UNIVERSITY - INDUSTRY SKILL MISMATCH – GS III MAINS

Q. Rising Indian unemployment is more or less due to the increasing industry-university skill mismatch. Discuss the factors leading to the skill gap and bring out the measures to reduce the same. (10 marks, 150 words)

News: *Is higher education out of touch with the skill requirements in the job market?*

What's in the news?

- Reports by private agencies states that fewer than half of India's graduates were employable in 2021.

Key takeaways:

- According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey, the unemployment rate among graduates is higher than in many other developing countries.
- Students who enrolled in college during the pandemic have now graduated and there are concerns over their employability and the quality of online education.

Key Findings of the PLFS Report:

- It has reduced to 3.2% in 2022-23, from 6.1% in 2017-18.
- Graduate degree unemployment rates has reduced to 13% in 2022-23 from 17% in 2017-18.
- Unemployment rate for young workers aged 18 to 29 with graduate degrees, has reduced to 27% in 2022-23 from 36% in 2017-18.
- The share of graduates in the labour force has risen to around 15% by 2022-23 from 5% in 1993-94.

Reasons for University - Industry Skill Mismatch:

1. Slow curriculum updates:

- Higher education institutions (HEIs) often have slow processes for updating curricula.
- This results in a lag between the emergence of new skills in the job market and their incorporation into academic programs.

2. Governance issues:

- As HEIs are affiliated with UGC or AICTE etc. they face challenges of over-centralisation, lack of autonomy and transparency.

3. Limited industry collaboration:

- Some higher education institutions may lack effective collaboration with industries. This can lead to a disconnect between academic content and the practical skills required in the workplace.

4. The degree-oriented education system:

- Focus on rote memorization and exams, which may not foster critical thinking, creativity, and skills.

5. Faculty skill gap:

- Faculty members may themselves lack up-to-date knowledge and skills relevant to rapidly changing industries, result in the transmission of outdated information and a lack of emphasis on cutting-edge technologies and practices.

6. Inadequate focus on research and innovation:

- Due to scarcity of funds, ill-equipped labs and weak linkage of Research, higher education and Industry.
- India's research and development (R&D) expenditure as a proportion of GDP is only 0.7% and in Korea is 4%.

Government Initiatives to Address Skill Mismatch:

1. Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC), 2018:

- For improving the research ecosystem of India's Higher Educational Institutions.

2. Education Quality Upgradation and Inclusion Program (EQUIP):

- To enhance access, inclusion, quality, excellence, and employability.

3. Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme of Government of India (TEQIP):

- To upscale and support ongoing efforts in improving the quality of technical education.

4. Institute of Eminence (IoE):

- To empower Higher Educational Institutions and to help them become world-class teaching and research institutions.

5. National Education Alliance for Technology (NEAT):

- To provide technology solutions using Artificial Intelligence for customized learning or e-content in niche areas having highly employable skills.

WAY FORWARD:

1. Regulation and Funding:

- Strengthen regulatory bodies to ensure quality standards in both public and private institutions.
- Increase public funding and promote private investment in higher education to improve infrastructure, faculty training, and resources.

2. Curriculum Reform:

- Revamp curricula to be more relevant to industry needs and equip students with practical skills. Emphasise critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills.

3. Faculty Development:

- Invest in ongoing faculty training and development programs to update skills, promote research and improve teaching methodologies.

4. Industry-academia collaboration:

- Create strong partnerships between universities and industries to co-design courses, conduct joint research, and provide internship opportunities.

5. Focus on STEM education:

- Increase investment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education to meet the demands of the growing knowledge economy.

6. Entrepreneurship and Innovation:

- Create programs and incubators to foster entrepreneurial spirit and support student startups in translating ideas into viable businesses.

7. Focus on Vocational Training:

- Strengthen vocational training institutes and offer diverse skill-oriented programs to equip students for employment in non-traditional sectors.

8. Improve R&D ecosystem:

- Increase public and private investment in research and development, encourage collaboration between universities and research institutions, and focus on translational research for practical applications.

9. Effective policy implementation:

- Ensure clear and consistent implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) with adequate funding and resources.

10. Multi stakeholder collaboration:

- Involve government, educators, employers, students, and civil society in policy formulation and implementation.

11. Continuous monitoring and evaluation:

- Regularly monitor progress, evaluate policy effectiveness, and adapt approaches as needed.

By implementing these solutions, India can create a higher education system that is accessible, relevant, and prepares graduates for success in the globalised world. Thus, a complete revamp is needed to meet the present demand and address the future challenge that Higher education is about to face.