

Skilling India's Path to Progress

What is the issue?

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- The much touted demographic transition in the Indian population has much to offer in terms of economic and social returns.

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- But India's vocational education landscape needs to be devised to be able to support mass skilling in order to capitalise on this "demographic dividend".

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What are the governmental actions in this domain?

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- Capitalising the demographic dividend is key to India's growth and skilling is mandatory to channelize the youthful workforce to enhance productivity.

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- To further this, in 2016, the government appointed "Sharada Prasad Committee" to rationalise the Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) had gave its report.

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- SSCs are promoted by employer bodies like Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), to better skill the work force.

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- It is now prudent to look at the reforms that Sharada Prasad committee had suggested and the action taken for vocational education/training (VET).

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What are the Sharada Prasad Committee recommendations?

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- The two goals in 'Skill India' are - to meet employers' needs of skills and, to

prepare workers (young and old) for a decent livelihood.

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- **Mindset** - The report has prominently focused on youth, and has underlined that the vocational education is not just for underprivileged communities.

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- Further, it has stressed that it is not a stopgap arrangement for those who cannot make it through formal education but for all.

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- **School reforms** - Concrete steps have been suggested to have a separate stream for vocational education within the secondary education setup.

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- Creating vocational schools and colleges for upward mobility, and having a Central university to award degrees and diplomas has also been proposed.

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- Notably, in China, a separate stream for vocational education is offered after “class 9”, and almost half the students choose this vocational stream.

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- **Challenges** - The need for stemming the problem of the rising numbers of unemployed degree holders due to mushrooming of poor quality tertiary educational institutions has been recommended.

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- While employer engagement is needed, currently, private vocational training providers (VTPs) haven't been producing the desired output.

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- Also, National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) - that provides short-term training can't be a substitute for the scale and quality of skilling required.

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What needs to be done to better the quality of training programs?

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- Our human potential needs to be harnessed by designing our courses as platform for life-long learning and in accordance with international standards.

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- Strengthening reading, writing and arithmetic skills is important for any skilling program as it is key to enable faster grasping.

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- **Courses** - This will help in equipping people with a skillset that is in demand, along with considerable national/global mobility across jobs as per the need.

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- This means that we should have no more than 450 courses that are to be broad enough in scope to facilitate job mobility - (as recommended by International Standard Classification of Occupations)
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- But we currently have nearly 10,000 standards for courses, which is also against the “National Skills Qualification Framework” recommendation.
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- **Durations** - Vocational training must by definition be for a minimum of a year, which includes internship (without which certification is not possible).
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- Short-term training should be confined to recognising prior learning of trained workers who are already working and not a standalone certification program.
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- **Accountability** - Cases of a conflict of interests, rigged assessments and training happening only on paper have been cropping up for long.
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- A parliamentary report has also pointed to regulatory failures in the approvals granted by the Quality Council of India for thousands of ITIs.
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- This has led to the proliferation of poor quality private ITIs, which significantly went from 2,000 to 11,000 in just five years.
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- Skilling institutions are fleecing trainees and there seems to be a huge ethics and accountability deficit which needs to be rectified by better regulations.
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What are the structural reforms needed?

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- **NSDC issue** - An NSDC-centric focus (where industries are roped in for short term training) has negated established structured mandates of skilling.
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- Also, it has been noted that NSDC programs are providing merely 12% employments for those who’ve completed its short-term courses.
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- This is because the training period is too short and there is a regulatory deficit, both of which mandate that better engaging the private sector is needed.
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- **Industry Lead** - Corporate sector pins the blame on the government when it laments about “unemployable youth”, but rather it needs to take the lead.
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- While corporate are the key benefactors of a skilled labour force, only 36% of India’s organised sector firms conduct in-firm training (mostly large ones).
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- A government piloted skilling program would inherently be a supply driven one, but it is desirable to constitute a demand oriented skilling push.
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- Hence, it needs to be recognized that a publicly funded but industry drive model works best as the companies realise demands better than governments.
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- The government needs to actively take up the role of actively supporting these efforts through proper regulations and crucial employment indicator data.
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Source: The Hindu

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