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Nurturing Sustainable Careers: How New India's NEP 2020 is Driving Employability Through Skills-Based Education

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ABSTRACT

As New India prepares to become a "developed" country by the year 2047, the strategies for managing one of the most populous economies in the world are undergoing steady and positive transformation. The country's new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has set the context for enhanced employability for the masses and sustainable careers, potentially transforming the youngest workforce in the world not only by equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and abilities that the workplace demands but also by providing opportunities for inclusive, sustainable, and trans-disciplinary employment. However, given that the NEP 2020 will not succeed as a standalone initiative, this study seeks to examine 1) the many factors that enable employability in a country like India, e.g., rich human capital, the grass-roots skill gap, and what it means to pursue sustainable careers, and 2) industry-academia partnerships, e.g., how the government, educational institutions, organizations, and individuals together serve as key driving factors impacting New India's global footprint. The paper reviews literature across these related domains and leads to a conceptual model that supports the nurturing of sustainable careers and their multifaceted nature.

INTRODUCTION

In 2018, India had a growing economy and a competitive labor market which made it necessary for the youth to remain employable. The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog, 2018) addressed this concern through its Strategy for New India@75 program. The government implemented a comprehensive evaluation of the country's education policy, which had been in place for thirty-four years, as part of its multifaceted strategy to attain these ambitious objectives. First formulated in 1986, the National Education Policy (NEP) was revised in 1992. NEP 2020 aims to fill several critical voids in the current education system through a more comprehensive approach, significantly greater financial investment, and an emphasis on overall enrollment. The NEP assumes a pivotal role in establishing a connection between industry demands and higher education; indeed, developing an "industry-fit" skilled workforce for the country is anticipated to be among the most efficacious of approaches. These "industry-fit" employable individuals will eventually compete in the job market to secure careers.

Careers, meanwhile, have always taken place within the social space. Researchers in the area of careers have long explored the friction between social and economic factors and examined its impact on careers (Bates, 1990; Hooley et al., 2017; Irving & Malik, 2004; Watts, 1996). Arthur et al. (1989) provide one of the most comprehensive definitions of a career, that is, as a "series of work experiences spread over the lifespan of the individual," indicating the all-encompassing role played by work in the lives of human beings. Careers constructed within the social context (Savickas, 2005) have served and will continue to serve the good of humankind for the foreseeable future. Individuals compete in the job market to ensure sustainable careers that provide security and economic rewards while also carrying implications

for the lifestyle choices that they make (Hooley et al., 2017). Sustainable careers as defined by Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015) constitute

> sequences of career experiences reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, thereby crossing several social spaces, characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual. (p. 7)

Our third dimension of employability in the current context of a rapidly transforming workplace is the result of multiple factors. Hillage and Pollard (1998) provide one of the earliest definitions of employability:

> The capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realise potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers and the context (e.g., personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work. (p. 12)

Subsequently, McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) identified employability as follows:

> The concept of employability has been deployed to describe the objectives of the economic strategies promoted by important supranational institutions and labour market policies at national, regional and local levels. (p. 197)

Put together, employability includes economic growth-related policies that create job opportunities for the masses, an altruistic industrial environment that supports the nurturing of requisite skills, educational institutions that are both inclusive and flexible, and individuals who consistently commit to acquiring new knowledge and skills to retain sustainable careers. A nexus between progressive government policies on skills development, future-focused educational institutions providing industry-aligned programs, and organizational partnerships that support the industry-readiness of human capital is a critical component that supports sustainable careers and employability.

This study aims to examine how sustainable careers can be mobilized through policy-level interventions in human capital-rich countries such as India. The goal is to examine the intended impact of the country's NEP 2020 policy, specifically concerning the enhancement of skills and thereby of employability and the nurturing of sustainable careers for its citizens.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

A literature review was conducted by undertaking document analysis that highlighted the intention and implications of the NEP 2020 and its contribution to the enhancement of employability as well as existing obstacles associated with its full-fledged execution. The role of key stakeholders, specifically educational organizations and institutions, was included in the review. The content review also explored how the NEP 2020 contributes to bridging the skills gap and establishes itself as a dominant force in supporting employability. Document analysis was directed at government policy documents and peer-reviewed articles published in journals. The search included a comprehensive review of the literature on the NEP, Skill India, the roles played by the various stakeholders in skill development, and an understanding of what sustainable careers are and how they are different from careers as they have been known in the past. Search terms used include "NEP 2020," "Skill India," and "New India@75 Strategy."

In addition, a systematic review of literature was carried out using Google Scholar to synthesize conceptual and empirical peer-reviewed articles. The search terms used were "skill enhancement by organisation," "corporate social responsibility, CSR, and skill development," "talent gap," "skill gap," "bridging the skill gap," "sustainable career," and "NEP India." A conceptual framework was then proposed elucidating how India's new NEP 2020 meets the human capital needs of a developing country that is set to grow very quickly over the next few years.

This research was subject to specific constraints due to its reliance on secondary data and the testimonies of academics who had played a pivotal role in the execution of NEP 2020.

PROPOSING A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE CAREERS THROUGH SKILL ENHANCEMENT

The findings from the review were synthesized to propose a Framework for Sustainable Careers through Skill Enhancement which was supported by the government's NEP 2020. The literary resources led to the identification of two critical stakeholders in addition to the government, namely, business entities and educational institutions who play a significant role in enabling the nurturing of sustainable careers. The framework explores the potential impact of the government's

NEP 2020 policy on skill enhancement, which supports the pursuit of sustainable careers for individuals as provided in Figure 1.0.

The Dimensions of Person, Context, and Time

Of specific relevance for this study is De Vos et al.'s (2020) conceptual model of three pivotal aspects for analyzing and investigating sustainable careers and various stakeholders across multiple contexts that evolve over time. They point out that despite increasing interest in examining sustainable careers (Suresh & Anusha, 2017), more conceptual clarity is needed on what constitutes a sustainable career and its key dimensions. Few empirical studies have examined sustainable careers in the Indian context (Nimmi & Zakkariya, 2021; Bhaskar et al., 2023). De Vos et al.'s (2020) process model is thus used to propose a dynamic framework for the Indian context.

- The *Person* dimension (person-centred approach) focuses on the skills development of the large employable youth workforce in the country.

- The *Context* dimension (systemic approach) focuses on the NEP 2020 and its provisions for skills development and on the collective partnerships of corporate organizations and institutions that promote skills development.

- The *Time* dimension (dynamic perspective) takes care of the present and future needs of the country's workforce.

The interplay of these three dimensions provides the ideal sustainable career ecosystem that benefits the citizens, the context for rapidly emerging economies like India which possesses one of the largest employable resources in the world, and the time required to fill the current skill gap and meet the future needs of a dynamic workplace.

Nurturing Sustainable Careers for the Person

The sustainability context for careers is derived explicitly from the 1972 United Nations Charter, which promotes a prudent utilization of resources in the present that does not compromise their long-term viability. Holling (2001) defines sustainability in the context of human systems as "creating opportunities and

fostering adaptive capabilities through the integration of learning and continuity." Sustainable development entails an ongoing cycle of innovation, conservation, and testing that involves opportunity maintenance. A sustainable career, according to Newman (2011), is one that safeguards and improves human resources instead of depleting them through the provision of opportunities for re-establishing and sustaining equilibrium. Alternatively stated, a sustainable career prioritizes the long term and is maintained by the individual through equal opportunities for creative growth and investment in opportunities for continuous learning. In accordance with Newman's definition, De Vos et al. (2016) define sustainable careers as strategies that guarantee employment throughout one's lifetime. According to Greenhaus and Kossek (2014), individuals who harmonize their professional endeavors and personal values are more inclined to pursue sustainable careers. In an increasingly complex and unpredictable career environment, where the individual, as the primary career actor, seeks a personally meaningful career as opposed to the socially shared view of career success, De Vos and Van der Heijden (2017) emphasize the criticality of a sustainable career. A sustainable career, according to the model proposed by Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015), encompasses multiple domains of life and emphasizes four fundamental concepts: time, social space, agency, and meaning.

Spurk, Hirschi, and Dries (2019) assert that individuals who were self-motivated achieved sustainable and prosperous careers over the course of a year. On the contrary, De Vos et al. (2020) and Van der Heijden et al. (2020) argue that the concept of sustainable careers is contingent upon both the circumstances and the individual and is therefore a joint obligation of employers and employees (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). According to Van der Heijden et al. (2020), sustainable careers in the future will persist in being individual-driven and occur within the context of the organization. There is an abundance of evidence in the field of career management that describes how people self-manage their careers by implementing a variety of strategies (Mihal et al., 1984; King, 2004; Savickas, 2005; Greenhaus et al., 2009). De Vos and Soens (2008) and Cortellazzo, Bonesso, Gerli, and Batista-Foguet (2020) discovered a positive correlation between employability and the characteristics of individuals who manage their own careers. The notion that self-managed careers contribute to increased levels of perceived employability has also been supported by research conducted in India (Khan & Sherwani, 2019; Kaur & Kaushik, 2020; Nimmi et.al, 2021). Another empirical study by Nimmi and Zakkariya (2021) used SEM to confirm the crucial role that self-managed career

attitudes play in perceived employability. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated through research that merely possessing domain-specific expertise does not ensure favorable career outcomes (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). An abundance of digital learning platforms, such as Coursera, Udemy, EdX, and others, facilitate learning as a flexible medium through which individuals can consistently acquire new information and competencies.

The literature also indicates that individuals are more likely to maintain productivity in their current and future positions if they are self-motivated to identify the new skills they may require; indeed, the careers of individuals are adversely affected by the rapid technological advancements that occur in the workplace today (Friedman, 2005). Establishing sustainable careers in the current context of a rapidly transforming workplace, particularly for developing nations, requires a consideration of three critical factors. In a rapidly changing, technology-driven environment, individuals will have several job opportunities; the entanglement of an individual in such contexts influences their career choices (Arur & Sharma, 2019). An educational environment characterized by adaptable and inclusive individuals who are perpetually dedicated to gaining new knowledge and skills, policies associated with economic growth that generate employment opportunities, and an industrial setting characterized by altruism and the provision of opportunities that foster the development of necessary skills—all these factors provide citizens with sustainable, lifelong careers. When seeking employment in a specific industry, one is confronted with very intricate career decisions; hence, one may also consider employability as a consequence of personal factors and choices.

> **Proposition 1 (P1): The nurturing of sustainable careers will help the youth respond with long-term impact to the changing demands of work.**

The Context for Skill Development and Skill Enhancement

According to a 2013 report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), a significant discrepancy exists between the educational qualifications of numerous young individuals and the demands of the labor market. This discrepancy creates numerous challenges for individuals seeking employment in developed and developing countries alike. The ILO (Brewer, 2013) adds that a proficient labor force constitutes an essential and fundamental component of holistic strategies for fostering economic expansion. Without a doubt, skills are a fundamental contributor

to economic prosperity and high productivity (Lerman, 2013). Ongoing skill development serves as a consistent intervention for fostering progress. This implies that skill acquisition is an ongoing process throughout an individual's professional trajectory, and is influenced by a range of factors including organizational and social interventions, formal education and training, and other relevant channels. Büth et al. (2017), in their examination of the evolving practices of the Indian manufacturing sector, discovered that graduates of conventional engineering fields possess less practical expertise. These graduates enter the workforce equipped with theoretical problem-solving abilities rather than practical problem-solving skills and lack practical exposure. According to ASSOCHAM (2016), industry in India considers merely seven percent of graduates from the country's top B-schools to be employable, on average. The India Skill Report of 2018 (Wheebox et al., 2018) states that only 45.6% of graduates coming out of higher educational institutions—excluding Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), National Institutes of Technology (NITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and other premier institutes of the country—are employable (Wheebox et al., 2018). According to the India Skill Report of 2023 (Wheebox et al., 2023), employability rose from 40.44% in 2017 to 50.30% in 2023, showing a consistent upward trend over time. An ILO (2023) report provides additional support for this claim, estimating that the unemployment rate in India, which stood at 6.5% in 2019 preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, has decreased to 4.8%.

Furthermore, the content offered in these courses is of questionable quality (Bhatnagar, 2021). Strickler et al. (2018) found that educational institutions struggle to keep pace with employers' demands for skills. Investigation has also revealed that B-school faculty members are constrained in their ability to implement novel courses in their curricula and that the connection between management academia and industry is deteriorating, both of which contribute to the widening skill gap (Bhatnagar, 2021). Clearly, greater industry-academia collaborations as outlined in the NEP 2020 will contribute to skill enhancement.

At present, the total count of students in India who have the privilege to engage in higher education amounts to a modest 4.14 crore (41.4 million). Higher education institutions (HEIs) currently have limitations in their ability to increase student enrollment due to constraints pertaining to infrastructure and capacity, and the feasibility of establishing additional HEIs in the near future may be questionable.

The NEP suggests the integration of digital technologies and the purposeful use of technology to augment the pedagogical and learning procedures in tertiary education and expand the outreach to a broader demographic via virtual classrooms. In addition, the NEP delineates a modification in the profile of educators by stipulating that only individuals possessing a four-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree and Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) certification shall be eligible for employment as educators.

The present emphasis on skill-based, transdisciplinary education places substantial expectations on educators within the existing system. There is, however, a prevailing sense of concern regarding the reliability and long-term viability of implementing extensive systemic modifications to the education system. The significance of the institution's leadership in the implementation of the NEP rollout will be of utmost importance in this regard.

> **Proposition 2a (P2a): The roles of institutional leadership and educators are critical for the successful implementation of the NEP and its vision. As early adopters of the NEP, their suggestions are important for nationwide proliferation of the NEP.**

An analysis of NEP 2020 would be inadequate without acknowledging the obstacles it presents. The implementation of the NEP 2020 and the development of the youth who are prepared for employment face specific challenges. Educational institutions, too, face a number of significant challenges. These encompass inadequate infrastructure and resources, a dearth of qualified instructors capable of imparting essential skill sets to pupils, demographic barriers such as the lack of access to high-quality education in remote and rural areas, and the imperative for effective collaboration among a variety of stakeholders. The policy must also tackle concerns related to inclusion, equity, and access regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location. As of October 2023, only nine of the 28 states in India have implemented the NEP 2020, with some of these states having implemented only a portion of the policy's provisions for HEIs. As of March 2021, the country was home to a total of 425 universities of which 375 are private, 54 are central universities, and 125 are state universities (Khatak et al., 2022). Clearly, this presents the education ministry with a challenge. The following is thus proposed:

> **Proposition 2b (P2b): An examination of the NEP 2020 implementation experiences of institutions can provide**

insights into degrees of achievement as well as the obstacles encountered. It will be advantageous to address concerns and expedite the implementation of the NEP nationwide.

Organization-sponsored skill development. Numerous learning and career advancement initiatives are being offered by organizations, demonstrating that "skilling has emerged as the new currency" (Suri, 2021). The existing body of literature provides ample support for skill development initiatives led by organisations. An anthology of executive and management development programs, job rotation, action learning initiatives, and on-the-job training are all examples of professional development methods that Conger and Fulmer (2004) deem to be essential. Organizations that embrace talent development and management with a long-term outlook implement performance management systems that support various learning initiatives, including self-directed learning, online or internet-based learning courses, mentoring and coaching, and feedback from multiple sources (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007).

Extensive research has also been conducted to define the organizational impact of skill enhancement and development initiatives and the benefits they provide. Work-based learning strategies and human resource interventions, according to a study by Khandekar and Sharma (2005), facilitate the growth of a sustainable competitive advantage. Additionally, individuals benefit from the competitive advantage. According to Potnuru et al. (2021), human resource development (HRD)-related training and career development practices were found to be strongly associated with greater organizational effectiveness and enhanced employee competencies. Organizations have also intensified their learning and development efforts by utilizing virtual platforms in response to the recent pandemic (Hiremath et al., 2021). Currently, corporations afford their staff members significantly expanded opportunities for education and proficiency enhancement via the implementation of technological advancements and electronic learning. Skill enhancement is now accessible to anyone, anywhere, and from the convenience of their own residence.

According to Mahapatra and Das (2020), the GOI Ministry of HRD in India has utilized widespread mobile internet usage across the country and the exponential growth of their internet penetration rate to promote e-learning. This increases access to high-quality education by narrowing the gap. Bordoloi et al. (2021) suggest that India can mitigate the difficulties associated with the "one size fits all" paradigm

through the implementation of online/blended learning that accommodates different age groups as well as by addressing concerns related to access to technology infrastructure, social, cultural, and economic diversity, and technology readiness. Throughout the duration of the crisis of the pandemic and beyond, India has enabled individuals who are thirsty for knowledge to access educational inputs, training, and skills.

It is evident that perceptions of employability are substantially impacted by an employability culture (Estiénne, 1997) that emphasizes individual development supported by the organization (Nimmi & Zakkariya, 2021). It enhances the transferability of employment skills across organizations (Menon, 2017), ensures the autonomy of individuals in career management (Konrad & Mangel, 2000), and facilitates the acquisition of a wide range of resources (Li, 2018; Wong et al., 2017). In light of this development and the ongoing digital disruptions that wreak havoc on a global scale, the subsequent research objective is suggested.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Skills Enhancement. Education and skills development are among the primary areas that receive corporate social responsibility (CSR) funding. Schedule VII, Section 135, of the Companies Act of 2013 (Ministry of Company Affairs, 2013) includes skill development as an eligible activity for CSR projects. According to analysis conducted by CSRBOX (2020) on the subject of CSR and skill development projects in India, a total of 328 organizations made contributions to skill development initiatives through CSR funding amounting to INR 1652.95 crore (Cr), approximately 7.35% of the overall CSR contribution throughout the period spanning 2018 to 2019. The contribution exhibits a wide range of diversity, originating from 32 distinct industrial sectors and allocated toward a total of 775 projects. A few noteworthy initiatives are included in this paper.

As per the latest CSRBOX report (2022), a total of 395 Crore INR was allocated by firms toward education and skills initiatives during the fiscal year 2021–2022. These firms include HDFC Bank Limited, Larsen & Toubro Ltd, HCL Technologies, Power Grid Corporation of India Limited, and Mahindra & Mahindra Limited.

Axis Bank Foundation (2021) has established skilling centers for youngsters in rural and peri-urban areas of India as part of its CSR skill initiatives programs. They offer educational programs in several vocational trades and sectors of industry.

The BRIDGE (Bosch's Response to India's Development and Growth through Employability Enhancement) skills program (Bosch, n.d.) addresses the increasing demand for a trained workforce in many sectors and is executed through BRIDGE centers located throughout India. Their programs address the specific needs of marginalized youth between the ages of 18 and 25 who have dropped out of school, commonly referred to as "NEET" (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) youth.

Earlier this year, Dr. Reddy's Foundation adopted the Livelihood Advancement Business School (LABS) model in making provisions for industry-validated "Core Employability Skills." They focus specifically on targeting young people, especially those with disabilities and within the age range of 18 to 30 (Dr. Reddy's Foundation, 2023).

The Tata Strive program (Tata Communications Limited, 2018) addresses the needs of marginalized adolescents by offering skill development opportunities targeting those from Alcoholic Anonymous communities and providing trade-specific training for various industries. More than 1,500 individuals have already undergone training in a wide array of fields. These include but are not limited to banking, financial services, insurance, customer relationship management, retail sales, call center services, Android application development, general duty assistance, electrician work, beauty therapy, solar technology, and automobile sales. Approximately 900 young individuals will get to engage in professional collaborations with esteemed corporations such as Olacabs, Tata Motors, Bajaj Finserv, Bandhan Bank, and Axis Bank.

The aforementioned instances demonstrate a noteworthy advancement toward fostering equitable economic growth and empowering individuals through skill-based education. To foster skill development projects and get financial support from business, corporations are asked to allocate a minimum of 25% of their CSR funding toward such endeavours. This allocation can be made either directly or through the utilization of the National Skill Development Fund. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has established a distinct entity known as the "CSR Cell" within the National Skill Development Corporation to streamline the involvement of corporations and foundations in supporting their goals through CSR and other financial resources. The CSR fund contribution made by firms listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange and National Stock Exchange amounted

to 1009.12 Cr, which represented the biggest contribution. This was followed by public sector undertakings which gave 564.99 Cr and the private sector which contributed 78.95 Cr.

CSR programs undertaken by private firms in the realm of skill development encompass several areas such as Skilling Infrastructure, Rural Livelihoods, Persons with Disability (PwD) Skilling, Women Empowerment, Digital Skilling, and Urban Livelihoods. In relation to the development of skills, implementing agencies hold the highest share at 78%, followed by CSR foundations at 14%, while government agencies are responsible for only 8% of the initiatives. Through the allocation of resources toward skill development programs as part of CSR initiatives, firms are significantly able to accomplish Sustainable Development Goal 4, specifically targets 4.3 and 4.4 which pertain to vocational education. In addition, this investment in skill development contributes to the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 8—objectives concerning the promotion of decent work and employment opportunities—by cultivating a proficient workforce.

> **Proposition 2c (P2c): Organization-led skill development initiatives enhance employability. An evaluation of the efficacy of skill enhancement initiatives will help determine the sustained measurable impact of such investments in nurturing sustainable careers.**

Future-Proofing the Workforce—The Time Dimension

The NEP 2020, along with the Skill India Mission, provides the ideal skill enhancement ecosystem that supports the pursuit of sustainable careers. However, the authors limited the scope of this study to the NEP 2020 alone. They identified the NEP as a government initiative that lays the groundwork for skill enhancement, starting with what takes place in schools and colleges. NEP 2020 is instrumental in bridging the gap between the needs of the labor market and the formal education and training systems. Shifting the emphasis of New India's educational imperatives from "knowledge-driven" to "skill-driven" is an unprecedented approach to policy. The NEP emphasizes the incorporation of skill development into the academic curriculum at every level, promoting the development of communication skills, vocational exposure, digital literacy, coding, and citizenship skills, among others, at the school level to foster the holistic growth of students.

The authors propose that the much-talked-about skill gap and employability are two sides of the same coin (Banerjee, 2014) and pose a global challenge not limited to developing economies alone. NEP 2020 promotes access to skills-based education as an on-going part of one's career and emphasizes on-going skills-based education and diplomas that empower individuals to keep learning and investing in education, "earning as you learn." Addressing talent gaps necessitates the provision of sustainable career opportunities for individuals, the fundamental unit of development, while employability addresses apprehensions surrounding talent gaps. The NEP 2020 envisions that a minimum of 50% of students will have been exposed to vocational training by the year 2025 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). In addition to encouraging the acquisition of application skills among students, the purpose of this policy is to improve vocational education through an emphasis on the development of technological awareness and realistic comprehension of curriculum theories.

Furthermore, a number of intervening factors that transpire over the course of an individual's employment guarantees sustainable careers and lifelong employability (De Vos et al., 2016). Individuals must participate in both organization-sponsored learning and development (L&D) programs and self-directed digitally enabled learning initiatives to maintain their relevance in the workplace (Hiremath et al., 2021). Sustained reskilling efforts and a dynamic emphasis on employability will be crucial in responding to rapid and disruptive technological and digital advancements. This also aids individuals in proactively managing career disruptions (Nair & Chatterjee, 2021) in the face of unparalleled situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, socioeconomic policies have directed CSR funds toward the promotion of skill development and the contribution of businesses toward employability and its associated advantages.

> **Proposition 3 (P3): The NEP 2020 advocates for Sustainable Development Goal 17, enabling partnerships with private and public business organizations, educational institutions, and international partnerships which ultimately facilitate the development of sustainable livelihoods.**

The authors' Framework for Sustainable Careers through Skill Enhancement synthesizes the various ramifications of the NEP for the general populace along with the responsibilities of key critical stakeholders who will ascertain its success. Most of the suggestions for research possess immediate implications for the field and can

be implemented without delay. This type of research has the potential to aid in the resolution of implementation challenges and lead to the development of strategies that yield more rapid and efficient results for the nurturing of sustainable careers, especially for rapidly developing countries such as India.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

The current study extends the understanding of employability as a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary construct, carrying implications for meeting the talent gap of industry as well as nurturing sustainable careers and sustainable work for individuals by prioritizing on-going education. It was undertaken with the intention of connecting New India's vision articulated through NEP 2020 as a critical cog in the wheel of India's economic growth and its consequences for organizations and individuals. Stakeholder collaboration by the government and organizations is critical for ensuring the availability of sustainable work and sustainable careers while addressing the skill gap the country is grappling with. The NEP 2020 targets inclusive growth at the grassroots level, which is a critical outcome in addressing the much-discussed skill gap that New India is experiencing. The framework suggests connections between domains which are most effectively described as *symbiotic* and *co-creative* in nature. These connections foster the envisioned future of New India as a talent powerhouse.

IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A few other propositions might need to be carried out once the NEP has been fully implemented to measure macro-level impact and effectiveness. Citizens, organizations, and the country's socioeconomic policies play a crucial role in ensuring that the ultimate objectives of employability, flexible work arrangements, and hiring practices are realised. Amid ongoing changes in the workplace and the emergence of novel work models and approaches, the objective of promoting employability becomes a collective pursuit that aligns with Sustainability Development Goal 8, which prioritizes inclusive economic growth and decent employment.

The effectiveness of the NEP 2020 will be compromised if it fails to fulfill its intended purpose, despite its extensive reach and influence on the lives of all citizens

(Govinda, 2020; Kumar, 2021). In addition to the propositions delineated in this paper, the following areas of deficiency have been recognized as obstacles to the intended results of the NEP 2020:

- At the outset, the notion of a sustainable career was regarded as an individual responsibility of the employee. However, this perception evolved over time to include the employer. Educational institutions have thus been empowered and mobilized by NEP 2020 to act as game-changing enablers. Academic establishments are now empowering students to select and subsequently obtain industry-relevant competencies that correspond to the difficulty level of their position. Yet establishing industry partnerships within academic institutions is difficult and restricted. Moreover, notwithstanding the difficulty in securing internships for graduate students, the NEP also requires undergraduates to complete internships. Already a nascent ecosystem, the NEP must foster considerably more collaboration between industry and academia to achieve its intended goals.

- The NEP 2020 offers India's youth a practical introduction to a unified interdisciplinary learning environment through the implementation of continuous education. Without a doubt, this can substantially enhance employability given that research indicates that universities should offer programs in a greater variety of transdisciplinary areas (Della Volpe & Esposito, 2020). Yet a significant challenge that exists is the lack of nationwide and expeditious implementation across all states. It is cause for concern that heads of state have met the NEP with a lackluster reception.

- The integration of industry forums into the student evaluation criteria at the conclusion of the program, coupled with the application-oriented curriculum, contributes to the program's credibility and practical evaluation of acquired knowledge and skills. This predicts a transformation that will have a greater influence on the educators than on the learners. Based on the personal experience of one of the authors of this paper, the greatest

obstacles to the implementation of the NEP are substantial shifts in mentality and/or skill set required on the part of the instructor and/or faculty. Those who are responsible for imparting education must engage in substantial unlearning and relearning to surmount opposition to "teaching fewer skills" and "fewer knowledge."

- Paradoxically, the political climate in India, which is a mixed democracy, is a game-changer. The dynamics undergo a transformation when the governing political party at the state level diverges from the ruling political party at the center. An illustration of this can be seen in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, where a political party previously affiliated with the Central Party vigorously supported the NEP and its implementation was advancing at a rapid rate. The recent state elections also witnessed a shift in the governing political party, which resulted in a diminished emphasis on the NEP 2020. As a consequence, educational institutions are confronted with uncertainties regarding the trajectory to be followed. The curriculum remains ambiguous and undefined, particularly with regard to non-STEM streams. The first cohort of NEP 2020 students will be graduating in June 2024 (for those pursuing a three-year degree), and those who enrolled in the four-year undergraduate program will by then have completed their inaugural year.

- The NEP 2020 was originally designed to grant educational institutions greater independence to implement necessary course corrections and ensure greater conformity with evolving market demands. Disparate modifications, on the other hand, will result in additional complexities for academic establishments. And as the Indian diaspora relocates effortlessly throughout the country's states for economic and personal reasons, achieving incomparable practices among educational institutions in different states will substantially exacerbate the situation. Unless the Center takes action, the future is undoubtedly uncertain (Govinda, 2020).

- Achieving sustainable careers is difficult for many. India, along with other large, diverse, and emerging countries, is founded upon the principle of inclusivity. An individual pursuing a single job or an appealing field of work could be considered unemployable for another job or field of work (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). In addition to identifying the right CSR initiatives, organizational support such as L&D might not have the intended impact unless uniformly and fairly implemented. The new NEP leverages this gap and enables reskilling in an entirely new area of work with ease. Indeed, it will prove interesting to understand how open organizations and individuals are to such shifts.

Any new policy takes time to yield the expected outcomes. The National Education Policy (NEP) needs a lot more academic, logistical, and financial support from everyone involved to be put into action successfully (Yenugu, 2022). The efficacy of implementing New India's NEP 2020 will ensure that all intended stakeholders benefit from it. As a result, the single most important metric for assessing the policy's impact is employability and the role it plays in ensuring that India's citizens have access to sustainable employment and careers. The paradigm of New India opens up avenues for significant growth, and as is the case with every shift brought about at a country or global level, the proof of the pudding can be established only when it has been consumed and yields the desired outcome.
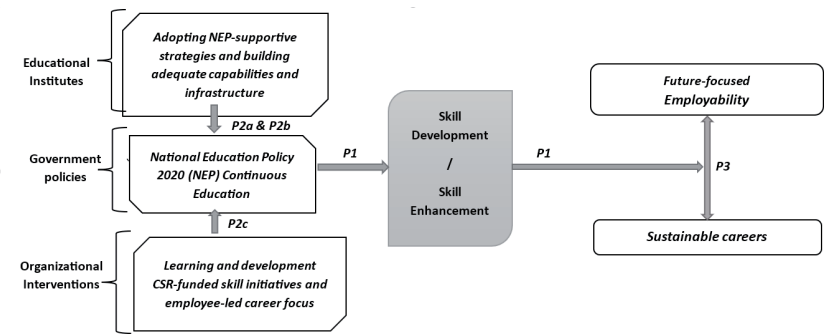

Figure 1: Framework for Sustainable Careers through Skill Enhancement

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