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A STUDY ON MEASURES TO IMPROVE SKILLS OF LEARNERS

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Abstract :

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Introduction :

The basic purpose of education is to generate future citizens who are fit to serve the society and earn their livelihood by doing so. Education is not just about learning the facts; the young minds need to be trained to think. Education is meaningless if it does not train the young learners to capture all opportunities, to be useful to others, and to be happy themselves. To serve the society, it is necessary to possess the required skills that has to be developed through education. The learners should acquire the necessary skills and also learn to apply those skills in their personal and professional lives. Education will be meaningful only if they empower the learners to lead satisfactory and successful productive life. The conventional education system of school, high school, bachelors, masters, professional and research studies in the areas of STEM and/or humanities are basically meant to develop professional and personal skills of learners. Through this study an attempt is made to understand how far the learners are acquiring such skills and what measures can be taken to improve them.

Objectives of the Study :

1. To study the 21st century skills that can improve the employability and personality of learners
2. To analyse the effectiveness of the conventional education system in imparting such skills
3. To suggest practical measures that can improve the skills of learners

Methodology :

1. Interview and observation method of learners in the age group 16 to 22 years from varied fields of education.
2. Articles from newspapers, magazines, reference material from career guidance sessions and books

21st Century Skills for Employability and Personality Development :

The term 21st century skills refer to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed—by educators, school reformers, college professors, employers, and others—to be critically important to success in today’s world, particularly in collegiate programs and 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. Some of such skills are mentioned as under:

- 1. Information and media literacy skills :** Information and communication technology skills, media and internet literacy, data interpretation and analysis.

This will also help them in staying updated with the latest information in their areas of interest as well as to connect with like-minded individuals. Reading and comprehending the information from print and broadcast media; analysing and applying the same in the area of study will deepen the knowledge of the learners.

- 2. Financial literacy skills :** Identifying and setting financial goals, developing appropriate financial plan, formulating investment strategies – balancing risk, returns and liquidity, periodic review and upgradation of the plan are necessary to achieve financial wellness and financial freedom. Learners should focus on not just earning money but equal emphasis should be on how to manage the money. They should know how to use money to make more money.
- 3. Collaboration and team work skills :** Cooperation with team mates, balancing independence and interdependence at work place to achieve the common goals. Setting aside personal rivalries and working in sync with the organizational objectives as the top priority is also a necessary skill that learners should develop at an early stage. Identifying the strengths and weakness of the team-members and adapting accordingly with commitment to achieving the goals are steps towards success.
- 4. Digital literacy skills :** ability to live and work in a society where communication and access to information is increasingly through digital technologies like internet platforms, social media and mobile networks. This skill is required for the learners to identify the real and fake news circulating through social media. Social media can also be used positively for professional connectivity, thereby providing more opportunities for career growth and development of the youngsters.
- 5. Social and emotional skills :** managing emotions, build healthy relationships and be empathetic. These skills go a long way in leading a happy personal and professional life; thereby improving the efficiency and productivity of the youth. Personal emotional management and developing EQ will help learners in conflict management and thereby increasing work place productivity.
- 6. Effective communication skills :** active listening, verbal and nonverbal communication, asking questions, clarifying and summarising, providing feedback, developing trust 7 Cs clarity, correctness, conciseness, courtesy, concreteness, consideration and completeness.
- 7. Leadership skills :** strategic thinking, planning and delivery, people management skills, persuasion and influence. These skills instil confidence in the subordinates and can help in maximising productivity.
- 8. Decision making skills :** evaluate options, establish priorities, navigate risk and uncertainties. Making the right choice at the right time is one crucial step leading to success.

9. **Problem solving skills** : identifying and analysing the problem, finding the cause and development of solutions, implement the solution and measurement of result. These skills are required to meet the challenges presented by the ever-evolving business environment.
10. **Creativity skills** : ability to think in a different way and use imagination to generate new ideas. These skills build resilience to challenging situations and help the youngsters to convert obstacles in to opportunities.

Education System and its Effectiveness in Skill Development :

The formal education system comprises of school, high school, bachelor's, master's, and professional degrees have integrated varied skills in their curricula. The result of these is yet to be measured. Even now, students join college for degree and they enrol in training programmes to develop skills. Graduates passing out of college doesn't possess the relevant skills and there are skilled candidates who doesn't possess a college degree.

Summary of information gathered by personal interview and observation:

1. Children learn to read and write in school, but only few learners who are encouraged by teachers or parents to read have information and media literacy skills. But if not encouraged, then these skills are grossly underdeveloped.
2. With an exception of learners pursuing graduate or professional education in the field of finance; these skills are almost ignored by the education system.
3. Due to emphasis on group activities and group projects, youngsters are trained to attain collaboration and team building skills to a limited extent.
4. Digital wellbeing is not much emphasised in the present education system.
5. The huge number of diverse students in a class, to some extent helps to develop their social and emotional skills.
6. Almost all the areas of study, focus on developing communication skills and it is integrated in the curriculum. The effectiveness of delivery of these courses is yet to be measured.
7. Leadership, decision-making, problem-solving etc are skills that are developed through effective delivery of the curriculum. In the present mass education system, these skills are not developed much.
8. Rote learning and merit ranking system, does not leave much scope for developing the creativity of the learners.

Practical Measures to Improve Skills :

1. **Preparatory programme and entrance tests** : Considering the loss of learning in the pandemic situation, a 3-4 months course on preparing the high school students for their bachelor's may be implemented. The course should develop the basic reading and comprehension, numerical aptitude, reasoning abilities and research aptitude. The learners have to be directed to the right field of study through personality, interest and aptitude tests. A foundation course for the field of study that they chose may be included at the end of the programme. An entrance examination for any form of higher education may be introduced that will ensure that learners focus on competency rather than academic merits. The pre-requisite for entry to any form of higher education should be sufficient score in the foundation or entrance, that measures the interest and commitment of the learners in the chosen field of higher education.

2. **Finishing school :** The development of skills, employment, and good personality among the people of the nation is the main responsibility of the government and the medium of education is a major deciding factor in achieving this goal.

Finishing School aims at empowering students with various skill sets in addition to knowledge that makes them Industry ready. Finishing School Trainers enable students to hone their Life Skills, Employability Skills, Functional and Spoken English Skills so as to carve a niche in the competitive and dynamic world.

Objectives of finishing school :

- A. To Identify students who are in need of training in essential and critical skills that enhance their employability.
 - B. To provide such students with suitable training in modules that add value to their education and enable them to leverage on best career opportunities.
 - C. To strengthen students with self-esteem, self-confidence, professional skills, and functional communication skills which is the prerequisite for a healthy professional life and life in general.
 - D. To empower students in the practical application of their knowledge in the different domains of the eco-system and thereby contribute positively towards nation building.
 - E. To support the economic progress by providing a robust and well-equipped talent pool as a part of the human development.
3. **Internships and Live Projects :** Internship and internship based live projects as a part of the curriculum is an effective method for enhancing skills of learners. Practical exposure to a workplace and the experience gained though that can improve the employability of the learners.

Benefits of an Internship

- A. The learners can learn about their chosen career field and identify whether that is the right career for long term growth and fulfilments.
- B. The learners can benefit from professional mentors in the chosen field.
- C. The learners can gain knowledge about the workplace in the specific industry.
- D. They gain a sense of accomplishment in the organization.
- E. They get an opportunity to practise the knowledge acquired.
- F. It is bridge between the formal schooling and professional environment for the learners.
- G. It offers potential for a full-time job at the end of the internship based on performance.

Conclusion :

Based on the educational reforms happening all over the world, the NEP2020 recommended that vocational education will be integrated into all school and higher education institutions in a phased manner over the next decade. CBSE schools all over the country have introduced vocational education from Class VI onwards. The new National Higher Education Skills Framework (NHESF) will be aligned with new educational reforms to give Indian learners uninterrupted vertical pathways of mobility from class I into higher education.

Teachers and parents play the most crucial role in providing a proactive and encouraging environment to develop the highest potential in the child. Identifying the learning need of the child and provide the opportunities for growth and development in the right direction will ensure that the true purpose of education is served. A

three -step model can be followed to ensure this:

1. Parents and teachers be trained to be receptive towards identifying the talents at a young age
2. Appropriate education should be provided to convert the talents into skills
3. Right choice of career to ensure applying those skills for attaining the personal and professional goals of the youth

The best education system to develop the requisite skills is the traditional gurukul system, wherein the children are sent to stay, learn and work with the Guru – the teacher. The teacher imparts the necessary knowledge and skills to the disciple throughout such stay. Such learned youth then serves the society by performing the role that he/she is most suitable for. A modern version of this system may be worked out, wherein it is not the parents who pay the fees for the education of the child, but the learners themselves repay the teacher by serving the teacher in return for the knowledge acquired.

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