



REINVENTING EDUCATION SYSTEM – TOWARDS UPPING SKILLS QUOTIENT

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Abstract

This paper highlights that changing times have witnessed radical shifts in economic activities. The technological advancements have transformed jobs and businesses alike. The nature of employment has also evolved overtime. Today staying updated with technology and the rapid developments in the surroundings are vital to success and individuals growth. However studies show that the skill gap is widening every day and employers are looking out for skilled talent. This then calls for looking into what is wrong in our educational system and suggest models that can be built into our education system so as to up the skill quotient of our students so that they can progress through a well identified career path and ensure sustainability of the education system in the current scenario.

Keywords: Community College, Skill Based Learning, Equal Opportunity

1. INTRODUCTION

“There is a need to change the framework of the Indian educational system” – very true to the words of Dr. A.P.J Kalam there is a pressing need to restructure our educational system. The educational system in our country is as old as our scriptures and can be traced back to the ancient way of Gurukul Learning. This was a practice where only a gifted few to go to the Gurukul and stay with their learned guru to be imparted the knowledge of ancient arts, literature and mathematics. Only when the guru was happy with the student’s knowledge was he/she allowed to go back into the world to practice and preach their learning. Though times changed, it was the British colonial rule that brought about a marked change in our education system. Here the schools started to teach social science, mathematics and science courses to the students to churn out the manpower that Britain needed. Though we attained freedom from the British their education system was deep valued and revered in our society and we follow it to this day.

It is sad that India after independence has taken a lot of time in building India through initiatives like liberalisation, Privitisation and globalization to its disruptive awakening in the recent years towards protecting our nation’s interest through nationalization. Our system restricts our children to think beyond the conventional streams of commerce, science and mathematics. Hence we



have been churning engineers, doctors, economists and financial consultants who are in demand across the world but we failed to develop skills that would meet our industries and nation to harness upon to contribute to the economic wealth of our nation. Our education system is in need of creating artists, writers, designers, plumbers, masons and entrepreneurs who can uplift the nation's employability status quo. This has indeed resulted in the huge unemployment problem in our country.

2. REVIEW OF LITERTURE

The mandate of education providing gainful employment seems to be very far off in our nation. The data with regard to India is, unfortunately, quite alarming. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), India will again see its unemployment rate at 3.5 per cent in 2018 and 2019, the same which was seen in 2016 and 2017. It has been estimated that there would be around 18.9 million unemployed in India in 2019 a little over 2018 when it was 18.6 million. In contrast we do see a large number of private institutions and universities mushrooming across the length and breadth of our country churning graduates, post graduates and doctorates but much below the industry requirement of talent. This is justified by the 1000s of doctorates and Engineers whose applications arrive for LDC and UDC level jobs to jobs in the banking sector and so on. Further these growing institutions do not have the infrastructure and quality faculty to nurture talent that is required by the industry. This is impacting upon the pedagogy and the quality of the students being churned out of the mill. No wonder this is eventually drained out into the economy of our country. Hence our much touted demographic dividend faces the biggest ever challenge of demographic drawback. To recall Toffler's words that unless and until education makes our student future ready, it is of no use to correlate employment and education. Also governance of a nation stands failed. Review of our government education policy clearly states that education has lacked national priority and it is indeed inevitable to reinvent it through workable paradigms.

It is also understood from other universities and countries that foreign collaboration sans industry collaboration is very imminent to produce graduate employability. For example: University of New South Wales has, furthermore, been voted one of the top performing universities for graduate employability with some of the biggest global employers, such as, Google, Penguin, Ernst & Young, Microsoft, Rio Tinto, HSBC, Slater & Gordon, NASA, UNESCO, and Oxfam.

Further many articles and studies reviewed showed that at the other end of rising unemployment is the urgent need of the changing times and the way that companies hunt for talent. The technological advancements have transformed jobs and businesses alike. The nature of employment has also evolved over time. Today staying updated with technology and the rapid developments in the surroundings are vital to the success of individual growth. While skill gap is widening with each passing day, companies are engaging in newer modes of recruitment to



acquire the skilled talents. A recent report by Aspiring minds, an employability assessment firm, says that over 80% of engineers are unemployable as they lack the technological skills sought after by their employers. Academic institutions play an important role in honing the skills of the youth by adapting to the job demand of the market. At present our curriculum is about 70% theory and 30% practical knowledge. This has led to the obfuscation of skill development.

It is also observed that companies like Teamlease, TCIL and many institutions backed by NSDC are training graduates from Universities and colleges on industry relevant skills. This is again an indication that our existing massive higher education infrastructure has failed its purpose.

A paradigm shift in the corporate dynamics today has rendered multiple qualifications incapable of filling the ever changing job requirements. It is imminent that multiple degrees may not provide gainful employment but it is skill based educational qualification that can enhance employability and bring to rest the pressure of joblessness.

This study hence is directed to look at operational models of education that can render our manpower with the necessary skill sets at the approach of industry 4.0

2.1 Community College Model of Education

It is a model very prevalent in some of the western societies and aims at equal opportunity and egalitarianism. In America the 22 year colleges were its answer to the call for the opportunity to educate the masses of people never before served by higher education (Tushar Agrawal, 1990). Rosalind Latiner Raby in her article says that despite recent advances for countries to offer compulsory secondary education, traditional universities have not altered their structure to respond to the social demands for higher education. University admittance remains limited and therefore highly competitive. Fifteen years ago, Cerych (1993, p. 5) noted that “the existence of a recognized alternative to traditional universities [is] indispensable.” Today, this alternative pathway has become the domain of the community college model which not only offers options for university overflow, but also offers a “second chance” for non-traditional students to achieve a higher education. These institutions maintain a flexibility characteristic that enables them to idealize and demonstrate in a practical way the means by which new generations can receive skills to ensure a stable employment that in turn increases economic development, social prosperity, and improves social conditions.

This has sent a wave across the world and Community college model based educational system has come up in many countries under various names Colegio Nacional de Education Profesional Tecnia (CONALEP) Mexico (found in 24 states) College of Applied Arts and Technology Canada College d’Enseignement Général et Professionel Canada Colleges of further Education Australia; Great Britain; Scotland Colleges of Technology Japan Community College Australia



and many more (Chart compiled from Cohen, 1995, pp. 13–18; Kintzer, 1994, pp. 6–16; Raby and Tarrow, 1996, pp. 197–203). India has also been a front runner in this movement way back in 1995 with Pondicherry University Community College offering 2 year associate degrees in various vocational skill training programs. It was only in 2013 that MHRD noticed and around 200 model community colleges were given a nod to be established across the country. Objectives of the Study

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is an analysis of the age old community college model established in India in 1995 and its structural transformation overtime to its present ability to produce skilled workforce in the neighbourhood. This study would be based on case study approach.

4. CASE STUDY DISCUSSION

Pondicherry University Community College is the first of its kind in the University system of higher education in India to cater to employment oriented education of the community and is an experimental model of American and Canadian Community Colleges. Its motto is “Education for employment through skills formation”. The educational activities are designed in line with the needs and demands of the local community. More specifically “to offer job oriented courses based on the perceived community demand for specific manpower”. In short it operates with aim of Community College is “for” the Community and “of” the Community. Since the inception of the college in 1995, it has been offering skill oriented training as per the needs of the community like diploma programs in Sanitary Inspector, Physician Assistant, Radiological Assistant, Multipurpose health workers, Early Childhood care, Office Management & Secretarial Practice, Accounting and Taxation, Diabetic Care and Management etc.. Further it has been recognised by the UGC as a constituent college of Pondicherry University. As part of Vocationalisation of higher education, B.Voc Degree courses were introduced for the first time in India by UGC in 2013-14 at the Community College of Pondicherry University too. This exercise was taken after a market based survey undertaken in the community. Surveys with industry experts in and around Pondicherry town in the sectors of Retail, Hospitals, Travel & Tourism, Journalism, Media, IT etc.. was undertaken. Demand supply mismatch for skilled manpower was seen in fields like cardiac lab technology, radiology & imaging Technology, Operation Theatre, renal dialysis and optometry technology in paramedical stream, Tourism and catering in management stream was foreseen to have abundant employment opportunities in the town of Pondicherry as the town boasts of many hospitals, medical colleges with attached hospitals and also surely serves as a small medical hub in South Arcot district of Tamil Nadu. Also the umpteen number of hotels/ resorts and the growing attraction of Puducherry as tourism destination is a sure attraction for tourism course too. These courses also have vertical mobility and lateral entry and



exit to suit the requirements of the various categories of students. This ensures the sustainability of the program too.

Steps were initiated to establish industry tie-ups with the industries identified in the locality. The syllabus for the courses was framed based on NSQF format with well defined career paths as shown in Fig: 1 & 2. There has been very good industry support for these courses. The industry and hospital support has enabled the college to attract students from the neighborhood, provide on the training unlike any other course and the best of all is the good job placements they get in house from within their training provider to offers in the neighboring states to opportunities to work abroad. This indeed is really the need of the hour to address the employability of the rich demographic dividend that India is headed to.

Fig: 1 Career Path in B.Voc (Tourism & Service Industry)

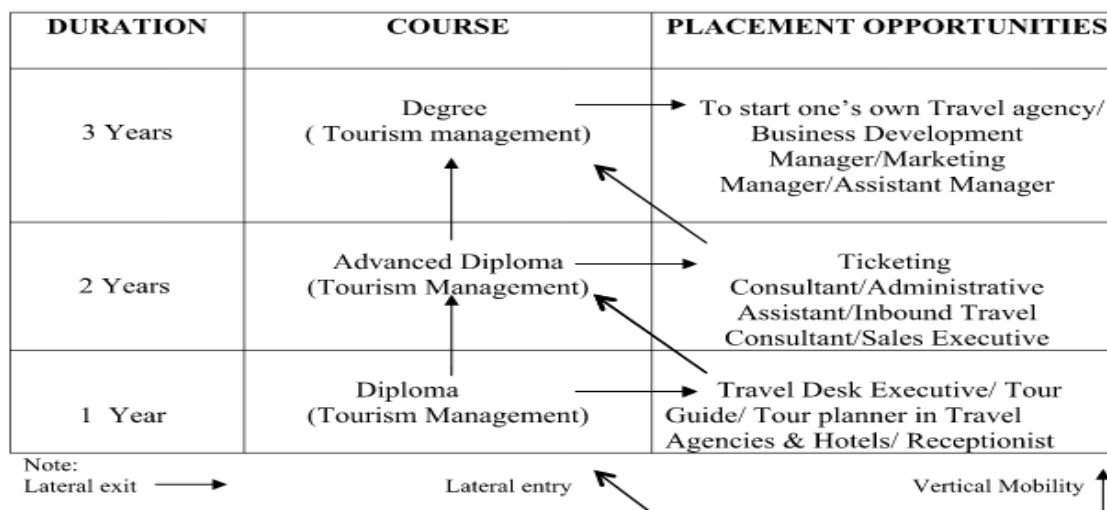


Fig: 2 Career Path in B.Voc (Retail Management)

DURATION	COURSE	PLACEMENT OPPORTUNITIES
3 Years	Degree (Retail management)	Retail Professional
2 Years	Advanced Diploma (Retail Management)	Store Manager/ Supervisor
1 Year	Diploma (Retail Management)	Customer Support Executive

Note:
 Lateral exit → ↙ Lateral entry ↑ Vertical Mobility

4.1 A SWOT Analysis of the Community College Model at Pondicherry University is briefed;

STRENGTHS

- Generating immediate employment for the students in the hospitals and industries in the neighbourhood and in foreign countries too.
- These courses in some bigger universities and colleges come at very high fee that is impossible to be paid by the students from the weaker economic sections.
- Instead of students preferring the traditional B.Sc/ BCA/BBA/B.Com courses, these new vocational programs are multi skilling them and providing gainful employment.
- Courses have a well defined career path.
- Resource persons are industry experts and will serve as skill knowledge persons.
- Hands on Training in the related industry through partnerships with Industry.
- The students of these courses are also able to venture as entrepreneurs like setting up travel agencies, free lance photographers, Photo and video studios etc..
- These courses are also helping the industry as the students doing their internship fill the gaps in manpower requirement at these places. This enhances their service efficiency too.
- The availability of credit transfer in the courses helps in mobility of the students to Higher Educational institutions and Universities.



WEAKNESS

- These courses are approved by MHRD and UGC and the grant-in aid proposals have been sent and approved, the funds have not reached the system.
- The stipend component that is a big motivator to students pursuing these programs suffers to be implemented.
- This affects the needed infrastructure development of the institution.
- The existing academia is not receptive to these new changes.
- The process needs field coordinators to constantly monitor the students undergoing training in various parts of the city.

OPPORTUNITIES

- This has encouraged launching more skill based programs from the skill gaps identified.
- These courses also provide an opportunity to the students to upgrade themselves unto the level of PhD.
- This provides excellent opportunity to bring more students into the mainline education.
- Introduction of Vocational training subjects from High School and Higher Secondary levels.
- More industries need to be awakened towards this concept.
- The Government should also motivate the industry to tie – up with institutes as their CSR initiative and for sustainability.
- The Government of India is considering a policy to give credits to school students for skill Training. This can be transferred to Higher Education Institutes.

THREATS

- The private institutions are imitating these models faster than the government institutions.
- This again would kill registrations in government colleges.
- Industries start to venture into training institutions and hence affect collaboration.
- MHRD has set up a number of third party skill trainers to graduates at almost free of cost. These agencies are not well established and are cogs in the wheel of skilling today's man power.
- There is a need for academia to match such tectonic changes, it does face the risk of being driven to irrelevance unless it marries curricula and teaching methods that are designed around the industry needs.



5. FUTURE DIRECTION

As many more community colleges are already established and running in many Arts and Science colleges, this calls for empirical studies with respect to persistence of the students studying in these colleges to complete levels from 5-7 and also to study how many of these knock onto the door of the Universities. It also calls for identifying more skill gaps and prepare well defined career paths so that students understand and tread easily through these paths.

6. CONCLUSION

This study clearly brings forth the theory of natural selection based on Darwinism that only the fittest survives. If Community College system survives the need of the time then the current thesis represented by the traditional education system and the antithesis representing the modern educational institutions built on the British system should synthesise towards Vocationalisation of the curricula across the various levels of our educational system from grade 6 at school onwards and the awakening of industries to support social cause for nation building.

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