



Curriculum Design and Development: The Essentiality of Aligning with NSQF

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Abstract

For a long time Curriculum Design and Development in Indian academic foray remained as an isolated effort of clubbing together related elements of knowledge, domain-wise, leaving little scope for its horizontal expansion for holistic integration of the core and ancillary elements of the domain and vertical expansion in terms of levels of professional maturity leading to conferring qualifications of corresponding levels. Contrary to this conventional practice, the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) organizes qualifications according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude. These levels are defined in terms of learning outcomes which a learner must possess regardless of whether they are acquired through formal, non-formal or informal learning. NSQF is a nationally integrated education and competency based skill framework that will provide for multiple pathways, horizontal as well as vertical, across education subsystems and training sector. This will enable a person to acquire desired competency levels, transit to the job market and at an opportune time, return for acquiring additional skills to further their competencies in a multi-entry-multi-exit mode

Keywords: higher education, Indian reality, knowledge economy

NSQF for Competency Development and Equity Enhancement:

India, having been heading for a knowledge economy, with human capital as its prime growth engine, has been equally poised for its attainment through its stated vision of 'expansion, equity and excellence' in higher education. While there are very many financial, structural and institutional constraints in the attainment of the above three lofty goals, the resolve and action by the progressive minded governments, institutions and even individuals has been quite gratifying by

unfurling ample opportunities to move forward in this regard. Going by the Indian reality, an all-embracing inclusive approach, in an innovative model of NSQF, wherein learners seeking knowledge and careers in professional domains can be offered learner-centric, flexible and modular courses, where one can plan and adopt a vertical progression in phases that suits to one's own socio-economic conditions and personal compulsions. Through multi-entry- multi-exit framework that is possible by adopting NSQF, it would be possible to address problems of stagnation and wastage in higher



education in its most versatile manner while enlarging access and equity. The presentation is structured around the Indian reality, need for innovation and aligning with NSQF for multi-entry multi-exit framework, which is being illustrated hereunder by taking Social Work as a model for innovation that ensures expansion and equity in higher education in India.

The Indian Reality:

To understand the scenario of higher education in India, with its inherent strengths as well the endemic weaknesses, the report on "Higher Education in India: Twelfth Five Year Plan and beyond", astutely summed up by Ernst & Young in the FICCI Higher Education Summit 2012, an initiative in association with Planning Commission, is believed as one of the authentic sources. The report says that India has one of the largest higher education systems in the world, with 25.9 million students enrolled in more than 45,000 degree and diploma institutions in the country. It has witnessed particularly high growth in the last decade, with enrolment of students increasing at a Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 10.8% and institutions at a CAGR of 9%. The private sector has played an instrumental role in this growth, with private institutions now accounting for 64% of the total number of institutions and 59% of enrolment in the country, as compared to 43% and 33%, respectively, a decade ago. The Government has also given the required thrust to the sector in its Five Year Plans. During the Eleventh Plan period (2007–2012), India achieved a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 17.9%, up from 12.3% at the beginning of the Plan period, thus turning the

phenomenon of higher education in the country from class orientation to mass orientation, the threshold point of GER being 15% to be qualified as mass oriented. However the GER achieved thus far has been quite low in comparison with its Asian allies.

Various legislative actions were also taken during this period, including the introduction of the Higher Education and Research Bill, the Educational Tribunal Bill and the Foreign Educational Institutions Bill, to enhance transparency and quality in the sector. However, in spite of the significant progress made during the past few years, India's higher education sector is still plagued with several challenges, e.g., its relatively low GER, inequitable access to higher education by community, gender and geography, and lack of high-quality research and education institutions, resulting in sub-optimal outcomes. The Twelfth Plan recognizes these challenges and proposes several initiatives around six focus areas to address them. They are:

- Expansion – augmenting capacity in existing institutions
- Equity- creating targeted schemes for backward and minority communities
- Excellence - building excellence through research and innovation, faculty development, and internationalization
- Governance - enhancing institutional autonomy and transparency
- Funding – increasing public and private funding and linking them to outcomes



- Implementation and monitoring–improving co-ordination across ministries and agencies

Further the report notes that going forward in a manner that is desired would be possible with full appreciation of looking at the quality imperative more comprehensively by institutions and in line with their orientation: research-focused, teaching-focused, and vocational-focused. India's higher education system can be expected to be better aligned to industry and global practices, and be more transparent and inclusive by the end of Twelfth Plan period, provided the Government is able to create an enabling regulatory environment and put in place robust implementation, monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms in the sector of Higher Education.

JitendraKumar at. al. juxtaposes the context of globalization and the higher education scenario and concludes that globalization has redefined the constituents and drivers of economic progress over last two decades. The traditional contributors of economic development and economic power such as material resources and production capabilities have been replaced by knowledge and information. Globalization has resulted in significant changes in the knowledge economy and ushered new conditions for the provision of higher education to cater the skill requirement all across the globe. Higher educational services have emerged over the last few years as a major economic sector for trade worth several billion dollars. The key elements of globalisation include the knowledge society, information and communication technologies, the market economy, trade linearization and changes in governance

structures. These elements of globalization have impacted significantly the education sector in general and higher education in particular.

Inline of agreement with the report on Higher Education in India, Jitendra Kumar at. al. too points out that although higher education has expanded several times since independence, with the government initiative for the planned development of higher education in the country and establishment of University Grants Commission has transformed the elitist systems of education favouring the rich and higher class to a more democratic and mass based system, with around 40 percent of enrolment now coming from lower socio-economic strata, and women comprising of approximately 35 percent, however issues of access, equity and quality still continue to be the areas of concern.

Out of six focus areas of the report on Higher Education in India and three focus areas of Jitendra Kumar at.al. observations, two areas namely 'expansion' and 'equity' are taken up for further discussion in this presentation with innovation and inclusiveness as an undercurrent to improve expansion and equity in higher education in India. The inclusiveness that is being propounded here can address the challenges of unequal access to higher education based on the denominations of community and gender in particular.

The critical areas of 'expansion' are augmenting capacity in existing institutions, availability of suitable number of institutions across regions, allowing 'for profit entities', infusion of capital, development of knowledge clusters, skill based courses, access to accurate and updated information on



Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) and courses, fewer admission tests and increased financial aid to students. With respect to 'equity', the critical areas are creating equal opportunity for all sections of society to participate in higher education, by breaking the interstate disparity, urban rural divide, differences across communities and gender disparity, the targeted schemes for backward and minority communities, including women and revamping and integration of schemes targeted at under-served areas and vulnerable and deprived communities.

Need for Innovation: Aligning with National Skill Qualification Framework

To address the critical areas of expansion and equity, what is necessary is an innovation that fosters inclusiveness at its best, breaking the conventional norms of entry and exit and reasonably prolonged tenures of education leading to the award of graduate and post-graduate degrees. Under the conventional system the institutions offer courses with a single entry and exit for 3 years for undergraduate and 2 years for postgraduate programs. While this is limiting access and equity in its true sense, a multi-entry multi-exit model would definitely enhance both expansion and equity in higher education by

aligning the curriculum design and development as per NSQF. Let us now see how this works.

In the multi-entry multi-exit model, the intake is supposed to be through multiple channels-the formal, informal and non-formal. This itself is a mechanism of augmenting the capacity in the existing institutions, because of the multiple channels. These channels unfurl opportunities to those persons, who are stagnated at different levels, most often due to social and economic reasons, which are happening more in the case of underprivileged and vulnerable groups. Thus the system ensures more inclusive expansion and access to the underprivileged sections. In this model every year is terminal and the academic progression is in a modular manner.

Schema:

Unlike the conventional systems, the NSQF model with multi-entry multi-exit system opens the unique opportunity of earning certification to the extent of completion of the tenure such as one year, two years etc. Thus the candidates with successful completion of the course and clearing of the examinations would secure:

Tenure of Learning	Level of Certification	Level under NSQF
At the end of First Year	Certificate	3
At the end of Second Year	Diploma	4
At the end of Third Year	Degree	5
At the end of Fourth Year	Post-graduate Diploma	6
At the end of Fifth Year	Masters Degree	7



Let us now see how this model facilitates competency development and equity enhancement. NSQF focuses on expected learning outcomes that are clearly defined in terms of skill sets. More over the framework encourages work-integrated training (WiT). That means essentially the learner has to work in an entity that provides direct work experience and improves the skill knowledge for a specified duration of time. That entity is generally termed as Skill Knowledge Provider (SKP). In this system there is a concurrent reinforcement of knowledge gained from the academic institution with that of the practical experiences from SKPs leading to competency development.

Since equity is basically focusing on mainstreaming the disadvantaged groups into higher education, there should be a mechanism that ensures this mainstreaming. Under the conventional system a person planning for a degree course should be prepared for three years of investment of resources, time and effort. For the under privileged this is sometimes a deterrent and hence persons opt out from the realm of higher education. Particularly in minority communities and women of low income groups, surviving for three year in the educational stream is a challenge of so many sorts. Mainly married women, expectant women and lactating women most often discontinue the studies leading to gender related acute stagnation and wastage. The absence of any institutional mechanism of restoring their coming back at their own convenience has been a major reason in vitiating equity and access. The available data on stagnation and wastage indicate that the problem is more with the underprivileged. There can be umpteen reasons for the

discontinuation of studies from the underprivileged groups. In which case, the effort of the persons that went unto that stage is yielding no fruits in the case of the existing conventional single entry single exit system.

In multi-entry multi-exit model, designed as per NSQF, with the element of lateral entry at any point of time, persons have choices and are at liberty to choose their tenure of course. In the unfortunate event of withdrawing from the stream, of course not permanently, because in the case of underprivileged groups any small calamity in the family may trigger a whole series of consequences, sometimes compelling the person to join the family chores immediately, the person can earn a proportionate certification from the institutions and that enhances one's livelihood options. Persons with limited means in the immediate future can bravely enroll into a suitable level, yet has a guarantee for educational progression because of lateral entry at one's own choice. This induces faith in low income groups to embrace higher education with love and confidence, because of the flexibility in the completion of the course.

Moreover by keeping more skill orientation and ensuring employability at all levels of the academic program, through appropriate workforce planning and effective lobbying with state and central governments, this model serves the purpose of higher education more aptly and helps us heading the knowledge economy.

The Multi-Entry Multi-Exit Framework for Social Work Course:

Let us now try to understand the multi-entry multi-exit framework for a



professional course like Social Work in a indicative options/outcomes.
 matrix form with focal points and

Focal Points	Indicative Options/ Outcomes
Title of the Course	Five-Year Integrated Social Work (Multi-entry Multi-exit Mode)
Proposed Post Graduate Degree / P.G. Diploma / Degree / Diploma / Certificate to be introduced with duration of the course	Five-year Integrated Social Work Certificate at the end of First Year Diploma at the end of Second Year Degree at the end of Third Year P.G. Diploma at the end of Fourth Year MSW at the end of Fifth Year
Number of the students expected to join for the course	26 Students through Direct Admission Test + 10 Students through Lateral Entry Direct Entry through Common Test Lateral entry & re-entry for Internal Candidates at corresponding levels & on the formula of equivalence for External Candidates. This ensures the avoidance of multiple entrance tests as mandated by the report on higher education
Whether there will be any sponsored candidates from the industry, agency / organization?	Yes. Because the mechanism of lateral entry ensures sponsored candidates from industry, NGOs and Government as well.
Objectives and goals to be achieved through this model	The main objective of the model is competency development through work integrated training and equity enhancement by flexible mechanism of entry and exit. The Model is purely modular and terminal at the end of every year. Persons opting out from the Model for obvious reasons will be awarded Certificate in Social Work at the end of First Year, Diploma in Social Work at the end of Second Year, Degree in Social Work at the end of Third Year, Post-Graduate Diploma in Social Work at the end of Fourth Year and Master of Social Work at the end of Fifth Year. The rationale for such a structure is the availability of ample career opportunities at every level. Moreover, the model having the nature of multi-entry multi-exit character contributes for avoiding stagnation and wastage in higher education as there is scope for getting some certification at one level below at one is temporarily stagnated. The re-entry provision



	<p>ensures possible continuity in future and contributes for vertical progress, which is otherwise not available in the conventional system.</p> <p>One can opt out and come in at the corresponding level, at any point of time, and thus the Model contributes for the inclusivity in higher education.</p> <p>This Model provides scope for development of human resources spanning from paraprofessionals to advanced professionals across the human service organizations and thus contributes to improve their qualifications and skill sets, encourages continuous professional development and life-long learning.</p> <p>Workforce from GOs, NGOs, and Corporate Organizations can avail this as a mode of vertical advancement in vocation and careers.</p> <p>Having scope to receive persons with field experience, the model offers versatile learning in a two way process-the learner sometimes being the teacher, sharing lived experiences.</p>
Where lies the innovation?	Indian higher education of the contemporary times is rarely giving flexibility of the nature that is indicated in the objectives above. Scope for lateral entry and re-entry is a great innovation leading to more inclusivity in higher education to impact the lives of the underprivileged by unfurling opportunities for life and livelihoods.
Whether the model belongs to emerging or hi-tech areas or in the areas of national and global priorities?	The Model is part of an emerging ideology in higher education aiming to enlarge expansion and equity apart from improvement of employability of the learners.
Possible themes which can be taken up for research	Focuses on Service Delivery aspect of Human Service Professions.
Practical usefulness of the new model	Caters to the diverse needs of Human resources across the whole spectrum and of GOs, NGOs and Corporate Organizations.
Whether the proposed model is problem specific?	Problem specific to cater to the gap in human resource in social sector
Major aims of the model	Bringing innovation and excellence in teaching and research. The innovation is lateral entry at every level and prevention of stagnation by conferring certification at appropriate level. The teaching is combined with field experience and experts from field also have a major role in



	teaching-learning process and action research. Promotes pure research as well. Having focused on field action, the model unfurls ample scope for applied/action/sponsored research.
Whether the model offers solution to the local/regional/global problems by training of the required human resources?	Yes! The model gives solutions to the local and regional requirements of human resources operate governmental, nongovernmental and corporate initiatives of welfare and development programs.
Whether the model generates possible employment opportunities for the students in the area?	Social Work itself is having lot of employment potential in the light of huge welfare and developmental programs to ensure human wellbeing and the model having thrust on field action and collaborations with implementing agencies of programs of welfare and development would have substantial employment opportunities.
Whether serves industry, Govt./ other organizations which are possible users or are sponsoring agencies for models etc. and to mobilize industry / other organizations to know their requirements	Precisely the interface with user community is the lifeline of this innovation and appropriate live linkages would be established for win-win relationships between University and user communities.
Whether solves problems in ecological / environmental / atmospheric and related aspects?	Ecological Social Work as a domain of Social Work Education is working for the protection and promotion of ecological capital. Collaborations with civil society organizations are a priority in the organization of these models.
Whether serves Societal education, research and teaching for popularization and application of the know - how, technology output?	In fact the above focus is the fulcrum of Social Work Education at all levels.
Whether monitors, abatement of and giving a solution to the hazardous problems, natural calamity disasters/ flood?	This is part of the course content and the regular practice is to be engaged both in disaster preparedness and response for relief, restoration and rehabilitation of disaster victims.
Whether there is any scope for institutional collaborations ?	UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, FAO, CII, FICCI, NACO, SACS, Planning Commission, Governmental Departments at Central and State level, NGOs and Cos. etc.
What is the creative part of the model?	Live and sustainable interface with user community and visibility of the Department of Social Work through social activism and institutional social responsibility through



	outreach work apart from fostering inclusion through multi-entry multi-exit mode.
Whether the course is meeting global requirements in hi-tech, emerging, thrust areas or it is a proposal to solve some issues or problems of national priority?	Yes, by bridging the gap in quality human resource at global and national level in social sector.
How is it going to influence research and teaching?	Social Work's integral domains are teaching, practice and research and they are not separate but go together correspondingly. The very mandate of the Department to adhere to this predisposition fosters evidence based practice and practice based research that impinges upon creative teaching.
One line statement on the relevance and usefulness of the Model	The Course caters to the diverse needs of the user communities, offers scope for lateral entry, continuous professional development and life-time learning and in the process enhances expansion and equity in higher education in the country.

Based on this model most of the professional courses can be reoriented into this multi-entry multi-exit mode which not only addresses expansion and equity in higher education, but also improves the employability of the learners by bridging the skill gap and lead us to knowledge economy in its most impeccable manner.

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