



Schooling and Skill Development: Enroute to Gender Equality and Inclusive Development

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Abstract:

Skills and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and social development for any country. As India moves progressively towards becoming a 'knowledge economy' it becomes increasingly important that the nation must focus on advancement of skills and these skills have to be relevant to the emerging economic environment with the twin targets of achieving the economic growth and inclusive development. The present paper attempts to explore the inter-linkages between schools, skill development and gender equality in 21st century by highlighting the prominence of 'capabilities approach'. Thus, the paper revolves around the central theme of promoting gender equity through skill development in schools to achieve the goal of inclusive development. Various sections of this paper deliberate the concept of gender equality in brief; conceptual understanding of skills; and the rationale behind the skill development to attain gender equality to sustain inclusive development.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Skill, Capabilities Approach, Inclusive Development

I. Introduction:

What, In the pre-independence era skill was usually transferred from father to son. This informal method of skill acquisition continued for centuries. With the advent of industrialization the need for more skilled workforce became enormous in 19th and 20th century. Independent India during Nehruvian era underwent rapid industrialization process that demanded more and more skillful workforce. Was this demand for skilled workforce undermined in policy making and practice? Did schooling in Independent India ever imparted "skills" to the children that enabled them to make their 'career choices' as well as facilitate 'vertical mobility' in higher education? Have we ever attempted to impart "skills" to our children that would empower them to be 'employable' in the market in their future? Are educators aware of the fact that "skills" are gateway to 'social inclusion' and 'employment' that eventually carve a path to 'equality' and 'inclusive development'? This paper conceives the answer to the above questions as big YES. After independence, as a matter of policy, a number of committees and commissions recommended the vocational education system inextricably interlinked with common school curriculum. National Policy of Education (1968), Kothari commission (1964) and Central Advisory Board of Education in 1975 emphasized the need for (pre)vocational skills in schools and diversified vocational training at secondary schools. The focus of such initiatives

was to build a sustainable skill based education system. The Kothari Commission on Educational Reforms, 1966 had visualized that 25 per cent of the students at the secondary stage would go for the vocational stream. Scholars and educators of Nehruvian era predicted that ‘skill development’ in the nation will have to be in consonance with the wheels of modernization that are rolling through the industry, agriculture and tertiary sector. Nevertheless, current scenario in India is that only 5 per cent of the population of 19–24 age group has acquired some sort of skills through vocational education, while the corresponding figure for Korea is as high as 96 per cent. Experts estimate that 32 percent of its current population is under the age of 15. India with more than 1.2 billion citizens has the second largest education system in the world (after China). However, the National Knowledge Commission and the Planning Commission reiterate lack of skill to be a major hurdle in nation’s inclusive development.

In such a context of inclusive development, this paper takes a position that socializing school children into skills and facilitating them to acquire skills becomes central to schooling. Furthermore, in order to achieve the goal of inclusive development, this paper perceives that skills have to be imparted in schools so as to empower both girl students and boy students to achieve the immaculate goal of gender equality and eliminate the remnants of historical marginalization, social exclusion and oppression of one the sub-categories of gender, i.e., women. The subsequent sections deliberate the concept of gender equality in brief; and the rationale behind the skill development to attain gender equality and sustain inclusive development. It also highlights the contextualization of capabilities approach to attain gender equality through skill development in schools. The perspective that this paper adheres to is to permeate vocational training in schools as a part and parcel of integral/common curriculum for schools.

II. Gender Equality via Right to/within/through Education:

The term gender equality is reflected in one of the six Education for All (EFA) goals elucidated in the Dakar Framework for Action [2000] which envisages ‘eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality’. Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals i.e., Promote Gender Equality and empower women is incorporated as major socio-political agenda of the state in India.

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, girls and boys. Gender equality is achieved when the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured and do not give rise to different consequences that reinforce inequalities. As such, gender inequalities arise from the unequal power relations between women and men. For women in particular, equality means the realization of rights that have been denied as a result of cultural, institutional, behavioural and attitudinal discrimination. Equality is both a goal and a means whereby individuals are accorded equal treatment under the law and equal opportunities to enjoy their rights and to develop their potential talents and skills so that they can participate in national political, economic, social and cultural development and can benefit from its results. Consequently, a need is felt to

develop workers into knowledge workers who will be more flexible, analytical, and adaptable as well as multi skilled. In the new knowledge economy (of 21st century) the skill sets will include professional, managerial, operational, and behavioural, inter personal and inter functional skills. For this purpose, this paper draws on Duncan Wilson's (2003) three-fold characterisation of 'rights in education' and adapts the characterization of rights in the context of skills and gender equality. The three-fold characteristics of 'rights in education' are:

1. Right to Education
2. Right within Education
3. Right through Education

The Right of children for Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (Act No.35 of 2009) is already in vogue as a state agenda for universalization of school education between age of six to fourteen years. However, the standpoint of this paper moves beyond the concept of free and compulsory education and advocates 'Rights with in Education' which means every child will have to be endowed with the right to get imparted with the skills that are required for her/him to function successfully in 21st century. Furthermore, Right to Education will also have to ensure 'Rights through Education' whereby a child is instilled with skills that are necessary to legitimize and institutionalize equality, more specifically gender equality. Thus skill becomes central to achieve gender equality which is quite substantive and perpetuates and reinforces inclusive development. The sections below will deliberate on skills; skill development and 21st century skill for gender equality.

III. Skills: What Body of Literature/Research says?

As the concept of "skill" is gaining its prominence tremendously due to various forces such as globalization of 'Market Economy', inclusion, equality and development, it is pertinent to overview the literature pertaining to skill to develop a conceptual understanding of skills. Skill may be defined as "the ability to do something well". It has various synonyms such as "expertise, skillfulness, expertness, adeptness, adroitness, deftness, dexterity, ability, prowess, mastery, competency, capability, efficiency, aptitude, artistry, art,, fitness, flair, virtuosity, experience, professionalism, talent, cleverness, smartness, ingenuity, versatility, knack, readiness, handiness"

For Some, the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance dexterity or coordination especially in the execution of learned physical tasks a learned power of doing something competently. Skill is "an ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carryout complex activities or job functions involving ideas (cognitive skills), things(technical skills), and/or people (interpersonal skills) ". This section briefly reviews the historical genesis of the skill; its contextual usage in scholarly/ research works.

Skill was characterised by Pear (1927) as being concerned with the quantity and quality of motor output: 'skill is the integration of well-adjusted muscular performances' (Pear, 1948, p. 92). While for Pear the emphasis was on manual, motor skills, his contemporary Hans Reynold in 1928 defined skill as 'any combination, useful to industry, of mental and physical qualities which require considerable training to acquire' (More, 1980, p. 15). While Reynold

was therefore introducing a cognitive dimension alongside the manual, his emphasis on training ignores the fact the skills may equally be acquired through practice, without training. Usually the term skill is used to refer to a level of performance, in the sense of accuracy and speed in performing particular tasks (skilled performance). Skilled performance has long been a subject of psychological enquiry and is of obvious interest to employers. In Cox's (1934) study of manual skill, which was not defined but involved both physical psychomotor abilities and mental cognitive abilities, performance in terms of speed and accuracy was measured in experiments with repetitive assembly operations. Hence, the concept of skill acquired enormous significance with industrialization process across the globe in 19th and 20th centuries.

Another strand of skills research has concerned transfer of training, particularly the extent to which proficiency and experience in one task helps performance in another. In general, transfer of motor skills has only been found to occur where the tasks have particular elements in common, undermining the argument for developing general abilities that will improve performance in various activities (Adams, 1987; Gagné, Foster and Crowley, 1948). This observation has been shown to apply equally to the transfer of cognitive skill (Singley and Anderson, 1989). One conclusion of Cox's studies was that 'skill developed by the mere repetition of one manual operation confers little advantage in the performance of other operations that may be subsequently undertaken' (Cox, 1934, p. 176).

Welford (1968, p. 12-13), who defined skill as a combination of factors resulting in 'competent, expert, rapid and accurate performance', regarded this as equally applicable to manual operations and mental activities. Welford's (1968; 1976) work focused on perceptual-motor performance, as has much of skills research since the two are intimately linked in practice (Fuchs, 1962; Lintern and Gopher, 1978). Welford's work shows how actions are selected and coordinated at different levels of skilled performance and the conditions of practice and training that promote the acquisition and transfer of skill.

More recently, research into skilled performance has increasingly taken into account broader cognitive skills such as problem solving and decision making. This demonstrates the difficulty in regarding such cognitive competences as knowledge rather than skill. Indeed, there is substantial evidence that acquiring skill and demonstrating skilled performance involve a combination of underlying perceptual, cognitive and motor skills (Carlson and Yaure, 1990; Salthouse, 1986). Also, retaining even relatively simple motor skills appears to depend upon understanding of results (Lavery, 1962) and verbalised knowledge (Berry and Broadbent, 1984), or knowledge that is articulated in the course of developing such skills. Moreover, knowledge and working memory play a major role in acquiring skills (Chase and Ericsson, 1982) including procedural skills (Carlson, Sullivan and Schneider, 1989), problem-solving skills (Carlson et al., 1990) and complex cognitive skills (Logie et al., 1989; McKeithen et al., 1981).

Fitts and colleagues (Fitts et al., 1961; Fitts and Posner, 1967) developed a three stage framework for skill acquisition: (i) the cognitive phase of understanding the nature of the task how it should be performed involves conscious cognitive processes; (ii) the associative phase involves inputs linked more directly to appropriate actions and reduced interference from

outside demands and finally (iii) the autonomous phase occurs when actions are automatic requiring no conscious control.

Proctor and Dutta (1995, p. 18) in what is arguably the most authoritative text on skill acquisition and performance, define skill as ‘goal-directed, well-organised behaviour that is acquired through practice and performed with economy of effort’. Each element of this definition is important: first, skill develops over time, with practice; second, it is goal-directed in response to some demand in the external environment; third, it is acquired when components of behaviour are structured into coherent patterns; and finally, cognitive demands are reduced as skill develops. In further articulating their conception of skill, Proctor and Dutta (1995) distinguish perceptual skills, response selection skills, motor skills and problem-solving skills. Perceptual skills are concerned with the ability to make distinctions and judgements; more complex situations require attentional control for processing but many tasks that initially require attention become automatized. Skill in selecting the appropriate response can be developed with practice; reaction time is affected by the number of alternatives and can be accelerated by providing advance information, thereby reducing the alternatives. Motor skills are the manual aspects of performance such as speed and accuracy of physical movements or dexterity. Problem-solving skills, while dependent upon intellect and mental models, can be acquired and developed through practice.

IV. Skill Development and Schooling: Capabilities Approach:

The 11th five year plan (2007-12) has recognized India’s massive need to skill millions of formal and informal workers in the next ten years. In response, the government developed an ambitious scheme of increasing the proportion of formal and informal skilled workers in its total workforce from a mere 2% now to 50% by 2022, thus creating a 500 million strong resource pool.” Improved training and skill development is critical for providing decent employment opportunities to the growing youth population and necessary to sustain the high growth momentum. Planning Commission (2011) opines that children acquire skills faster if taught earlier. It goes on to say that it is important to offer pre-vocational courses in classes IX and X either as an add-on or as an alternative to work education or third language, where applicable. Furthermore, students opting for such pre-vocational courses could be encouraged and facilitated to take up advanced vocational subjects at the higher secondary level. Providing vertical mobility options for students opting for vocational courses, to pursue undergraduate and postgraduate level, if they so desire, appears imminent, failing which the vocational courses at the school-level may not pick up. For a high quality vocational education at school level to evolve and grow in the country, there is a need to train and equip our teachers on a continuous basis with latest skills and the vocational pedagogy itself.

Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum which deliberated on Empowering Women through Skill Development - Challenges and Opportunities identifies that low social value is attached to girl’s education, and as they are considered secondary income earners, lower importance is given to training of girls for employment. It also goes on to say that much focus has to be given on improvements in access to education and training for girls, including

the provision of services, such as transport, hostels, scholarships, and other incentives to encourage women to enrol for education and training. It is in such a context, this paper argues that skill development programs have to be initiated in schools with an emphasis on skilling girl children for more employability in the market with in a broad framework of capabilities approach. Elaine Unterhalter (2003) interprets that “the key idea of the capability approach is that social arrangements should aim to expand people’s capabilities – their freedom to promote or achieve ‘functionings’ which are important to them”.According to Sen(1992) the foundational idea is that what matters to people is that they are able to achieve actual functionings that is ‘the actual living that people manage to achieve’. Walking is a functioning, so are eating, reading, writing and talking. The concept of functionings reflects the various things a person may value doing or being varying from the basic (being adequately nourished) to the very complex (being able to take part in the life of the community). Sen argues that when we make interpersonal comparisons of wellbeing we should find a measure which incorporates references to functioning’s, that is what has been achieved, but also reflects the intuition that what matters is not merely achieving the functioning but being free to achieve it. So we should look at ‘the freedom to achieve actual livings that one can have a reason to value’ (Sen, 1999, 18) or, to put it another way, ‘substantive freedoms’ or ‘the capabilities’ to choose a life one has reason to value (Sen, 1992, 40). A person’s capability refers to the alternative combinations of functionings that are feasible for her to achieve”.the Capability Approach considers development through education to be understood not only as increasing income or better access to resources, but as the enhancement of people’s freedoms to do and be what they have reason to value (McCowan 2011, p. 285).This capabilities approach goes beyond economic development and rights and broadens the perspective of enabling people’s freedom and choices to function in the society. In the light of the above discussion, this paper argues that skills are such capabilities that can be nurtured through schooling where the future citizens ‘freedoms to do and be’ are enhanced.

NCERT’s position paper on ‘Gender Issues in Education’ by National Focus Group acknowledges that substantive gender equality in education is a more complex notion that relates to the nature and quality of education, and has to focus on how education can enables girls to exercise their choice and claim their rights. Hence, it is argued in this paper that skills will enable girls to exercise their choice in market spaces as well as private spheres. The following section explicates the skills that are required for young generation to exercise their choices and rights, specifically girl-students in the 21st century.

V. Gender and 21st Century Skills:

With the realization that school education is increasingly becoming academic-oriented; the government has decided to revive skill development programs in schools to ensure ‘all-round development’ of students. We must equip and nurture our youth with the right kind of education, skill-set and opportunity to reap this demographic dividend. A well educated population, adequately equipped with knowledge and skill is not only essential to support economic growth, but is also a precondition for growth to be inclusive since it is the educated and skilled person who can stand to benefit most from the employment opportunities which

growth will provide. It is by providing skill training in schools, a strong foundation can be built for students which can later be put to use for entrepreneurship and also in their everyday life. Besides the demographic dividend, another factor that adds to the urgency for improved skill development is the increasing number of newly educated youth, especially women, who are willing to seek employment in the service sector. School curriculum and schooling become active instruments of cultural reproduction and social control without seeking to alter the informal and the formal processes of socialization. This paper argues that education and skill development sector has to adequately respond to this emerging need, making it imperative to provide skill development and training in marketable skills and services.

The most recent developments in the knowledge society and the subsequent changes in the world of work at the global level are raising skill/qualification requirements for job entry and subsequently demand for a more knowledgeable and skilled workforce. In this context, this paper explicates that there is a dire and urgent need for a paradigm shift in the skill development sector, in favour of innovations, improvements and high quality training. Furthermore, the paper expounds that it is very pertinent that the concept of training and skill development will have to move beyond the conventional goal of imparting technical and managerial competencies, to playing a broader role of even including basic literacy, numeracy, critical social and political awareness, awareness about gender, and enhancing life skills. Such interventions by their nature will encourage higher self-esteem among girl children and overall personality development. This paper is in consonance with the exposition that for skill development to be more effective, training needs to bend towards developing the kind of skills women and men already knows and move towards the skills unknown to boys and girls previously. This paper broadly categorizes the skills that are required for gender equality to become more inclusive in 21st century and these skills can be incorporated under an umbrella term known as 21st century skills. The term 21st century skills refers to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed—by educators, school reformers, employers, and others—to be critically important for success in today’s world, particularly in contemporary careers and workplaces. Generally speaking, 21st century skills can be applied in all academic subject areas, and in all educational, career, and civic settings throughout a student’s life. It should be noted that the “21st century skills” concept encompasses a wide-ranging and amorphous body of knowledge and skills that is not easy to define and that has not been officially codified or categorized. While the term is widely used in education, it is not always defined consistently, which can lead to confusion and divergent interpretations. In addition, a number of related terms—including applied skills, cross-curricular skills, cross-disciplinary skills, transversal skills, non-cognitive skills and soft skills that are widely used in reference to the general forms of knowledge and skill commonly associated with “21st century skills.” While these different terms may not be strictly synonymous, and they may have divergent or specialized meanings in certain technical contexts, these diverse sets of skills are being addressed in this one entry for the purposes of practicality and usefulness.

Generally speaking, the 21st century skills concept is articulated, in this paper, by the belief that teaching students the most relevant, useful, in-demand, and universally applicable skills must be prioritized in today’s schools and by the related belief that many schools may not

sufficiently prioritize such skills or effectively teach them to students. The basic idea is that students, who will come of age in the 21st century, need to be taught different skills than those learned by students in the 20th century discussed in earlier sections on this paper, and that the skills they learn must reflect the specific demands that will be placed upon them in a complex, competitive, knowledge-based, information-age, technology-driven economy and society. While the specific skills deemed to be “21st century skills” may be defined, categorized, and determined differently from person to person, place to place, or school to school the term does reflect a general—if somewhat loose and shifting—consensus. The following list provides a brief illustrative overview of the knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits commonly associated with 21st century skills:

Types of Skills:

A. Technical/ Work-specific skills (Vocational Skills) are specific to a job and are not easily applied in other environments or situations. These skills tend to be technical and specialized. These skills can be imparted/acquired through vocational training. Vocational training is about imparting of specialized skills and knowledge, instilling social and political attitudes and behaviour patterns for successful economic activities by people engaged in dependent employment, self-employment in both Formal as well as Non-formal trainings. Integration of vocational education at the school level is the only practical way of imparting basic technical skills to a large number of new entrants to the labour force. Planning Commission Task Force on skill development further goes on to recommend that “Vocational Education can be provided in schools either by ‘weaving’ the subjects into the curriculum or by providing separate ‘optionals’ at the School and College level. The planning commission affirms that software aspect can be looked at by the National Council of Education Research & Training (NCERT) and the extent to which these subjects can be covered should be largely left to the Secondary School Boards and Universities (2007, p.i). Highlighting the role of NCERT The following recommendations are made by the Task Force of the Planning Commission (2007) to integrate technical skills in schools :

- a) Flexibility should be provided in the school curriculum to give weightage to vocational subjects during the examinations and for the grant of credits.
- b) VT and VE programmes can be made available to students after Class VIII at any time and after Class V for those over 15 years of age in order to cater to dropouts from the formal education system. As regards ‘streaming’ of students into VT, this could begin after class X, given the Government of India’s mandate to universalize elementary education and expand opportunities for secondary education.
- c) The Pundit Sunder Lal Sharma Central Institute of Vocational Education (PSSCIVE) should become the coordinating agency for VE and promote the interface between education and industry. It can be designated as the National Institute for Vocational Education Planning and Development.

This paper advocates close linkages between various institutes such as Institute for Applied Manpower & Research (IAMR), The National Council of Vocational Training (NCVT), Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), NCERT, PSSIVE and evolve strategies to integrate Vocational

Education and Training at school level for the purpose of providing exposure to school students about various skills and train them in one or two skills of their choice, propensities, proclivities and inclinations. Furthermore, Polytechnics should only be opened in those areas where there is a public demand and a likelihood of employment. National Mission on Skill Development, Skill Development Council and Skill Development Centre's need to provide incessant inputs to schools and the Polytechnics. Keeping in view importance of skill development in agriculture and its vast potential, this paper is of the view that agriculture training institutes have to be set up all over the country, to empower persons dependent on agriculture.

Life skills/Functional/transferable skills/Self-management skills can be applied in most environments and situations. "Life skills" are defined as psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. There are many different understandings of life skills but no definition is universally accepted. Different organizations attach different meanings to the term. The International Bureau of Education (IBE) derives its understanding from the Delores four pillars of learning - learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together - and defines life skills as personal management and social skills which are necessary for adequate functioning on an independent basis. For instance, meaningful targets for an overall goal aimed at "improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills" (EFA Goal 6). Additionally, it is essential to ask how life skills are defined in particular life situations and throughout life (Ouane 2002; Goody 2001). It is believed that life skills are developed as a result of a constructive processing of information, impressions, encounters and experiences, - both individual and social - that are a part of one's daily life and work and the rapid changes that occur in the course of one's life. The social dimensions are particularly important as they condition life itself and compel individuals to purposefully acquire skills, develop attitudes and values in order to face and master real life situations (Ouane 2002).

Life skills can be loosely grouped into three broad categories of skills: cognitive skills for analyzing and using information, personal skills for developing personal agency and managing oneself, and inter-personal skills for communicating and interacting effectively with others. Essentially, there are three kinds of skills –

"thinking skills"- those related to thinking and these skill relate to reflection at personal level,

"social skills"- skills related to dealing with others and include interpersonal skills,

"emotional skills" - can be perceived as a skill not only in making rational decisions but also in being able to make others agree to one's point of view. Elaborate list of life skills are presented below that are essential in 21st century to ensure gender equality:

"Decision-making and problem-solving; creative thinking and critical thinking;

communication and interpersonal skills; self-awareness and empathy; coping with emotions and coping with stress; Perseverance, self-direction, planning, self-discipline, adaptability, initiative; leadership, teamwork, collaboration, cooperation Civic, ethical, and social-justice literacy; economic and financial literacy, entrepreneurialism dealing with conflict that cannot be resolved, dealing with authority, solving problems, making and

keeping friends/relationships, cooperation, self-awareness, creative thinking, decision-making, critical thinking, dealing with stress, negotiation, clarification of values, resisting pressure, coping with disappointment, planning ahead, empathy, dealing with emotions, assertiveness, active listening, respect, tolerance, trust, sharing, sympathy, compassion, sociability, self-esteem; critical thinking, reasoning, analysis, interpretation, synthesizing information; personal expression; public speaking and presenting, listening; health and wellness literacy, including nutrition, diet, exercise, and public health and safety; environmental and conservation literacy, ecosystems understanding”.

This paper maintains that an eclectic approach is required to evolve school programs that integrate vocational and life skills with the core curriculum. This paper emphasizes that NCERT, NCTE and CBSE will have to advance a liaison with Skill Development Council and evolve curriculum on skills for various stages of schooling which is intricately integrated with the core curriculum of schools.

VI. Conclusion: Gender, Skills and Inclusive Development:

Skills, knowledge and innovation are driving forces of economic growth and social development in any country of the world. Countries with higher levels of education and highly skilled citizens are not only more competitive in the global economy, but can also quickly respond to challenges and seize opportunities. There is a dual rationale for promoting gender equality. Firstly, that equality between women and men - equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities – is a matter of human rights and social justice. And secondly, that greater equality between women and men is also a precondition for (and effective indicator of) sustainable people-centred development. The perceptions, interests, needs and priorities of both women and men must be taken into consideration not only as a matter of social justice but because they are necessary to enrich development processes.. All in all, this paper foresees the synergy between schools and skill development to promote gender equality from the perspective of inclusive development.

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