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INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGY IN EDUCATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

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Original Article

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Abstract

Capacity building and education are intertwined fields where success in the latter becomes impossible without the former. Capacity building is the process of developing the skills, knowledge, and abilities of the individuals with resource planning to improve their performance and effectiveness. Education is the process of improving critical thinking, awareness, and knowledge enhancement within the conceptual framework of the curriculum. In this digitalisation era, where education is a powerful weapon, its accommodation is fruitless without capacity building. If education is a means of attaining individual empowerment, capacity building is the means of attaining the right knowledge and the right skill set through collaborative networks and training programmes, which act as the foundation to achieve greater heights, matching the dynamics of the society for professional development by meeting the diverse student needs. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of this needful concept through an introduction, a review of literature, the present scenario, the role of various organisations in capacity building in education, an analysis and discussion, and suggestions. It concludes with a future scope that enumerates the possible effects of adopting the mentioned suggestions.

Keywords: Capacity Building; Empowerment; Foundation; Resource planning; Skill development

Introduction

Capacity building represents a crucial nexus between academia and the professional sphere, signifying the preparedness of graduates to seamlessly integrate into the workforce. This state is characterised by a graduate's possession of the requisite skills, encompassing both the technical proficiencies specific to their field and the essential soft skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, teamwork, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal interactions, all of which are highly valued by employers.

The traditional focus of India's higher education system has predominantly revolved around imparting academic knowledge and cultivating technical proficiencies within specific domains. While this emphasis has undeniably contributed to the nation's growth in various sectors, the evolving landscape of the global and national job markets increasingly demands a complementary set of attributes known as soft skills. These skills, encompassing interpersonal abilities, communication effectiveness, and emotional intelligence, are now considered crucial for graduates to not only secure employment but also to thrive in their professional and personal lives. Recognising this paradigm shift, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has placed significant emphasis on the holistic development of students, explicitly advocating for the integration of soft skills into the educational framework.

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These skills often serve as the distinguishing factor that enables graduates to secure meaningful employment and embark on successful career trajectories.

This trend indicates that practical skills and interpersonal abilities are now valued as much as, if not more than, theoretical knowledge. The NEP 2020's strong emphasis on these competencies further underscores the policy-level acknowledgement of this evolution towards a skill-based economy, necessitating a re-evaluation of priorities within Indian higher education.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study how educational qualifications help in students' capacity building.
2. To examine the prospectus of soft skill training among students for their capacity building and improving employment opportunities and entrepreneurial skills.

Literature Review

Karunanayaka [1] stated that the growing use of digital learning environments supports the adoption of open educational practices, aligning with SDG4. Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, educators are rethinking pedagogy through technology-enhanced learning (TEL). This study presents an online capacity development programme for 15 purposively selected educators, focused on designing OER-integrated TEL materials. Delivered via Moodle and Zoom, the intervention included hands-on activities and interactive workshops. Data collected through surveys, journals, and interviews underwent content analysis. The results indicated that a "learning by design" methodology enabled educators to develop OER-integrated TEL resources and promoted leadership in the implementation of open and digital practices within education.

Laurillard [2] emphasised the need for pedagogy to evolve into a "design science" in response to the changing landscape of education, particularly driven by digital technology. The author introduces a model that integrates technology with pedagogy, allowing teachers to design learning experiences that are more personalised and interactive. This aligns closely with capacity-building efforts, as it empowers teachers to innovate their teaching methods while developing digital competencies. Her work supports the idea that capacity building in education is not just about resources but also about the design and execution of effective pedagogical strategies.

Viczko [3] discussed "new pedagogies" that leverage deep learning competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, and self-regulation. Fullan and Langworthy argue that innovative pedagogy requires a fundamental shift from content delivery to fostering student engagement and creativity. In this case, capacity building means that both teachers and students learn together in a way that changes over time. The authors also highlight the role of technology as an enabler, not just a tool, which suggests that true innovation depends on pedagogical vision and systemic support.

Voogt et al. [4] examined how digital technologies are reshaping educational practices and challenging traditional pedagogies. They introduce the concept of "21st-century learning,", which includes digital literacy, problem-solving, and collaborative skills. The study points out that while many schools adopt digital tools, their use is often superficial unless accompanied by professional development and pedagogical innovation. This aligns directly with capacity building, as it illustrates the value of training educators in both technical and pedagogical innovation.

Korthagen [5] criticised conventional professional development models as insufficient for real pedagogical change. He proposed "Professional Development 3.0," which emphasised experiential learning, reflection, and emotional engagement. This approach to capacity building focuses on empowering educators to internalise innovative pedagogies through authentic learning experiences rather than top-down training. It supports sustainable pedagogical transformation by fostering intrinsic motivation among teachers.

Methodology

In this study, secondary data has been utilised to provide a comprehensive understanding of existing pedagogical innovations and their impacts on educational outcomes and capacity building. Data sources include academic journals,

government reports, policy briefs, and institutional case studies that document past and current educational strategies across diverse contexts. By analysing these sources of information, the research identifies patterns, best practices, and challenges in implementing innovative teaching methods. The use of secondary data allows for a broader perspective, enabling the comparison of findings across regions and educational systems, thereby enhancing the reliability and relevance of the study's conclusions.

Conceptual Framework

Research has indicated that graduates often lack essential soft skills due to a greater emphasis on the development of practical skills and procedural knowledge within academic curricula.

Consequently, many graduates, despite holding academic qualifications, perceive themselves as ill-prepared for the immediate demands and expectations of the professional world.

Capacity building through soft skills facilitates a smoother transition for graduates into the workforce, enabling them to become productive contributors from an early stage in their careers. Studies have shown a positive influence of soft skill integration on students' communication and teamwork levels, as well as problem-solving and critical thinking abilities. The integration of soft skills training has a positive and significant effect on employability, both directly and through increased self-efficacy among students.

Capacity Building Initiatives by HEIs

Higher education institutions in India are increasingly implementing a range of initiatives to enhance the practical skills of their students and improve their capacity building. These initiatives encompass various pedagogical approaches and structural changes aimed at bridging the gap between academic learning and the demands of the professional world.

Figure 1: Capacity Building

Source: Sehgal [6]

Pedagogical approaches like Project-Based Learning (PBL) and experiential learning are also gaining traction in Indian higher education institutions. PBL involves engaging students in real-world projects over an extended period, fostering inquiry, problem-solving, and collaboration. These methods aim to move beyond rote memorisation by connecting learning to practical scenarios, thereby enhancing students' critical thinking, reasoning, and creativity. Experiential learning, which includes hands-on workshops and real-world simulations, provides students with opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills in authentic environments, preparing them for the transition from academia to the professional world.

Methods for Soft Skills Training

Curriculum frameworks such as the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and the Learning Outcomes-based Curriculum Framework (LOCF) also provide guidance for integrating soft skills.

The NCF emphasises the importance of life skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving within the broader educational context. The LOCF specifically aims to cultivate graduate attributes that include communication skills, critical thinking abilities, and problem-solving capacities. Effective soft skills training necessitates a fundamental shift in pedagogical practices, moving away from traditional lecture-based instruction towards more interactive and experiential methods that provide students with ample opportunities to practise and apply these essential skills.

The underlying principle is that practical application and active engagement are essential for students to internalise and master their soft skills. Therefore, curriculum design and pedagogical approaches must prioritise this active

learning methodology to ensure effective training (refer to Table 1).

Table 1: Pedagogical Approaches for Soft skills Training in Indian Higher Education

Pedagogical Approach	**Description**	**Advantages**	**Potential Challenges in Indian Context**
Experiential Learning	Learning through doing and reflecting on the experience.	Promotes deeper understanding, enhances retention, develops practical skills.	May require significant resources and careful planning; effectiveness depends on the quality of reflection.
Role-Playing	Simulating real-life scenarios to practice communication and interpersonal skills.	Provides a safe environment for experimentation, improves communication and empathy.	Can be challenging to implement effectively if students are not comfortable with acting; requires skilled facilitation.
Group Discussions	Engaging students in conversations to share ideas, perspectives, and build consensus.	Enhances communication skills, fosters teamwork, promotes critical thinking and active listening.	May be dominated by a few students; requires careful moderation to ensure equitable participation.
Case Studies	Analyzing real-world situations to identify problems and develop solutions.	Develops critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and analytical abilities.	Relevance of case studies to the Indian context is crucial; requires students to have a foundational understanding of the subject matter.
Presentations	Students preparing and delivering information to an audience.	Improves public speaking skills, enhances confidence, and develops the ability to articulate ideas clearly.	Anxiety related to public speaking can be a barrier for some students; requires constructive feedback mechanisms.
Simulations	Creating virtual or physical environments that mimic real-world situations.	Provides immersive learning experiences, allows for risk-free practice, and can be highly engaging.	May be resource-intensive to develop and implement; requires access to technology and skilled facilitators.
Project-Based Learning	Students working on extended projects to address real-world problems.	Fosters collaboration, problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity; enhances ownership of learning.	Requires careful planning and monitoring; effective teamwork can be challenging to manage.
Technology-Enabled Learning	Utilizing digital tools, gamification, and AI-driven feedback for soft skills development.	Offers personalized learning experiences, can increase engagement, provide immediate feedback, and enhance accessibility.	Requires adequate digital infrastructure and digital literacy among students and faculty, potential for over-reliance on technology.

Source: Collected by Author

Measuring The Impact: Assessment of Soft Skills and Employability

Assessing soft skills presents special obstacles due to their intangible and subjective nature, making it difficult to quantify and evaluate objectively using traditional assessment methods.

To overcome these limitations, a shift towards more innovative and holistic assessment approaches is necessary. Methods such as self- and peer feedback can offer helpful observations about an individual's self-awareness and interpersonal effectiveness.

Collaborative projects offer opportunities to assess teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills in a practical setting. Presentations can be used to evaluate communication skills and confidence. Simulations can provide realistic scenarios for assessing problem-solving, decision-making, and teamwork skills.

Competency-based assessment (CBA), which focuses on evaluating the practical application of skills, is particularly well-suited for assessing soft skills in the context of employability.

Studies have shown that graduates who undergo soft skills training are more likely to secure employment and perform well in their roles.

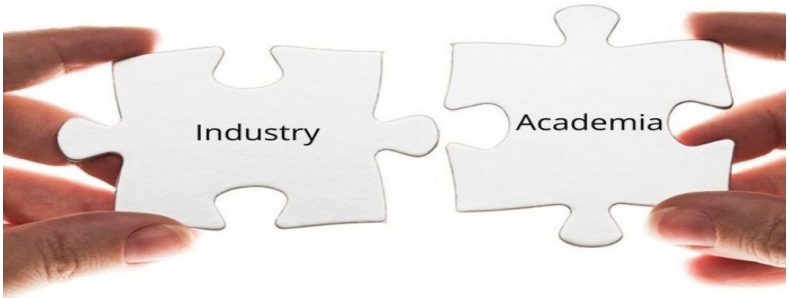
The inherent difficulty in quantifying soft skills necessitates the adoption of alternative approaches.

The broader implication is that embracing such varied assessment strategies is crucial for truly understanding the effectiveness of soft skills training and its contribution to enhancing graduate employability.

Industry-Academia Collaboration

A critical aspect of capacity building is the extent and quality of collaboration between higher education institutions and industries in India. Active collaboration ensures that the curriculum remains relevant to the demands of the job market and provides students with valuable practical learning opportunities. Various models of collaboration are being implemented, including joint curriculum development, where industry experts work with academics to design courses that align with industry needs. Guest lectures delivered by industry professionals provide students with real-world insights and exposure to current trends and practices. Industry-sponsored projects offer students opportunities to work on real-world challenges under the guidance of industry mentors, enhancing their problem-solving and technical skills.

Figure 2: Collaborating Industry and Academia



Source: Agnihotri and Rameshan [7]

The establishment of centres of excellence in specific domains—often with industry partners—creates hubs for specialised training and research. Faculty exchange programs facilitate the transfer of academics to industry and vice versa, fostering a deeper understanding of each other's needs and perspectives. Successful models of industry-academia collaboration have demonstrated a positive impact on student learning outcomes and placement rates.

Challenges and Bottlenecks

Despite the policy focus and the increasing number of initiatives, Indian higher education institutions face significant challenges in effectively implementing practical skills training and achieving widespread empowerment opportunities among their graduates. These challenges are multifaceted and require systemic interventions to address them effectively.

Discussion

The findings strengthen a growing body of literature that proposes that higher education institutions continue to prioritise the acquisition of technical skills and procedural knowledge, often at the expense of developing soft skills crucial for workplace success. While technical proficiency remains essential, it alone does not equip graduates with the holistic competencies required in dynamic, team-based, and problem-solving environments typically in the workplace [8, 9].

Research has constantly accentuated that employers value communication, adaptability, collaboration, and critical thinking as some of the core competencies for new hires [10, 11]. However, graduates frequently demonstrate deficiencies in these areas, emphasizing a gap between academic training and industry expectations [12]. This mismatch contributes to a longer adjustment period for graduates entering the workforce and may affect their early productivity and career progression.

Prioritising structured soft skills training within academic programmes has demonstrated promising outcomes. Studies have reported statistically significant improvements in students' communication, teamwork, and interpersonal skills following targeted interventions [13]. The cultivation of soft skills appears to influence students' self-efficacy—a critical psychological factor that mediates employability and workplace readiness [14].

The influence of soft skills training ranges beyond individual competencies. As indicated by recent capacity-building initiatives, such training also nurtures reflective practices, leadership, and resilience—traits increasingly recognised as essential for sustainable professional development in uncertain and evolving work environments [15]. Blended learning approaches and experiential methodologies, including role plays, peer collaboration, and real-world simulations, have been shown to be particularly effective in facilitating the transfer of soft skills into practical contexts [16].

The role of digital learning environments and open educational practices has to be acknowledged in expanding access to soft skills development. Post-pandemic, online and hybrid platforms have enabled more inclusive and scalable training models that align with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) by promoting equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities [17].

Various studies increasingly confirm that, despite policy momentum [18] and many capacity-building efforts, a large gap persists between curricular design and industry-relevant, practical skills acquisition in Indian HEIs. Key dimensions and documented evidence include:

There is a significant discrepancy between the theory and practice of prioritisation.

- Curriculum Rigidity and Outdated Content
- Practical exposure, internships, and hands-on learning are insufficiently integrated.
- Industry-Academia Linkage Weakness
- Faculty, Infrastructure, and Resource Constraints

One of the significant barriers is the prevalence of curriculum constraints within many Indian HEIs. Heavy emphasis on theoretical knowledge over practical application hinders the development of industry-relevant skills among students.

The traditional curriculum structure often prioritises There is a significant disconnect between academic learning and examinations, leaving limited space and time for hands-on training and practical skill development.

The disconnect between what is taught and what is required in the workplace contributes to graduates lacking the necessary competencies for immediate employability.

Language barriers also pose a considerable challenge, particularly in a diverse country like India, where English serves as the primary medium of instruction in many higher education institutions. Students from non-English-speaking backgrounds may face difficulties in effectively communicating and developing leadership skills, hindering their overall soft-skill acquisition.

There may be resistance from both students and faculty towards the incorporation of what might be perceived as non-traditional skills training. Some may view soft skills as secondary to academic knowledge, leading to a lack of engagement or prioritization of these training initiatives.

Infrastructure limitations also pose a substantial bottleneck to effective practical skills training. Many higher education institutions (HEIs) in India, especially those in rural and semi-urban areas, do not have the modern labs, workshops, and equipment they need to give students good hands-on training.

The absence of state-of-the-art facilities and resources can restrict students' opportunities to gain practical experience with industry-standard tools and technologies, thereby hindering their preparedness for the workplace.

The inherent nature of soft skills makes their impact difficult to quantify and assess objectively compared to the more tangible outcomes of physical skills training.

Impact on Graduate Employability

The India Skills Report 2025 indicated an improvement in employability to 54.81% in 2024, while the India Graduate Skills Index 2025 reported a slight decrease to 42.6% in 2024. Employability in technical roles, including AI and ML, has shown an increase, whereas non-technical roles have experienced a decline [19]. These varying statistics suggested that while practical skills training is generally beneficial for employability, its impact is influenced by factors such as the specific skills being developed, the quality of training, the sector, and the region. There remains a significant gap between the skills possessed by many students and the expectations of employers, which points to the continuing need for targeted and effective practical skills development initiatives (refer to Table 2).

Table 2: Key Soft Skills Valued by Employers in India

Soft Skill	**Description**	**Relevance to Job Roles/Industries**
Communication Skills [20]	Ability to express ideas clearly and effectively, both verbally and in writing; active listening.	Essential across all industries and job roles, particularly customer-facing roles, management, and leadership.
Teamwork and Collaboration [21]	Ability to work effectively with others to achieve common goals; contributing ideas, compromising, and supporting team members.	Crucial in almost all workplaces, especially in project-based roles and organizations with cross-functional teams.
Problem-Solving [22]	Ability to identify, analyze, and resolve issues effectively and creatively.	Highly valued in all sectors, particularly in technical, analytical, and managerial roles.
Critical Thinking	Ability to analyze information objectively, evaluate evidence, and make informed decisions.	Essential for strategic roles, research and development, and decision-making positions across various industries.
Adaptability and Flexibility	Ability to adjust to changing environments, new situations, and diverse tasks with ease.	Increasingly important in today's fast-paced and evolving work environments across all sectors.
Work Ethic and Professionalism	Demonstrating responsibility, integrity, punctuality, and a commitment to excellence.	Fundamental to success in any professional setting and valued by all employers.
Leadership Skills [23]	Ability to guide and motivate others, take initiative, and make effective decisions.	Essential for managerial roles and increasingly valued even in entry-level positions.

Emotional Intelligence	Understanding and managing one's own emotions and recognizing and influencing the emotions of others.	Increasingly recognized as a key determinant of success in various professional roles, especially those involving significant interpersonal interaction.

Source: Collected by Author

Implications of the Study

1. To significantly enhance industry alignment among Indian graduates, a multi-pronged approach involving higher education institutions, policymakers, and industry stakeholders is essential.
2. Curriculum reforms should prioritise the integration of more practical, application-oriented content, moving away from an overemphasis on theoretical knowledge. This includes incorporating case studies, real-world projects, and simulations across various disciplines.
3. Strengthening industry-academia partnerships is crucial, and this can be achieved through formal agreements that facilitate joint curriculum development, regular guest lectures by industry experts, industry-sponsored projects, and increased opportunities for student internships and apprenticeships [24].
4. Investing in faculty development programmes that focus on upskilled educators with industry-relevant skills and knowledge in emerging technologies is also vital.
5. HEIs should encourage faculty to engage in industry immersions, sabbaticals, and collaborations to stay abreast of the latest trends and practices.
6. Upgrading the infrastructure within HEIs, particularly by investing in modern laboratories, workshops, and equipment, is necessary to provide students with adequate facilities for hands-on training and practical skill development.
7. Promoting experiential learning through the widespread adoption of mandatory internships, apprenticeships, and project-based learning will further enhance students' practical skills and industry exposure.
8. Developing robust assessment mechanisms that go beyond traditional examinations to evaluate practical skills, competencies, and the ability to apply knowledge in real-world scenarios is also crucial.
9. A culture of continuous learning and upskilling among both students and faculty is essential to ensure that they remain adaptable and relevant in a rapidly evolving job market.
10. Technology, including AI, VR/AR, ML, and online learning platforms, holds immense potential for transforming practical skills training by providing immersive learning experiences, personalised feedback, and greater accessibility to quality education, particularly in remote areas.

Conclusion

The landscape of higher education in India is undergoing a significant shift toward prioritizing practical skills development to enhance the entrepreneurship and employability of its graduates. Driven by evolving economic demands, supportive policy frameworks, and the increasing recognition of the importance of hands-on experience, higher education institutions are implementing various initiatives, including mandatory internships, vocational training programs, project-based and experiential learning, and the establishment of specialized skill development centers. Active collaborations between academia and industry are further enriching the learning experience and ensuring the relevance of curricula. However, despite these advancements, challenges such as curriculum constraints, faculty expertise gaps, and infrastructure limitations continue to hinder the widespread and effective integration of practical skills training and capacity building among students. While the impact of these efforts is reflected in varying graduate employability rates, it is evident that a more concerted and strategic approach is needed to fully bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world expectations. By learning from successful international models and embracing the transformative potential of technology, India can further strengthen its higher education system and produce a

workforce that is truly prepared to meet the demands of the real world. The ongoing evolution of higher education in India necessitates a continuous commitment to adaptation and innovation to effectively equip students with the skills and competencies required to thrive in the future workforce.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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