



MICRO-CREDENTIALS IN HIGHER EDUCATION – GS II MAINS

Q. Micro-credentials are emerging as a disruptive way of bridging this gap to acquire ‘just-in-time’ modern skills and competencies. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Micro-credentials, the next chapter in higher education*

What's in the news?

- Higher education institutes (HEIs) in India must play a much more active role in ensuring that students become employable by connecting them with the careers and job opportunities of tomorrow. This is because there is a gap between the knowledge that students acquire in HEIs and the knowledge they must have in order to become employable.

Key takeaways:

- Micro-credentials are emerging as a disruptive way of **bridging this gap to acquire ‘just-in-time’ modern skills and competencies.**

Micro-credentials:

- Micro-credentials are **concise, specialized learning programs, distinct from traditional multi-year degrees.**
- They are available in various formats – online, in-person or hybrid – offering flexibility unlike traditional education’s classroom-centric approach.
- These programs target a wide range of learners, from beginners to professionals, focusing on specific skill sets.

Micro-credentials Different from Traditional Education:

- While traditional education measures progress through time-based credits, micro-credentials assign credits based on acquired competencies, integrating seamlessly into established education systems.

Validity:

- Issued a **digital badge, certificate, or credits** as proof of completion.

Examples of Micro-credentials:

- Globally, entities like Google and Microsoft, along with universities, offer micro-credentials.
- Digital marketing certificate from Google or Facebook, Data science course from NASSCOM or IBM, FinTech program from EY or Deloitte, Java programming course from Coursera, Short term TEFL course for English teaching, Excel modelling course from BSE Institute, etc.



Need for Micro-credentials:

1. Alignment with National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:

- India's focus on skilled education under the NEP 2020 complements the demand for micro-credentials.
- This policy emphasizes equipping students with practical skills from school to higher education levels.

2. National Credit Framework (NCrF) Integration:

- Micro-credentials are incorporated within the NCrF, standardizing their learning outcomes and credits in line with traditional education.

3. Academic Bank of Credits (ABC):

- Learners can deposit and accumulate micro-credential credits in the ABC, like traditional credit systems, allowing future educational or professional use.

4. Market Demand and Employability:

- With employers seeking skilled young employees, micro-credentials are increasingly seen as a valuable addition to standard education, enhancing job readiness.

5. Institution-Industry Collaboration:

- Indian educational institutions are encouraged to develop micro-credentials in partnership with industries, aligning education with current job market needs.

6. Reduce skill gap:

- It offers a targeted and efficient way to bridge the significant gap between the skills acquired through traditional higher education and the skills demanded by the job market by providing relevant, up-to-date skills that align with industry needs.

7. Adaptability:

- Micro credentials allow individuals to acquire specific skills quickly, enabling them to adapt to evolving job requirements and stay competitive in the workforce.
- They are offered in online, physical, or hybrid modes at various levels, such as beginning, intermediate, or advanced.

8. Simplify course:

- They can be described as condensed, competency-based certifications which involve smaller learning modules delivered over shorter periods than traditional education.

9. Compatibility:

- The credit in micro-credentials is based on hours spent in achieving a specific skill or competency hence they are compatible with those in conventional higher education and can be widely accepted and recognized.

10. Lifelong learning:

- They are well suited for working professionals and individuals who may not have the time or resources to commit to lengthy degree programs.

11. Diverse learning paths:

- It acknowledges that learning happens through various means, allowing learners to gain recognition for specific competencies acquired outside of traditional academic settings.



12. Upskilling:

- It encourages the culture of continuous learning and upskilling, fostering the development of a workforce that can readily adapt to changes in the job market.

13. Enhance employability:

- It provides a tangible way for individuals to demonstrate their competencies to potential employers, enhancing their employability.

14. Integrate with National Credit Framework (NCrF):

- Micro credentials can be integrated into this framework which provides a structured framework for learning outcomes and credits, allowing learners to accumulate credits that contribute to their overall educational profile.

15. Global recognition:

- Offering and earning micro credentials in India can facilitate global recognition of skills, contributing to the mobility and competitiveness of Indian professionals on the international stage.

Challenges With Micro Credentials:

1. Recognition:

- There is still limited awareness and formal recognition of micro credentials by many Indian employers and educational institutions. Their value is still to be established.

2. Quality Assurance:

- There are no clear regulations or benchmarks to ensure quality and consistency across different micro credential providers. Credibility is a concern.

3. Integration with Formal Degrees:

- Mapping micro credentials to credits in mainstream degree programs under the National Credit Framework is still at an early stage.

4. Accessibility:

- Issues like digital divide, affordability of courses, and eligibility criteria can limit access to online micro credentials, especially for disadvantaged groups.

5. Motivation for Providers:

- There are limited financial incentives for Indian universities and colleges to develop micro credential programs compared to their mainstream offerings.

6. Mindset Barriers:

- Traditional mindsets that favour formal degrees over skills programs or continued learning. Both students and institutions prefer multi-year degrees.

Indian higher education institutes must serve as agents of transformation and consider introducing micro credentials a vital element of their strategic institutional objectives, which requires regulators and institutes to must work towards harmonising micro credentials with existing academic programmes by coming up with clear validation metrics.