



Skill Development Initiatives and Career Development: The Interface in India

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Abstract

Over the recent past India has taken important steps to address the skill development of its youth. Under the banner of Skill India, a complete, independent Ministry for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has been created. An interesting approach taken by the government is to draw private enterprise into the training sector through a public-private partnership model. The National Skills Development Corporation has been established specifically for this purpose. However, as is the case with most skill development initiatives, not only in India but in many other countries as well, the interface between skill development and career guidance and counselling remains weak. This paper reviews the skill development initiative set out in India and presents an exercise at engaging with this initiative from the career guidance view point with the intention of highlighting the critical role that career guidance can play in strengthening skill development programmes.

Keywords: skill development, NSDE, MSDE, vocational training

The highest concentration of India's population lies in the age range between 15 to 29 years (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2017). This makes India one of the youngest countries in the world in terms of demographics. If this is to be converted into a demographic advantage, the challenges of skill development and employability are significant challenges to be met. However, a review indicates that a mere 4.7% of India's workforce is formally skilled while in other developed countries this ranges between 60% and 90% (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship [MSDE], 2016a). In this paper we examine how the government of India has set out to tackle this issue and extend

these observations to career guidance and counselling.

Institutional Networks

The Department of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship was created on 31st July, 2014, under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports with a focus on skill development, certification, job placement and employment which was then upgraded to the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship on 9th November, 2014 (MSDE, 2016a). The National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC), the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), and the Directorate of Training (DT) are seen as the three arms of this initiative. The NSDC rests upon the

public-private partnership model. The NSDC has an equity base of Rs. 10 crores, of which the Government of India holds 49% and the private sector, the remaining 51% (NSDC, "About us", 2017a). Under this scheme, the NSDC co-funds private sector agencies to take up profitable vocational training initiatives in 37 sectors (See Appendix 1 for a list of the sectors) (MSDE, "About us", 2018a). This wide reach across a range of industries is anticipated to bring training into the scope of private investors. Finally, the drive for skill development is aimed to run parallel with the government's emphasis on the growth of domestic products branded within the Skill India and Make in India campaigns. This paper focuses on the NSDC given its pivotal role in achieving these objectives.

The stated mission of the NSDC covers a wide range of related issues including the following (NSDC, "Vision and Mission", 2017b):

- Upgrade skills to international standards and develop necessary frameworks for standards, curriculum and quality assurance.
- Enhance, support, and coordinate private sector initiatives for skill development through appropriate Public Private Partnership (PPP) models, [and] strive for significant operational and financial involvement from private sector.
- Play the role of a "market-maker" by bringing in funds, particularly in sectors where market mechanisms are ineffective or missing.
- Prioritise initiatives that can have a multiplier or catalytic effect as opposed to a one-off impact.

The main objective of the NSDC is the promotion of skill development in the country. Parallel to this is the 2015 Skill Mission launched by the Prime Minister with an aim to train at least 40 crore people by 2022 (MSDE, 2016b). Seven sub-missions support the Skill Mission: (a) Institutional Training, (b) Infrastructure, (c) Convergence, (d) Trainers, (e) Overseas

Employment, (f) Sustainable Livelihoods, and (g) Leveraging Public Infrastructure (MSDE, "National Skill Mission", 2018b). To meet this stated aim, the NSDC claims to offer services to a range of stakeholders including quality assurance, faculty training standards, curriculum development, and student placement mechanisms. The NSDC's focus on specific industries is managed by Sector Skill Councils (SSC). These councils are meant to be independent of government control, with a strong representation from the relevant industry (autonomous industry-led bodies).

The Skill India vision sits alongside a range of initiatives introduced to support youth in low-income communities. In the domain of educational services, the initiative links to Article 21-A: Right to Education for all children between 6-14 years of age, the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, and National Achievement Survey to improve and monitor learning outcomes. Skill India also links with the *Mahila Samakhya* which focuses on gender equity and aims at the increased participation of girls and women in the educational process. It also brings in the various schemes designed to ensure targeted interventions for vulnerable groups such as Quality Education in Madrasas and Infrastructure Development in minority institutes. Within the domain of labour and employment, the Skill India vision focuses on social welfare and security for the organised and unorganised workforce in the country. Of particular relevance is the National Policy on Skill Development (Ministry of Labour and Employment, "Mission", 2018) where there is recognition of the positive impact of (a) worker safety and health in the workplace on productivity and economic and social development, and (b) initiatives like self-certification and reduced bureaucracy on improving compliance to industry rules and the ease of doing business. Also relevant to the interpretation of the NSDC are the access and equity orientation of labour and employment schemes captured in the *Aam Admi Beema Yojana* which provides social security to workers of unrecognised sectors, the elimination of child labour and rehabilitation of children exiting the

workplace (e.g., the National Child Labour Project), and the welfare and rights of women labourers in the Grant-in-Aid Women Labour scheme.

It is clear from the above description that the government of India's approach to skill development is complex and nuanced covering a wide range of institutional and administrative frameworks. The next section focuses on the intention of establishing qualification frameworks and standards.

The National Skills Qualifications Framework

A clear responsibility of each Sector Council is to establish easy-to-refer guidelines called the National Occupational Standards (NOS). The aim here is to set standards of performance that workers in that field are expected to achieve in their work, and the knowledge and skills they need to perform effectively and be consistent in meeting the standard. This objective is met through the description of a series of job roles compiled into a Qualification Pack (QP). The descriptions within the qualifications pack are expected to provide a well-articulated set of guidelines (a common framework) for development of both specific training curricula as well as examination and evaluation tools to monitor skill proficiency. Each qualification pack is organised in a series of levels of knowledge and skills. This competency-based organisation of skills is called the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF). The levels for the competencies range from 1 to 5, as Process, Professional Knowledge, Professional Skill, Core Skill, and Responsibility (MSDE, 2016c). Currently, over 2,000 Qualification Packs are listed across the current set of Sectors (NSDC, "Sector Skill Councils", 2017c).

Engaging with NSDC Resources: An Experiment

With the introduction of the NSDC an opportunity has become available to systematically collate and provide information related to vocational courses to

students. In an attempt to make this valuable information available to students through our career guidance interventions (Arulmani, 2010), we set out to obtain the list of courses that are available under the NSDC. This section is a report of our attempt to engage with the NSDC between September 2017 and February 2018.

As on 25th October, 2017, the NSDC website provided information on 2,132 courses as a list of Qualification Packs and National Occupational Standards. One of the biggest deterrents to further education for youth from low-income homes is the distance of the educational institution from the course-taker's residence (Basumatary, 2012). Hence, of particular interest to us was developing location-specific lists. This report focuses on locations around Bangalore. We began with a collation of NSDC courses in Bangalore city. It must be stated here that when we attempted this collation we found it difficult to arrive at a reliable list of courses since each time we came to the website the course list had changed. Either, previously identified courses were no longer seen or new course names had been uploaded.

The next step was to identify the training partners and training centres in Bangalore that offered these courses. The total number of training centres we were able to identify was 56. Next, we attempted to contact these centres to gain more information that we could include in our career information data base. Contact was attempted through telephone and email (these contact details were taken from the NSDC website). We were only able to establish contact with 12 of the identified centres. The remaining centres either had contact numbers that were not reachable or invalid. In many centres, the provided contact number was a personal contact number of ex-employees (field officers) who were currently not associated with those centres. The training providers with whom we were able to engage together offered 25 courses. Aligning courses to a career guidance format requires an analysis of course content to identify the aptitudes and interests they would draw upon. We were not very successful in this

attempt since the training providers were extremely reticent to provide course details. We also found it difficult to access the details of courses and training providers through the NSDC website. This was either because the training provider details had not been updated or we could not find these details on the website.

The overall impression we came away with was that listing of training providers and centres, contact information and course details were informal and unreliable. In some cases we also found that while a training provider listed 25 courses, not all of these were actually on offer. Instead, the “counselling” offered at these centres attempted to “convince” students to take the course that the centre currently provided.

Gaps in the System

As discussed above, the country has taken important steps toward skill development for Indian youth. Promotion of these skill development initiatives has also been creative with prominent advertising in the social media, print media, and television (including baggage tags in airports!). Celebrities have stepped forward to showcase the importance of skill development to the lay public. Skill India and Make in India are heard everywhere. There are conscious efforts to provide courses related to various skill sectors. And yet, there are challenges to be faced if these initiatives are to go beyond the rhetoric. We list a few:

- The rationale for the formation of Sector Skill Councils is not clear. A Skill Council is expected to be an overarching organisation under which an entire economic sector falls. In the case of the councils that have been formed in India, the range stretches from what seems to be over-specific (e.g., Beauty and Wellness) to broad categories (e.g., Health Care). The logic and rationale for the formation of the councils is not clear.
- People may be choosing courses based on their availability rather than personal suitability for a given course. As a

result, there could be dropouts from the courses or people may complete courses having only certificates in their hands which may not be truly reflective of skill development.

- Across the country a large number of training partners have been listed as providing courses to the public. While some of the centres are engaging with commitment and dedication, malpractice and poor service delivery are also evident. As per our experience reported earlier in the paper, sometimes centres shown in the records do not exist at the published address. If they have shut down or shifted after commencing, this information does not reflect on the NSDC website.
- The NSDC website appears to be attractive. But its functionality and navigability are convoluted. Even as professionals in the field, we found it difficult to track down specific information. It could be even more difficult for ordinary students and other users to find training providers. This difficulty becomes all the more acute since the information is presently available only in English.
- Another challenge is using the digital medium. The NSDC website keeps updating the courses and centres, but the large majority of people are unable to use this information to access the website due to low computer and digital literacy. Alternate ways of disseminating this information are needed. It was with this objective in mind that we set out to collate relevant information and pass it on to high school students through our career guidance workshops using the print medium.

In summary, while strong attempts have been made to establish institutional networks and qualification frameworks, the translation of these initiatives to actual skills development is well below what can be achieved.

Recommendations for the Way Forward

We make the following suggestions, viewing the various Skill India initiatives

from the career guidance perspective with specific reference to the career development of students from the government school sector.

- A difficulty encountered with almost all skill development initiatives (not only in India but in other countries as well) is the absence of a mechanism to help young people choose vocational training courses such that they are in alignment with their interests and aptitudes. Our suggestion, therefore, is to integrate tools and services into the NSDC system that would guide the young person toward courses based on a thorough understanding of his or her abilities and inclinations. Based on suitability, some courses may be prioritised over others for an individual. This could bring down the rate of course dropouts, foster better skill building, and achieve better vocational training outcomes.
- If the above point is to be addressed, it must be noted that of the different modalities available, internet-based tools (e.g., interest inventories and aptitude tests), without a definite guidance interface, could be prone to error. It is suggested, therefore, that the capacity for career guidance is built into the training provider system and faculty from these organisations are trained in the basic skills for career guidance and counselling.
- The NSDC could work toward offering course and training provider information in multilingual formats, to improve

access to information, both on its website as well as in other more accessible formats.

- It must be kept in mind that the digital literacy of the NSDC website's target user is quite low. Ease of navigation to find courses and training centres is essential.
- Our experience as described here reveals that training providers themselves could become a weak link in the process. If the NSDC is to succeed, monitoring of training providers is essential.
- The focus of course creation presently seems to have an emphasis on the job opportunities in the urban sector. Rather than encouraging youth to migrate from rural to urban areas, courses that would help them optimise the resources they do possess in and around their rural homes would be more culturally congruent. Therefore, creating courses that focus on jobs found within villages and in the rural hinterland with particular emphasis on the modernisation of traditional occupations could be considered.

Conclusion

This review and our attempt to engage with the system evokes deep concern about the integrity of the steps that have been taken by the NSDC. At the time of this writing, the implementation of ideas seems to suffer from a lack of depth and an informality of application that must be addressed with rigorous systematisation.

About the authors

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Appendix 1

Sector Skill Councils

Extracted from <https://www.nsdindia.org/sector-skill-councils-1> ; on: 27.03.2018

Sl. No.	Sector Skill Councils
1	Aerospace and Aviation Sector Skill Council
2	Agriculture Sector Council of India
3	Apparel Made-Ups & Home Furnishing Sector Skill Council
4	Automotive Skills Development Council
5	Beauty & Wellness Sector Skill Council
6	BFSI Sector Skill Council of India
7	Capital Goods Skill Council
8	Construction Skill Development Council of India
9	Domestic Workers Sector Skill Council
10	Electronics Sector Skills Council of India
11	Food Industry Capacity & Skill Initiative
12	Furniture & Fittings Skill Council
13	Gem & Jewellery Skill Council of India
14	Handicrafts and Carpet Sector Skill Council
15	Healthcare Sector Skill Council
16	Indian Iron and Steel Sector Skill Council
17	Indian Plumbing Skills Council
18	Infrastructure Equipment Skill Council
19	Instrumentation Automation Surveillance & Communication Sector Skill Council
20	IT-ITeS Sector Skill Council
21	Leather Sector Skill Council
22	Life Sciences Sector Skill Development Council
23	Logistics Sector Skill Council
24	Management & Entrepreneurship and Professional Skill Council (MEPSC)
25	Media & Entertainment Skill Council
26	Paints and Coatings Skill Council
27	Power Sector Skill Council
28	Retailers Association's Skill Council of India
29	Rubber Skill Development Council
30	Skill Council of Green Jobs
31	Skill Council for Mining Sector
32	Skill Council for Persons with Disability
33	Sports, Physical Education, Fitness & Leisure Skill Council
34	Strategic Manufacturing Sector Skill Council
35	Telecom Sector Skill Council
36	Textile Sector Skill Council
37	Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council