility. Caste and regional disparities also affect how easily people can get good education and skill training. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD, 2021) says that the dropout rates for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and female students in secondary school are much higher than average. This shows that there are systemic unfairnesses in the education system.

3.4 Gap Between Industry and Academia

There is a big difference between what universities teach and what businesses need, which makes it harder for graduates to find jobs. The India Skills Report (2023) shows that only 45.9% of Indian graduates meet the standards for employability set by the industry. Curricula frequently fail to keep pace with the changing needs of the job market, offering few opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and experiential learning that could help students learn practical skills. Because of this, graduates, especially those who studied engineering, often have a lot of knowledge but not enough practical experience and skills for the workplace.

Employers consistently report deficiencies in communication, teamwork, and adaptability among graduates, underscoring the pressing necessity to synchronize educational outcomes with labor market expectations.

4. Possibilities and Positive Interventions

4.1 Policy and Curriculum Reform

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a major change in India's education system by calling for multidisciplinary education and the inclusion of vocational training and skill development from the very beginning. The policy focuses on experiential learning methods, such as adding coding and digital literacy to the curriculum, to better prepare students for a job market that is changing quickly. One of the main goals of the NEP is to make vocational education more common. By 2025, the goal is for 50% of students to have some kind of vocational training, which will help close the gap between formal education and skills that can be used in the workplace.

4.2 Digital Innovation and Edutech

The growth of educational technology (Edutech) platforms has made it easier for people all over the country to get their hands on good learning materials. Millions of students can learn through interactive, self-paced, and skill-based content on private platforms like Byju's, Unacademy, and Vedantu, as well as government programs like SWAYAM, PM e-Vidya, and DIKSHA. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these platforms saw huge growth. For example, government digital platforms had over 2.3 billion views of e-learning content, which shows how important they are for keeping education going. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) offered through sites like NPTEL, Coursera, and Udemy have also made it easier for people to learn new skills in areas like coding, data science, and language learning. Gamification and adaptive learning tools powered by AI are two examples of innovations that make learning more personal and better. These tools make education more interesting and useful.

4.3 Public-Private Partnerships

Partnerships between business and academia have become more common as a way to make sure that what students learn in school matches what employers want. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, and Wipro are some of the biggest IT companies that have set up campus-to-corporate training programs, hackathons, and internships that give students the real-world experience they need. Pratham, Teach for India, and the Agastya International Foundation are just a few examples of non-governmental organizations and foundations that work to improve the basic, digital, and life skills of poor young people. The TCS iON Digital Learning Hub, for instance, offers free online courses to students, colleges, and job seekers. This shows how public-private partnerships can help people learn new skills on a large scale.

4.4 Focus on Inclusivity

To deal with the systemic problems that marginalized groups face, the government has put more and more emphasis on inclusivity. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, and Digital Saksharta Abhiyan are all examples of targeted programs that aim to improve girls' education and digital literacy among a wide range of people. The latter program has successfully taught more than six crore people basic digital skills, showing how effective large-scale efforts can be. Also, state governments have started projects in specific regions to help tribal, rural, and economically disadvantaged areas, making sure that everyone has equal access to skill development opportunities. These targeted efforts are essential for promoting inclusive growth and addressing educational disparities among various demographics.

5. Conclusion

India's goal of becoming a Viksit Bharat by 2047 depends on how well its young people learn the skills they need for the 21st century. The country's large population is a unique chance to boost economic growth, innovation, and competitiveness on the world stage. But this potential can only be reached by completely changing how education and skill development work. The long-standing problems, like outdated curricula that focus on rote learning, big digital divides, social and economic inequalities, and a gap between industry and academia that won't go away, make it hard to train a workforce that can meet the needs of a fast-changing global economy. Still, there are many ways to get past these problems, and they all look good. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is an important step toward bringing together different types of education, hands-on learning, and job training. This will make sure that what students learn is more in line with what businesses need. The fast growth of Edutech platforms and digital innovations gives us scalable ways to close access gaps and make learning more personal. Public-private partnerships improve hands-on experience and skill development even more. At the same time, targeted government programs focus on inclusion, making sure that groups that are already on the outside don't get left behind in this change. India can use its young people's full potential to drive technological progress, economic growth, and social harmony by creating a culture of lifelong learning, innovation, and inclusion. The vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 is not just a dream; it can come true if the education system changes to meet the needs of the 21st century. This will give every young Indian the tools they need to help the country grow and improve its standing in the world.

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