

English for Employability and Skill Development under NEP 2020: Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects for Higher Education in India

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Abstract

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a major shift in the Indian education system from conventional content-oriented learning towards holistic, multidisciplinary, competency-based and skill-oriented education. Within this transformation, English language proficiency assumes considerable importance because effective communication, professional interaction, digital literacy, workplace writing and interpersonal skills increasingly influence students' transition from higher education to employment. At the same time, NEP 2020 promotes multilingualism and recognizes the importance of Indian languages, thereby creating a need to conceptualize English not as a replacement for Indian languages but as an additional skill that can enhance educational and employment opportunities. This paper examines the role of English language education in promoting employability and skill development under NEP 2020, particularly in Indian higher education. The study is based primarily on secondary sources, including NEP 2020, UGC frameworks, government reports, higher-education statistics and recent employability research. The analysis indicates that English proficiency contributes to communication, confidence, professional mobility, digital participation and access to employment opportunities, but unequal access to quality English education remains a significant challenge. Recent experimental evidence from urban India also indicates that English-focused job training can improve English proficiency and employment-related outcomes. The paper argues for an integrated model in which English communication is linked with vocational education, digital skills, internships, entrepreneurship, critical thinking and workplace competencies. It concludes that NEP 2020 provides a strong policy foundation for transforming English education from a largely examination-oriented subject into a practical employability skill.

Keywords: *English Language; Employability; Skill Development; NEP 2020; Higher Education; Communication Skills; Vocational Education; India.*

Introduction

India's rapidly changing economic structure has created an increasing demand for graduates who possess not only disciplinary knowledge but also communication, digital, interpersonal, problem-solving and workplace skills. A university degree alone is increasingly insufficient to guarantee successful transition into employment. Employers

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expect graduates to communicate effectively, work in teams, participate in professional discussions, prepare reports and presentations, interact with customers and colleagues, and adapt to changing technological environments.

In this context, English occupies an important position in Indian higher education and employment. English is widely used in higher education, professional communication, information technology, business, administration, research, tourism, hospitality, banking and many other sectors. Proficiency in English can therefore function as an important component of employability, particularly where employment requires interaction across regions or with national and international organizations.

However, English education in India also has an important social and educational dimension. NEP 2020 does not advocate replacing Indian languages with English. Instead, it emphasizes multilingualism and encourages education through home, mother, local and regional languages wherever possible. The Policy simultaneously recognizes the importance of communication, discussion, debate and other soft skills within holistic higher education.

NEP 2020 envisages higher education that develops well-rounded individuals with intellectual, social, emotional and professional capacities. It specifically emphasizes communication, discussion and debate as important soft skills and calls for the integration of vocational and professional education with mainstream education.

This makes English language education particularly relevant when it is designed around functional communication and employability rather than memorization of grammar and literature alone.

Background of the Study

The Indian higher-education system has expanded considerably over the last decade. According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021–22, total higher-education enrolment reached approximately **4.33 crore students**, compared with 3.42 crore in 2014–15. The Gross Enrolment Ratio increased from 23.7% in 2014–15 to 28.4% in 2021–22. The survey also reported more than one crore pass-outs in 2021–22.

This expansion makes employability a major policy concern. As millions of students enter higher education, institutions need to ensure that graduates possess skills that allow them to participate effectively in the labour market.

The issue is particularly important for students from rural, economically disadvantaged and first-generation higher-education backgrounds. Many students have adequate subject knowledge but may lack confidence in speaking English, writing professional documents, participating in interviews or communicating in formal workplace environments.

Consequently, English language education needs to move beyond the traditional model of teaching grammar, vocabulary and literary texts in isolation. It needs to incorporate:

- Spoken English;
- Listening Skills;
- Professional Writing;
- Presentation Skills;
- Interview Skills;
- Group Discussion;
- Workplace Vocabulary;
- Digital Communication;
- Report Writing;
- Email Writing;
- Critical Thinking;
- Collaborative Communication; And

- Intercultural Communication.

Such an approach is consistent with the broader competency-based and multidisciplinary orientation of NEP 2020.

NEP 2020 and Skill Development

NEP 2020 seeks to remove rigid boundaries between academic education, vocational education and extracurricular learning. It proposes the integration of vocational education into mainstream education and emphasizes practical exposure, internships and skill development. The Policy originally set a target that by 2025 at least 50% of learners would have exposure to vocational education.

The Policy also emphasizes that higher education should develop students' communication, discussion, debate, teamwork, critical thinking and other 21st-century capabilities.

The UGC's Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes reflects this orientation by promoting multidisciplinary education, flexible learning and skill-oriented courses.

The National Credit Framework further attempts to establish connections between general education, vocational education, training and experiential learning. It is intended to facilitate credit accumulation, transfer and mobility across different forms of learning.

Therefore, English language learning can be positioned within the larger NEP framework as an **employability-enhancing skill** rather than merely an academic subject.

English and Employability

Employability refers to the knowledge, skills, attitudes and capabilities that enable an individual to obtain employment, perform effectively at work, adapt to changes and develop professionally.

English proficiency can contribute to employability through several mechanisms.

1. **Communication:** Effective communication is one of the most important workplace competencies. Graduates need to communicate with employers, customers, colleagues and other stakeholders.

English communication may involve:

- Speaking;
- Listening;
- Reading;
- Writing;
- Presentation;
- Negotiation; And
- Professional Interaction.

2. **Employment Interviews:** Recruitment processes frequently involve interviews, group discussions and presentations. Students who can express their ideas clearly and confidently may have an advantage in such situations.
3. **Workplace Writing:** Modern employment requires various forms of written communication:
 - Emails;
 - Reports;
 - Proposals;
 - Applications;

- Minutes;
- Business Correspondence;
- Project Documentation; And
- Digital Messages.

Consequently, professional writing should become an important component of English education.

4. **Digital Communication:** The expansion of digital workplaces has increased the importance of English in online communication. Students increasingly interact through email, collaborative platforms, professional networking sites, video conferences and digital learning environments.
5. **Access to Knowledge:** A substantial amount of academic, scientific, technological and professional information is available in English. English proficiency can therefore expand students' access to global knowledge and professional resources.

Review of Literature

- ❖ **NEP 2020:** The National Education Policy 2020 provides the central policy framework for this study. It advocates holistic and multidisciplinary education and identifies communication, discussion and debate among important soft skills for students. The Policy also promotes multilingualism and encourages the use of Indian languages while recognizing the need for high-quality language education. It calls for more experiential language learning, emphasizing conversation and interaction rather than an exclusive focus on literature, vocabulary and grammar.
- ❖ **UGC Curriculum Framework:** The UGC's Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes seeks to make higher education more flexible, multidisciplinary and student-centred. It supports skill-enhancement courses and broader competency development. This framework creates opportunities for integrating English communication with professional and vocational skills.
- ❖ **English and Employability Research:** Recent empirical research provides stronger evidence of the relationship between English training and employability. A 2025 study published in *Economic Development and Cultural Change* examined a randomized field experiment involving **1,260 low-income individuals in Delhi**. The study found that job training emphasizing English language skills substantially improved English proficiency, employability and estimated wages for regular jobs, while also improving employability for jobs specifically requiring English. The effects were reported across gender and social-class groups. This evidence is especially important because it moves the discussion beyond the assumption that English merely correlates with employment. It provides experimental evidence that targeted English-language training can contribute to employment-related outcomes.
- ❖ **Employability and Graduate Skills:** Mercer's *India's Graduate Skill Index 2025* reported an overall employability rate of **42.6% among Indian graduates who apply for jobs**, based on its assessment of more than one million students across over 2,700 campuses. The report also highlights soft skills, including communication, critical thinking and learning agility, as important employer requirements. The findings indicate the continuing gap between higher-education qualifications and workplace readiness.
- ❖ **English and Skills Development:** Research and policy work on English for skills development has emphasized the role of English in sectors such as healthcare, hospitality and construction. The British Council has also examined English as an employability skill within India's skills-development framework and highlighted the importance of standards and appropriate language training.

Research Gap

Existing discussions of NEP 2020 frequently focus on multilingualism, curriculum reform, vocational education, digital education and multidisciplinary learning separately. However, comparatively less attention has been given to the intersection of English language proficiency, employability and skill development under NEP 2020, especially

from the perspective of higher education. The present study attempts to address this gap by examining English as an integrated employability competency within the broader NEP framework.

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the role of English language proficiency in graduate employability.
2. To analyse the relevance of English education within NEP 2020.
3. To examine the relationship between English communication and workplace skills.
4. To identify challenges in developing English proficiency among higher-education students.
5. To examine opportunities for integrating English with vocational and skill education.
6. To suggest strategies for improving English-based employability training in higher education.
7. To propose a NEP-aligned framework for English language and skill development.

English as a Skill under NEP 2020

English can contribute to at least five dimensions of employability:

Dimension	English-related competency	Employment relevance
Communication	Speaking and listening	Workplace interaction
Professional writing	Emails, reports and applications	Office and administrative work
Presentation	Public speaking and presentation	Meetings and professional presentations
Digital communication	Online writing and interaction	Digital workplaces
Career development	Interviews and networking	Recruitment and professional mobility

The important policy implication is that English should be taught **through practical activities rather than exclusively through conventional examinations**.

English and Vocational Education

NEP 2020 seeks to integrate vocational education with mainstream education. It emphasizes exposure to vocational education, internships, practical learning and skill development.

English can strengthen this vocational orientation.

For example:

Healthcare

Students may require English for:

- Medical Terminology;
- Patient Communication;
- Documentation;
- Professional Correspondence.

Tourism and Hospitality

English is important for:

- Customer Interaction;
- Hotel Communication;

- Travel Services;
- Tourism Promotion.

Information Technology

English is widely used for:

- Programming Documentation;
- Technical Communication;
- Project Management;
- International Collaboration.

Banking and Finance

English skills are useful for:

- Customer Service;
- Documentation;
- Financial Correspondence;
- Professional Communication.

Retail and Services

English can support:

- Customer Interaction;
- Sales Communication;
- Product Explanation;
- Complaint Management.

Thus, English should be contextualized according to the employment sector rather than taught as a uniform subject for all students.

English, Digital Skills and Employability

Digital transformation has changed the nature of communication.

Today's graduates increasingly require the ability to:

- Participate In Video Conferences;
- Write Professional Emails;
- Prepare Digital Presentations;
- Communicate Through Collaborative Platforms;
- Create Professional Profiles;
- Prepare Digital Documents;
- Interact With Ai-Supported Tools; And
- Access International Information.

Therefore, English language education should be connected with **digital literacy**.

An NEP-aligned English course could include assignments such as:

1. Writing Professional Emails;
2. Preparing LinkedIn-Style Professional Profiles;
3. Creating Digital Presentations;
4. Participating In Online Interviews;
5. Preparing Video Presentations;
6. Writing Reports Using Digital Tools; And
7. Evaluating Information Obtained From Online Sources.

English and Soft Skills

English proficiency should not be treated as an isolated linguistic competence.

It can be integrated with:

- Critical Thinking;
- Creativity;
- Teamwork;
- Leadership;
- Problem-Solving;
- Negotiation;
- Emotional Intelligence;
- Presentation;
- Interpersonal Communication.

NEP 2020 explicitly emphasizes communication, discussion, debate and other soft skills within holistic higher education.

Thus, English classrooms can become spaces for developing broader employability competencies.

Empirical Evidence on English and Employability

Recent evidence strengthens the case for English-focused employability programmes.

A 2025 randomized field experiment in Delhi involving 1,260 low-income participants found that job training emphasizing English language skills increased English proficiency as well as employability and estimated wages for regular employment. It also improved employability in jobs where English was specifically required.

This evidence has several implications for Indian higher education:

- English training can produce measurable labour-market benefits.
- English should be included in employment-oriented skill programmes.
- Training should be practical and job-specific.
- English programmes should target disadvantaged learners rather than only students who already possess strong English skills.
- English development can complement rather than undermine multilingual education.

Higher Education and the Employability Challenge

1. India's higher-education expansion creates a large potential workforce. AISHE 2021–22 recorded approximately 4.33 crore students in higher education and more than one crore pass-outs in that year.
2. The scale of the graduate population makes employability-oriented curriculum reform particularly important.

3. Mercer's 2025 Graduate Skill Index reported that 42.6% of Indian graduates assessed as job applicants were overall employable and highlighted communication, critical thinking and learning agility as important soft-skill areas.
4. The evidence suggests that higher education needs to strengthen the transition from degree acquisition to workplace readiness.

Major Challenges

- ❖ **Unequal Access to English Education:** Students from urban and private-school backgrounds may have substantially greater exposure to English than students from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds.
- ❖ **Examination-Oriented Learning:** Traditional English courses often emphasize:
 - Grammar;
 - Written Examinations;
 - Memorization;
 - Prescribed Texts.
 These approaches may not adequately develop workplace communication.
- ❖ **Lack of Speaking Opportunities:** Students may understand English but hesitate to speak because of:
 - Fear Of Making Mistakes;
 - Lack Of Confidence;
 - Limited Classroom Interaction;
 - Inadequate Exposure.
- ❖ **Shortage of Specialized Teachers:** NEP 2020 itself recognizes the shortage of skilled language teachers and calls for improvements in language teaching, including more experiential approaches.
- ❖ **Digital Divide:** Technology-supported English learning requires:
 1. Devices;
 2. Internet Access;
 3. Digital Literacy;
 4. Appropriate Learning Platforms.
 These resources are not equally available.
- ❖ **English versus Multilingualism:** There is a potential misconception that promoting English necessarily means weakening Indian languages. NEP 2020 instead emphasizes multilingualism and encourages bilingual approaches. A balanced approach is therefore required.

Findings of the Study

The major findings are as follows:

1. **English is an important employability competency:** English proficiency can strengthen students' ability to communicate in professional and workplace environments.
2. **Communication is central to NEP 2020:** NEP 2020 identifies communication, discussion, debate and other soft skills as important components of holistic education.
3. **Practical English is more employment-relevant than examination-oriented English:** Students require functional communication skills, including speaking, listening, professional writing and presentation.
4. **English can strengthen vocational education:** English can be integrated into sector-specific vocational training in healthcare, tourism, hospitality, IT, banking, retail and other industries.
5. **Empirical evidence supports English-focused training:** The 2025 Delhi experimental study provides evidence that English-focused job training can improve employability-related outcomes.
6. **Skill gaps remain significant:** Mercer's 2025 findings indicate continuing employability gaps among Indian graduates and emphasize the importance of communication and other soft skills.

7. **Multilingualism and English can coexist:** English should be promoted as an additional employability and global-communication skill rather than as a replacement for Indian languages.
8. **Digital English is increasingly important:** English education needs to incorporate digital communication, online presentations, professional writing and technology-mediated learning.

Suggestions and Policy Recommendations

- a. **Introduce English for Employability Courses:** Higher-education institutions should introduce courses such as: **English for Employability and Professional Communication**. These could be offered as Ability Enhancement or Skill Enhancement Courses within NEP-aligned curricula.
- b. **Focus on Four Core Skills:** Training should develop:
 - Listening
 - Speaking
 - Reading
 - Writing

With greater emphasis on practical application.
- c. **Introduce Workplace English:** Courses should include:
 - ❖ Interview English;
 - ❖ Group Discussions;
 - ❖ Workplace Vocabulary;
 - ❖ Email Writing;
 - ❖ Report Writing;
 - ❖ Presentation Skills;
 - ❖ Professional Etiquette.
- d. **Sector-Specific English:** Institutions should design English courses according to local employment opportunities.

For example:

 - B.Com:** Business English
 - B.Sc.:** Scientific Communication
 - BBA:** Business and Corporate Communication
 - B.Voc.:** Workplace English
 - Tourism:** Tourism and Hospitality English
 - Computer Science:** Technical English
- e. **Establish Language Laboratories:** Language laboratories can provide opportunities for:
 - ❖ Pronunciation Practice;
 - ❖ Listening Exercises;
 - ❖ Simulated Interviews;
 - ❖ Presentations;
 - ❖ Digital Speaking Activities.
- f. **Promote Peer Learning:** Students can participate in:
 - ❖ English Clubs;
 - ❖ Debates;
 - ❖ Group Discussions;
 - ❖ Presentations;
 - ❖ Role Plays;
 - ❖ Public-Speaking Activities.

- g. **Integrate Internships:** Students should use English in authentic workplace environments during internships and apprenticeships.
- h. **Use Technology and AI Responsibly:** AI-supported tools can help students practise:
 - ❖ Pronunciation;
 - ❖ Vocabulary;
 - ❖ Grammar;
 - ❖ Writing;
 - ❖ Conversational English.

However, teachers should guide students in responsible and critical use of such technologies.
- i. **Strengthen Teacher Training:** English teachers should receive professional development in:
 - ❖ communicative language teaching;
 - ❖ digital pedagogy;
 - ❖ workplace English;
 - ❖ assessment;
 - ❖ blended learning;
 - ❖ inclusive language education.
- j. **Support Disadvantaged Students:** Special bridge courses should be offered to students who enter higher education with limited English exposure.

The objective should be **empowerment rather than exclusion**.

Proposed NEP-Aligned Model

A useful model for higher education can be represented as:



This model places English within the broader skill ecosystem rather than treating it as an isolated academic subject.

Suggested Curriculum Framework

Module	Major Components
Module I	Fundamentals of Communication
Module II	Spoken English and Listening
Module III	Professional Writing
Module IV	Presentation and Public Speaking
Module V	Group Discussion and Interview Skills
Module VI	Digital and Workplace Communication
Module VII	English for Specific Professions

Module VIII Internship and Project Communication

Assessment should include practical activities rather than only written examinations.

Suggested assessment pattern

Activity	Weight
Speaking	20%
Listening	15%
Professional Writing	20%
Presentation	15%
Group Discussion	10%
Interview/Role Play	10%
Project	10%

Policy Implications

The findings have important implications for policymakers and higher-education institutions.

1. English education should be repositioned as a **skill for empowerment and employability**.
2. English should be integrated with the broader objectives of NEP 2020 rather than being treated separately from vocational and professional education.
3. Multilingual education should remain central. English can coexist with regional languages and should function as an additional linguistic resource.
4. Employability programmes should be designed according to local labour-market needs.
5. Assessment systems should measure what students can **do with English**, not simply what they can remember about English.

Conclusion

NEP 2020 provides an important opportunity to transform English language education in Indian higher education. The Policy's emphasis on holistic education, communication skills, vocational education, multidisciplinary learning, experiential learning and employability creates a strong foundation for repositioning English as a practical professional competency. English proficiency can contribute to employability through communication, professional writing, interviews, presentations, digital interaction and access to global knowledge. However, English should not be promoted at the expense of India's linguistic diversity. NEP 2020's multilingual orientation provides a framework in which English and Indian languages can coexist and serve complementary educational and social purposes. The evidence reviewed in this study indicates that English-focused training can have positive employment-related outcomes. The 2025 experimental evidence from Delhi is particularly significant because it demonstrates measurable improvements in employability following English-oriented job training. The central challenge is therefore not whether English should be taught, but **how English should be taught**. An examination-oriented approach is insufficient for the contemporary labour market. Higher-education institutions should emphasize speaking, listening, professional writing, presentations, interviews, digital communication and sector-specific English. English for employability should consequently become an integral component of skill development under NEP 2020. When combined with vocational education, internships, digital skills, critical thinking, entrepreneurship and multidisciplinary learning, English can contribute significantly to creating a more confident, competent and employment-ready generation of Indian graduates.

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