International Research Journal of Educational Psychology
e-ISSN: 2456-8198 | Vol.09 | No.01 | Jan-Jun 2025 | pp. 15-22

RESEARCH PAPER

Double-Blind Peer Reviewed/Refereed Journal

Exploring the Challenges of Skill-based Education in Secondary Schools of Nagaland: A Reflection

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Abstract

According to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, skill development is regarded as a crucial aspect of education. NEP aims to integrate skill education into mainstream academia to prepare students to join the 21st Century workforce. Nagaland, like many other regions has several issues and challenges that hinder the effective implementation of skill- based education programs. This paper focuses on analysing the specific obstacles that surface during the process of integrating skill education into Secondary Education. Key challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, shortage of trained instructors, lack of variety of skill options, among others, have been highlighted. Furthermore, the paper explores effective recommendations to address these challenges while still aligning with the NEP 2020 objectives. In this way, Nagaland can foster a vigorous skill education that will empower its youth to succeed and improve the overall socio-economic landscape of the state.

Keywords: *Challenges, NEP 2020, Secondary Education, skill-based education*

Article Publication

Published Online: 30-Jun-2025

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Introduction

Education is necessary and possessing practical skills is imperative. Skill-based education is no longer an option- rather it is a societal requirement. Introducing the students to a variety of professions with promising income prospects plays a pivotal role in altering the mindset of contemporary young individuals (Joshi Vidhushi & Tripathi S.K., 2023). In addition, skill-based education takes a central role in the NEP 2020, with Secondary Schools playing a pivotal responsibility in imparting these competencies to students. The Policy's proposed measures resonate with contemporary demands: ensuring students are equipped with the requisite skills and expertise to thrive in the professional arena. Through the adoption of these strategies, Secondary Schools can effectively prepare students for the dynamic landscape of tomorrow, encompassing both the challenges and prospects. Skill education encompasses the acquisition of knowledge across a diverse range of subjects, including hands-on competencies such as welding, carpentry, and cooking, etc., as well as soft skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and communication. In a country like India where there exist a significant youth population, there is a pressing need for a good platform to foster skill development, to ultimately contribute to the nation's overall progress through individual empowerment. Similar to other regions, Nagaland also encounters numerous issues and challenges when it comes to establishing skill-based education, particularly within Secondary Schools in Nagaland. Based on the findings of the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) from 2017, only approximately 40% of teenagers aged 14-18 could accurately perform a task given to them: to determine the price

of a shirt after a 10 % discount. Also, fewer than 60% of these teenagers could read time from an analog clock, even among the more privileged students attending private schools. Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 also highlights that, only a total of 5.6% of youth surveyed were enrolled in vocational training nationally, against 1.5% in Nagaland (Morung Express, January 2024). Through these studies, it is established that a huge gap exists when it comes to the opportunity to encourage independent thinking and nurture individual interests among the youths; as opposed to promoting rote memorization. Over time, mainstream education in India is losing its appeal- a problem that neither the National Education Policy of 1967 nor the National Education Policy of 1986 could effectively tackle. However, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 highlights the significance of skill development and vocational education within India's educational structure. It focuses on incorporating vocational and skill-based learning into the standard curriculum, aiming to provide students with practical experience alongside academic learning. The policy emphasizes giving children early opportunities to experience a variety of abilities; beginning with the foundational years of schooling, which will support children in discovering their passions and skills, which will later on lead to the making of well-informed career decisions. The policy further emphasizes on aligning skill education programs with industry requirements to ensure their quality and relevance. It proposes a strategic approach to encourage collaboration among educational institutions, businesses, and relevant entities to establish high-quality skill development initiatives. NEP 2020 also recognizes the need for skill-oriented education at the Higher Secondary level, aiming to bridge the gap between formal education and employment, by incorporating vocational training and life skills into mainstream curricula (Ministry of Education, 2020). Additionally, to standardize skill certifications nationwide, NEP 2020 recommends the establishment of the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF). The objective of this framework is to facilitate lifelong learning, and streamline the recognition and mobility of skilled and proficient workers.

The state of Nagaland under the banner of Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) started implementing the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Vocationalization of Secondary and Higher Secondary School Education in 5 (five) selected Government Higher Secondary Schools, in multiple phases from Class IX from 2014 onwards with the help of Information Technology (IT), and travel and tourism industries, based on National Vocational Education Qualification Framework (NVEQF). Skill-based vocational subjects as well as their certification upon completion were jointly sanctioned by the Nagaland Board of School Education, National Skill Development Council, and the Sector Skill Councils/Industry (Nagaland Board of School Education, 2024).

Significance of the Paper

The notion of individual differences in learning suggests that not every student does well in academic and bookish learning. Hence, creating a platform for students to access skill education is crucial to mitigate the number of student dropouts, by offering various ways to meet their diverse learning requirements. However, several issues such as limited resources in terms of infrastructure, curriculum inconsistencies, etc., make it challenging to carry out skill education programs successfully, which must be addressed. By identifying the issues faced in integrating skill education into Secondary Schools, it is imperative to offer strong recommendations that address the socio-economic and cultural context of Nagaland.

Review of Literature

G, Shyamala. (2024) conducted a study on "Skill Education System in India: Importance and Challenges". The study explored the challenges in the skill education system in India. Data that had been used for the study were extracted from various books and publication. Through the study, it was found that providing skill-based learning to millions of youths in order to transform them into a skilled workforce has always been a challenge. In addition, several issues such as infrastructure, pedagogy, grading system, and curriculum factored in as challenges to imparting skill education. This study suggests that skill education curriculum and regular education syllabus should be integrated, so that it would promote holistic approach.

Sarkar, Premananda (2024) studied on "Attitude of Higher Secondary Students towards Skill-Based Education in West Bengal". The study aimed to measure students' attitudes toward skill-based education. For this study, 203 Higher Secondary students participated and filled up a descriptive survey that came from a quantitative approach.

Also, a self-constructed scale was developed to assess the attitude of the participants towards skill-based education. The study found that Higher Secondary students generally had a positive attitude towards skill-based education. The study concluded that curriculum should be enhanced so as to be more comprehensive and support students in continuing skill practice after secondary school.

Sahajahan, A. (2024) highlighted the importance of addressing societal prejudices, enhancing curriculum development, fostering industry collaboration, and the like, to ensure success and sustainability of skill-based education initiatives. The study underscored how the implementation of NEP2020 is expected to transform the landscape of skill-based education in India by fostering a culture of life-long learning, innovation and inclusive development. Further, the author also stated a concluding note that, as India embarks on this transformative journey, the principles of innovation, inclusivity and excellence must guide its path towards a brighter and more prosperous future.

Pradhan, (2021) highlighted that, if a policy is effectively implemented with enthusiasm, it will undoubtedly lead to significant changes in the education sector, fostering ambitious objectives of cultivating critical thinking and knowledgeable individuals. Simply completing extensive projects and assignments does not necessarily prepare students for real-life success; instead, it often promotes a culture of blindly copying pages to earn higher marks. It is important for students to avoid getting caught up in this competitive cycle and instead embrace the unique talents and passions they have cultivated for themselves, celebrating life in their distinctive ways.

Prativa, M & Sandeep, S. (2016) critically analyzed the pattern and scopes of vocational Education in India, and how the same can be seamlessly amalgamated with the school curriculum. The study found out that limited infrastructural availability, lack of skilled and trained teacher are the major challenges in designing an appropriate coursework for skill-based education among schools.

Objectives

1. To examine the status of skill- based education at Secondary School level in Nagaland.
2. To identify the issues and challenges of skill education.
3. To suggest measures for improving skill education in Nagaland.

Methodology

The study is a micro-level, qualitative and descriptive study in nature, based on secondary data collected from published and unpublished records, journals, books, and Websites.

Overview of Skill Education in Nagaland

In Nagaland, skill education is becoming more important, as the state realizes its significance in giving its children the necessary abilities for a fulfilling life. The state government has been actively promoting vocational education and skill development through the implementation of different programs and activities like the *Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY*), *Mobile Skill Morung*, establishment of state-specific skill development programs, the creation of Skill Development Centres, partnerships with industry associations, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations, the preservation and promotion of traditional skills through entrepreneurship initiatives and skill development programs, awareness campaigns, and outreach programs emphasizing the value of skill education, etc.

The Department of School Education and Literacy, Union Minister of Education released the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) report which highlighted that only 26 out of 198 higher Secondary Schools offers vocational education under National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF), across the State.

Table 1. *District-wise Number of Schools Covered Under Vocational Education Programme*

Sl. No	District	Hr. Secondary Schools	Secondary Schools	Total
1	Dimapur	5	-	5
2	Kiphire	2	-	2
3	Kohima	4	-	4
4	Longleng	1	-	1
5	Mokokchung	2	-	2
6	Mon	3	-	3
7	Peren	1	1	2
8	Phek	3	-	3
9	Tuensang	1	-	1
10	Wokha	2	-	2
11	Zunheboto	1	-	1
	Total:	**25**	**1**	**26**

Source: Samagra Shiksha, Nagaland Education Mission Society- Directorate of School Education, 2021

The NSQF established a system of clear educational pathways from the school level to the Higher Education while providing certification of vocational skills. The aim is to start the project at class 9th with a goal to make students employable when they complete class 12th (*Samagra Shiksha, 2021*).

Table 2: *Year-Wise Approval and Implementation of Schools Offering Vocational Education*

Phase	Approval Year (FY)	Implementation Year (AY)	No. of Schools
Phase I	2014-15	2015-16	5
Phase II	2015-16	2016-17	5
Phase III	2016-17	2017-18	1
Phase IV	2018-19	2019-20	7
Phase V	2019-20	2020-21	8
Total No. of Schools			**26**

Source: Samagra Shiksha, Nagaland Education Mission Society Directorate of School Education, 2021

Phase I to III model schools have been established in each of the district headquarters with 2 trades per each school. Samagra Shiksha Nagaland and Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE) is implementing the Scheme in association with Lend a Hand India to provide Technical and Monitoring Support. The State Government of Nagaland has outsourced the training delivery in these schools to registered Vocational Training Partners (VTP) under NSDC within the guidelines of MHRD scheme (Samagra Shiksha, 2021).

It may also be noteworthy to mention that the Life Skill Education textbook was created in 2016 by the Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE) for Secondary School students. At the secondary level, the curriculum includes subjects such as physical development, health education, work education, and art education, among others. Through these subjects, students can engage in practical activities and develop life skills alongside their academic learning.

Currently, under the Samagra Shiksha there are 97 Government Schools being covered under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Vocationalization of School Education. In keeping with the goal of the NEP 2020 to reach out to 50% of the student community to have exposure to Vocational Education, the NBSE allowed private schools to introduce vocational education from 2022 onwards.

Presently, there are 159 private schools with vocational education in 2023 academic session. This initiative of allowing the private schools to introduce vocational education is one of the first in the country. The Board has mainstreamed vocational education by introducing vocational education as an optional subject in the secondary

stage and as elective subject in the higher secondary stage. Vocational subject as an optional subject can replace one of the failed subjects, except in English, to be eligible for the next higher class at the secondary stage. Till 2021-2022, about 2561 and 940 students have been certified for class X and XII respectively. Certification was provided jointly by the respective Sector Skill Council and the Board. About 500 students of class XI & XII have completed 80 hours internship under Samagra Shiksha with the help of the Vocational Training Partners. At present the board has introduced 10 (ten) skill-based vocational subjects at Secondary and Higher Secondary level. They are; Information Technology Enabled Services, Tourism & Hospitality, Retail, Beauty & Wellness, Electronics, Agriculture, Automotive, Health Care, Plumbing, and Multi Skill Foundation Course (Nagaland Board of School Education, 2024).

Despite significant advancements in skill education in Nagaland, similar to other regions, numerous issues and challenges persist, complicating the effective implementation of skill education programs.

Issues and Challenges of Skill Education in Secondary Schools

The following are the issues and challenges in skill education that surfaced from the above data collected.

1. Infrastructure

Many Secondary Schools lack proper infrastructure to support skill-based education. This includes labs, and equipment necessary for practical training in various skills. Poor infrastructure hampers practical learning, limiting students' ability to experience hands-on skills. In the present scenario, with a high demand for skilled individuals in any field, there's a necessity to enhance the training infrastructure to cater to aspiring competent professionals. Yet, due to the overwhelming demand for labour, the current educational institution infrastructure falls short of meeting these needs.

2. Curriculum Misalignment and Integration

One of the key issues is the skills taught in schools and those needed in the workforce. The curriculum lacks practicality, providing inadequate opportunities for students to gain hands-on learning experiences. The existing curriculum in Secondary Schools may not always align with the local context and the needs of the Nagaland community. There might be a mismatch between the skills taught in schools and those required by industries or traditional livelihoods in the region. Adapting the curriculum to incorporate locally relevant skills and knowledge is essential for ensuring the employability and economic empowerment of students.

3. Teacher Training and Capacity Building

Teachers in Secondary Schools may lack the necessary training and expertise to effectively deliver skill-based education. Many teachers are trained in traditional academic subjects and may require additional support and professional development to integrate practical skills training into their teaching methods. Investing in teacher training programs specific to skill education is crucial for improving the quality of instruction in Nagaland's Secondary Schools.

4. Awareness and perception

The variety of options for developing one's skills, such as technical training programs, apprenticeships, and vocational education, may not be well known to parents and students. It is perhaps possible that they are also ignorant about the schemes that are run by the government. Hence, parents may struggle to grasp the significance of skill education, fearing it could impede their children's prospects.

5. Access and Equity

Access to skill education may be limited, particularly in rural and remote areas of Nagaland. Socio-economic factors, such as poverty and lack of infrastructure, can further worsen disparities in access to quality skill training. Ensuring equitable access to skill education for all students, regardless of their background or geographical location, is essential for promoting social inclusion and economic development in Nagaland. Due to a lack of

industry-faculty contact, the skills given through educational and training institutions do not match the skills required by the industry.

6. Funding and Resources

Insufficient funding and resources are major obstacles for schools in Nagaland to effectively implement skill education programs. Adequate funding is essential for establishing infrastructure, acquiring equipment, providing teacher training, and developing curriculum content tailored to skill-based learning. Without sufficient resources, schools struggle to provide hands-on learning experiences, hindering students' ability to acquire practical skills essential for their future success in the workforce. Addressing these funding challenges is crucial to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of skill education initiatives in Nagaland's Secondary Schools.

7. Cultural Relevance

Skill education programs should be culturally relevant and sensitive to the unique cultural identity and traditions of the Naga people. Incorporating indigenous knowledge and practices into skill development initiatives can help preserve cultural heritage while empowering communities economically. It is essential to strike a balance between modern skill training and traditional cultural values in Nagaland's Secondary Schools.

8. Employment opportunities and market demand

There may be limited employment opportunities for students graduating from Secondary Schools with skill-based education in Nagaland. The local economy may not always have enough job opportunities to absorb skilled graduates, leading to unemployment or underemployment due to inadequate facilities. Addressing this challenge requires collaboration between educational institutions, government agencies, and industries to create a conducive environment for job creation and entrepreneurship, which is not effective at present. The skills that are offered in schools are sometimes not what the market requires. So there is a gap between theoretical learning and the real world. And for which it creates fewer opportunities for employment in the state.

Suggestions

The following are some suggestions for improving skill education in secondary schools of Nagaland:

1. A consistent curriculum for skill education should be established by policy makers and stakeholders together in order to equip students for success in the workforce and to promote lifelong learning and personal growth.
2. For learners pursuing skill-based training to have their varied requirements, schedules, and learning styles met, flexible learning alternatives are crucial. Therefore, flexible learning choices including project-based learning, blended learning, modular curriculum design, online skill training, internships and apprenticeships, etc. should be available. This may facilitate access to skill-building education.
3. To fulfil labour market needs, great economic growth, and cultivate a competent world force, government support for skill education development is essential. Therefore, the government needs to offer full support for the development of skill education, as this might contribute to the creation of workforce with the necessary skills to meet the demands of the modern economy, spur innovation, and enhance general prosperity and social mobility.
4. Technology integration can be used to build skills because it allows teachers to improve student results, encourage active participation, and get students ready for the quickly changing digital economy.
5. Secondary Schools should invest in upgrading and enhancing their infrastructure and facilities to deliver effective skill education programs.
6. Inviting local resourceful individuals as guests or visiting teachers can greatly benefit Secondary Schools. These individuals bring practical expertise and real-world experience to the classroom, offering students insights into various industries and career paths. By interacting with local professionals, students gain valuable knowledge and skills relevant to their community and the broader workforce. Guest teachers can also serve as role models and mentors, inspiring students to pursue their interests and excel in their chosen

fields. Overall, integrating local resourceful persons into the teaching staff enriches the educational experience and better prepares students for future endeavours.

7. Employers, industry experts and providers of skill education must work together to create curricula that meet the needs of the labour market. This cooperative method generates chances for training and up skilling in addition to aiding in the identification of gaps in skills.

Conclusion

Taking complacence of the importance of skill development, the state government has initiated programs such as the vocational education courses, creating skill education text book for Secondary Schools by NBSE and activities implemented such as Mobile skill Morung and the like by Directorate of Employment, Skill Development & Entrepreneurship Society. As envisioned by NEP 2020, the integration of Skill development into Secondary Schools holds potential to empower and prepare students for a wider range of job opportunities which will improve their socio-economic standing in the society. The study also highlights several issues and challenges such as poor infrastructure facilities, weak curriculum arrangements, lack of trained teachers and trainers for skill development, inadequate materials and insufficient financial funding.

Despite the challenges faced, the potential of skill development and vocational courses cannot be emphasis enough. University and teacher education institutions should formulate relevant modules to provide professional skill trainers as well as equipped regular teachers for managing a variety of skill management programs.

Skill-based education should gather to student's interest, state/ regional potential, and future needs of the state to promote culturally relevant skills as well as focused on the 21st century skills – soft skills, digital skills and higher order thinking skills including creativity and innovation. If the state can strengthen the aspect of NEP 2020 goals, it is highly expected that the issue of drop-out rates can also be reduced and better job opportunities can be created and promote sustainable development.

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