



Issues and Perspectives in Combining Career Skills and Life Skills in Education

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Abstract

Education is the passport to opportunity and prosperity for an individual and for stability and development of a nation. Educated individuals can become entrepreneurs, academics, professionals, or business leaders and contribute in the process of development of a nation. Education in 21st century is a blend of career skills and life skills which involves enabling today's students to be academically competitive in global situations; good citizens within their community, country, and world; and effective within their workplace. It means that education must engage new technologies, equip students with rigorous academic coursework, and foster innovation and creativity.

Career skills may include creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication and information and ICT literacy. Life skills may include EQ, Attitude towards life, interpersonal skills, self-awareness building skills, decision-making, prioritization, empathy and coping with stress. Present scenario in the Indian context: While addressing issues and perspectives in combining Career skills and life skills in Education the most important fact to be comprehended is (a) these issues have been arising out of the changing social ethos from 1990 i.e. post LPG era and policies. (b) These issues are pertaining to striking a balance between social changes and the mandate of development before one of the largest democracy of the world.

Considering these two important points, Education – that too of combining life skills and career skills- is a major factor, which would go a long way to achieve the objectives of Higher Education in India. This paper makes a sincere attempt to probe into these areas and proposes to examine the possibility of developing a model, which would be suitable to the Indian learners and teachers initially and become adaptable to other developing societies in due course.

Historical Review

Since Independence Higher education in India has evolved with the objective of empowering people with the requisite skills for leading a quality life that would help in the individual as well as national well being. The Government of India has been taking significant steps towards development of Higher education to suit the specific requirements of the country. Various Commissions were set up for the purpose, namely:

1. University Education Commission in 1948 under the Chairmanship of Late Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, the former President of India.
2. The Kothari Commission in 1964 was appointed to advise the Government on national pattern of education and on policies for development of education.
3. The National Policy on Education was formed in 1986 and adopted in 1992 with some modifications. It provided a comprehensive framework to guide the development of education in its entirety

The essence and role of education according to all the Commissions on Education is that:

1. In our national perception Education is essentially for all. This is fundamental to our all-round development- material and spiritual
2. Education has an acculturating role. It refines sensitivities and perceptions that contribute to national cohesion, a scientific temper and independence of mind and spirit thus furthering the goals of secularism, socialism and democracy enshrined in our Constitution.
3. Education develops manpower for different levels of the economy. It is also the substrate on which, research and development flourish, being the ultimate guarantee of national self reliance
4. In sum, education is a unique investment in the present and the future. This cardinal principle is the key to the National Policy on Education.

A close look at the recommendations made by all the Commissions for development of higher education policy in the country shows that all of them have emphasized on one important aspect and that is the all round, holistic development of individuals –. We may therefore very well infer that the need for a blend of career skills and life skills in education was recognized at a very early stage of development of our nation.

Implementation of the national policies on education: Though the recommendations made by various commissions were very impressive they were not implemented effectively. A detailed plan/strategy comprising of assignment of specific responsibilities, provision of financial and organizational support would have well served the purpose. But the lack of it led to problems of quality, quantity and access to higher education in India (www.ncert.nic.in/oth_anoun/npe86.pdf)

With the LPG (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization) policy of the 1990s, a new phase dawned in the Higher Education sector. There were reforms in all sectors and if there was anything constant, it was *Change* and till date this change has become the guiding principle. So,

with LPG, we landed ourselves on a bigger canvas with complex opportunities and challenges. We were quick to realize that any upward mobility thereafter could be achieved only by coping with the change or by adapting to the change- be it the upward mobility in economic status or social status. And the key to adapting to this change was Education. So, Higher Education attained a key position in globalised economy and there were many expectations from the sector. However, there were many apprehensions about the benefits of LPG to the developing economy like India because its impact on the Individuals, Institutions, Systems and societies was not only not clear but also not comprehensible at that moment.

While some argued that globalization would promise dramatic and rewarding changes to the higher education system, some argued that it may threaten the very stability needed to build well performing higher education system. Developing countries like India would have to adjust willingly or unwillingly to the quickening pulse of international change and accordingly reform on several fronts simultaneously, which may not be possible under the given resource status of higher education(Dr. Mithilesh Kumar Singh, Challenges of Globalization on Indian Higher Education). In other words, the concerns expressed were with regard to:

- i) Benefits of globalization to different sections of the society –which were presumed to be far uneven.
- (ii) Its role in creating greater social stratification and inequality – widening the gaps between the “haves” and “have nots”
- (iii) Its role in destabilizing and distorting the indigenous culture, tradition and values
- (iv) Its role in alienating the youth from its own place by uprooting and at the same time not sure of providing a landing space and
- (v) More than these, its role in facilitating the rich countries to grow richer by drawing the resources from the poor.

These concerns were particularly important for a country like India which is a Welfare State. In a Welfare State, it is the responsibility of the nation to create social and economic equality. It is the responsibility of the government to take care of the welfare of the single most citizen in the lowest strata.

The 1990s thus posed two-fold responsibility on Higher Education System- 1) To consolidate the system’s development at national level and make it global by availing the opportunities thrown by opening up of the economy and 2) taking on the challenge of ensuring that the benefits derived there from reach every single person of the lowest strata in the society.

It was quite a balancing act for the country in general and for the HE system in particular amidst these two challenges of rising up to grab the opportunities yet going deep to reach the grassroot level. Added to it was the rapidity in which the entire change had to be handled.

Need for Career skills: Globalisation brought with it a transformation in the skills required for various jobs. The traditional skill sets imparted by the Higher Education system were insufficient to fulfill the demands of modern jobs. There was a strong need for a different set of skills that would make an individual more likely to gain employment and be successful in the chosen occupation. A strong need was felt to revamp our education system. Employable skills, career skills became the catch words of this era.

Career skills include creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication and information and ICT literacy,

Career skills may be defined as "A set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and to be successful in their chosen occupations"

Rationale behind developing Career skills: Emphasis on career skills was also due to the fact that there was lot of hue and cry from the industry that it is unable to get the required skilled workforce for its operations. Our Ex-President, Dr. Abdul Kalam once pointed out that India does not have a problem of unemployment but unemployability and this was proved in a survey on Higher education system in India. It was found that 48% of the companies find it difficult to get skilled workforce for their operations. This is an alarming situation, particularly in India which boasts of Demographic Dividend. It was realized that this Demographic Dividend which is an asset today will turn into liability if the required skill sets are not imbibed by the working youth. And so quite appropriately, the focus has been on career skills.

Other reasons for developing career skills are:

1. The emergence of global economy demands reshaping and adapting of higher education policy to changed global realities
2. The entire skills set required by the industry at global as well as national level has changed. Higher education system cannot afford to overlook this.
3. More than half of the job opportunities to be created in India would be skill specific and therefore skill development has to be viewed seriously.
4. The growth momentum of the economy can be sustained only if skill gaps are addressed
5. All developed and developing countries have been pragmatically shaping their HE policies and thereby posing a tough competition for India

Need for life skills: In recent years, however, there is an innate fear in our mind as to whether we are moving towards extreme practicability? Are we grooming our students to lead a quality life?

If we take a look at the present conditions in the country we understand that on one hand we have innumerable opportunities because of globalization. We have to build up career skills, rise higher and come out of our comfort zones to grab the opportunities. On the other hand we have to go deep at grass root level and see that single most person in the lowest strata is benefitted. It is thus about striking a balance between social changes and the mandate of development before one of the largest democracies of the world. If we have to navigate through this complex environment, mere career skills will not help. Today's life and work environments require something more than mere thinking skills and content knowledge. It has to be a blend of career skills and life skills.

Life skills include EQ, Attitude towards life, interpersonal skills, self awareness building skills, decision making, prioritization, empathy and coping with stress. The World Health Organization (WHO) in 1993 defined life skills as, "the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life.

Life skills are a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills, which can help people to make informed decisions, communicate effectively and develop coping and self management skills that may help an individual to lead a healthy and productive life. Life skills are said to be derived from the values that one holds early on in the life and they develop to take different dimensions on the basis of situations and experiences that come across in one's life. So life skills are a function of experiences. Then why talk about them in Higher education if it is all in the realm of experiences? This is because we do not want our students to flounder, when faced with unfamiliar situations just because they are not skilled in processing the situation. In a world that is increasingly dynamic, we need to engage our students early on about the processes and outcomes and make them better equipped. We cannot wait for the event to happen and processing to begin. Therefore by providing simulated or live cases and situations we can help students understand to some extent how to cope with unfamiliar situations. The following example explains how a blend of career and life skills works:

Case Example:

Meaningful Relationship Between Academic Institutions and Society - An Effort to Deal with Social Issues

This has a reference to an activity organized by the students and teachers of Gowande College, Umerkhed, Maharashtra.

The issue of farmers in Maharashtra (specially Vidarbha and Marathwada region) committing suicides due to their inability to repay heavy loans is generally known to all of us.

Here is a college, where the teachers and students of Faculty of Arts -Department of Psychology, Sociology, Political Science , Economics and Languages, decided to conduct a study of this problem within their place Umerkhed and the primary survey estimated that approximately 800 such deaths have taken place during 18 months prior to this survey. Without going into much details, it is important to note that they collectively decided to undertake the task of putting a full stop to such farmers' deaths .

Subsequent to the survey, they had meetings , house visits, report writing, fund raising drive, counseling, and every kind of support including medical help and personal supervision to the aggrieved families.

As a result there were work shops conducted for farmers on alternative crops and modern techniques of agriculture. The youngsters started joining schools and colleges. Women were provided vocational training and they started their own small business activities

With such relentless effort within a year there was not a single suicide committed in Umerkhed. Every teacher and student understood the real meaning of education. It brought a new confidence and self trust amongst them. The entire scenario had undergone a 360 degree change. This we are sure could not have been achieved through a score of courses and projects.

It is worth noting that student offering any subject in the college had something to contribute to address the social issue which proved the worth of their education beyond doubt.

Career skills if combined with life skills would lead in this direction

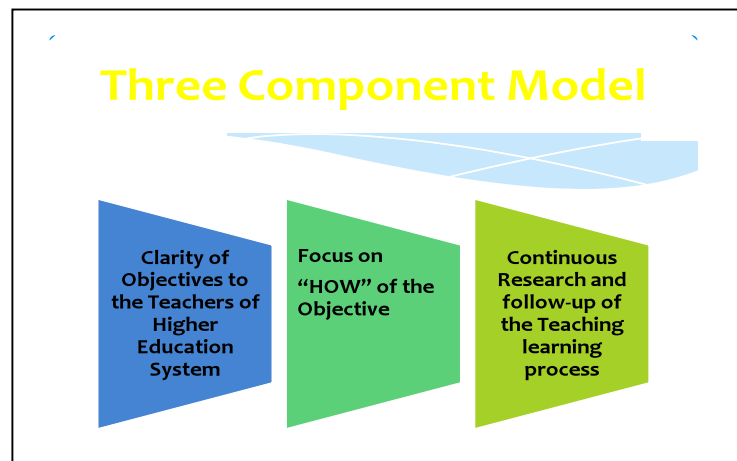
Rationale behind including life skills in HE

1. Equipping learners with various life skills to promote acceptable behavior and attitudes
2. To empower people in challenging situations
3. To help make informed decisions and establish positive, healthy relationships
4. To improve the quality of life.

Blending of career and life skills will help us ensure that students not only master numerical abilities, reading and writing but also develop the capability as:

1. Global citizens, to live and act in a knowledge based learning society and multi cultural world.
2. Communicators who will integrate themselves into information revolution
3. Workers who will adapt and create new opportunities to work
4. Preservers of their culture and cultural identity
5. Life long learners who will learn and contribute to knowledge based society.

Based on the above discussion, it is my personal opinion that a three component model can be suggested to revitalize the academic culture. This model can evolve further



1. **Clarity of objective:** As a first step, the teachers themselves have to be oriented as to the exact objective of higher education system. They must be able to understand, appreciate, imbibe and assimilate these objectives in the teaching learning process

2. **“How” to achieve the objective:** The teaching learning process has to be designed and developed and implemented in a way that can best achieve the objective of Higher Education. A creative teacher can find several reference points within the curriculum to achieve this. For

example, a simple act of assigning group work in a class is an opportunity to build team working skills. A creative teacher undertakes many such activities, within and outside the classroom, quite often to reach out to the students effectively. What is required is the internalization of such skills. This internalization can happen when some time is spent by teachers on discussing the dynamics of the experience to resolve the probable struggle that may have happened when groups of individuals work towards a common goal. This “dissection time” should not be overlooked because experiences may fade away but the skills imbibed remain forever. An exclusive time slot may be provided for internalization of these skills.

3. **Continuous research** and follow up: The teaching–learning process has to be enriched continuously through monitoring, follow up and research so that a sustainable quality development is achieved.

Conclusion

The implementation of above model can help the Indian higher education system not only to meet the domestic demand but also the international demand for qualitative and competitive participation of human resource. It can help achieve the objective of higher education that can be compared to **four pillars of learning** mentioned in the UNESCO’s Report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, which states that education must be organised around four fundamental types of learning: the four pillars of knowledge – learning to know, i.e., acquiring the instruments of understanding; learning to do, so as to be able to act creatively in one’s environment; learning to live together, so as to participate and cooperate with other people in all human activities; and learning to be, an essential progression which proceeds from the previous three (Delors, 1996).

With this ideology towards Higher education and appropriate policy measures taken by the government from time to time, India can achieve many accolades to its credit.

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