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Skills within schools

It is vital to incorporate Skill India into the education system

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India has among the youngest populations in the world, which means it can make a resourceful pool of manpower. A pre-requisite though is that it receives the right form of education, skills and employment. A step in this direction is the Skill Development Mission.

However, an issue that has been plaguing India since long now is jobless growth. The skilling programme has been built such that it provides short-term training to youth who have already dropped out from school. The idea is to provide them with a job by offering short-term technical/non-technical courses rather than actively enable them to seek out a career.

The concern here is that those who gained employment post-training were found to have dropped out in less than one year. For those who completed a year in employment, the system did not offer a career because career advancement is not just related to skills, but also to educational qualifications. The issue is that the same system that endeavours to provide jobs to youth restricts their career advancement, labelling them instead as dropouts. The skill programme fails to understand how integral it is to incorporate such a huge initiative within the education system. A system that integrates skills and education can go a long way in ensuring that the youth are better equipped to handle a challenging employment market.

The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) is a centrally sponsored scheme of 'vocationalisation' of secondary and higher secondary education. It focusses on enhancing the employability of youth through demand-driven, competency-based, modular vocational courses, while reducing drop-out rates. Yet, its biggest drawback is that its modules are not customised to suit the requirements of children in different age groups. The same approach for skill training a 12- or 14-year-old cannot be followed for training an 18-year-old because skills need to be looked at more dynamically. Skills at school should be imparted as a hobby and not as a serious trade, to make learning fun.

Moreover, operational challenges within the schools are barriers to coalesce the education and skill model. For instance, BMC schooling in Maharashtra doesn't provide for more than 70-80 hours per year for a vocational subject opted for by a student. Thus, it is not possible to complete the desired National Occupational Standards requirement of 150 hours for skills training. Also, there is lack of proper infrastructure and unavailability of quality trainers.

We need strategic thinking while looking at skills at school. The government must learn from the gaps while implementing its skill development programmes for 18-plus youth and then develop its strategy for integrating skills within schools.

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