



# Education Policy and Employment in India: Historical Perspectives from Education Commissions

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the significance attributed to employment in education planning and policy in India. It explores the relationship between educational planning and its alignment with employment outcomes. The study undertakes a historical policy analysis of major commission reports starting with The Despatch of 1854, on “General Education in India” up to the “National Education Policy (NEP)2020” to assess their implications on employability. This study integrated multiple official data sources on enrolment, institutional density, pass-out rates across secondary, higher secondary, and higher education and analysed transition to employment in relation to macroeconomic indicators of Worker Participation Rate, Labour Force Participation Rate and Unemployment Rate. The findings reveal that during the indirect rule by East India Company, the aim of education was not directed towards employment in general. Under the direct rule of the British, primarily the aim was confined to selection of manpower to the service of the British. Gradually, preparatory domains of employment such as vocational and technical education were advocated as reflected in the reports. Furthermore, in the post-Independence period, a gradual evolution of linkage between the two can be observed through the reports and recommendations of many commissions. Economic progress and employment have recently received explicit attention in National Education Policy, (NEP)2020. The study highlights the persistent gap between educational outputs and labour market needs.

**Keywords**-Education commissions reports, Vocational and Technical Education, National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Educational certification outcomes, Educational transitions, Macroeconomic indicators, Employment outcomes

## INTRODUCTION

Work is integral to human nature and is essential for well-being and development. Work is also associated with personal fulfilment, a sense of identity and contribution to economy. Creation of employment opportunities is fundamental to economic stability.

Economic development is not achieved by creation of jobs alone; it also requires working conditions that provide safety, dignity, freedom and opportunities for growth. (Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2019, p.1).

In the Educational context, employment is often referred to as a “Career” or, more commonly, a “Job” although there is a distinction between the two. A Career is typically a long-term pursuit of work that aligns with an individual’s choices, preferences, passions, aptitudes, and skills, whereas a job may represent a specific role or set of tasks undertaken as part of a broader career. A career may involve multiple job-changes, encompassing different roles or types of work along the way.

In many cases, individuals may undertake various jobs without a career plan either by choice or compulsion. In other instances, even with a preferred career plan, individuals may not be able to pursue work aligned with their chosen career due to various constraints or circumstances. Therefore, a career can be understood as a conscious plan in which an individual determines the field, area of work, specific roles, and types of jobs they intend to pursue over the course of their professional life.

(Yunfan Zhang and Gemma M. Perey, 2023, p. 18) observes career planning interventions help students and become better equipped to make well-informed decisions, setting a definite direction for their career trajectory.

In this context, it is imperative that the education curriculum integrates requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes and values aligning with careers in which individuals can apply their learning to achieve meaningful employment outcomes. (Dean, 2025, p.14) argues, while some Graduates may enrol with no specific career plans, some enrol not just for the degree but expects that the degree shall be a launchpad into a career that aligns with their interests and ambitions.

However, despite the recognized importance of career planning for learners, policies and programs in India have historically not prioritized employment as a central objective, creating a persistent gap between educational outcomes and labour market readiness. The current landscape reveals that the alignment between education and employment is driven by economic necessity rather than policy-driven opportunity.

### Research Questions

How was employment positioned within the aims and recommendations of major education commissions during the colonial period of India?

How did the relationship between education and employment evolve across post-independence education commissions and policy frameworks in India?

What do trends in enrolment, institutional density, certifications and employment indicators reveal about the relationship between educational expansion and employment outcomes in India?

How does “National Education Policy” (NEP) 2020 address the alignment between educational progression, skills development, and employment preparedness?

### LITERATURE REVIEW/BACKGROUND

Education plays a vital role in fostering economic growth, shaping both individual livelihoods and national development. As noted by (Giotis et al., 2025, p.2) education and employment constitute two fundamental pillars of economic and social development, closely interconnected in shaping the trajectory of individuals and societies.

This link is complex and dynamic, significantly influencing human development and labour market outcomes. While the willingness to work may depend on individual choice, requisite knowledge, competencies, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for meaningful employment are largely imparted through education. “Education has a vital role to play in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable people to contribute to and benefit from an inclusive and sustainable future,” (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018, p.4)

Mundle (2017) argues India’s education policy has not yielded the desired results leading to a fragile foundation of basic education, which in turn has intensified the challenge of employment.

A historical analysis of education commissions’ reports and recommendations particularly in relation to their implications on employment is a significant part of this study. The commissions appointed during the colonial rule included their observations of the indigenous education systems, this study confines its analysis of the education and its implication on employment as reflected through these reports.

As documented by Mondal (2017, p.2), The East India Company was established in 1600, it advanced its focus from traders to rulers, administrators and policy-makers. Although, the first attention of the company in educational matters was paid through the Charter Act of 1698, it was exclusively intended for children of the company’s British origin servants. The modern system of Education began with the Charter Act of 1813 with the objective to improve literature for native learned people and promotion of sciences. Thus, for nearly 200

years there was hardly any education activity carried out in general for the masses and hence there is no scope to study objective of employment during this period based on education policy.

The Despatch of 1854 on “General Education in India” referred to as Wood’s Despatch and “Magna Carta of Indian Education” was ratified by the Despatch of Lord Stanley (1859) as acknowledged in the “Note” in the reprint version of the report General Education in India (1882). Further, “The Indian Education Commission” (1882), referred to as Hunter Commission was appointed to measure the effectiveness of implementation of recommendations of The Despatch of 1854, in addition to suggesting more measures without deviating from the principles laid down therein (p. 2). These documentary linkages indicate, that the three reports formed part of a continuing policy framework and therefore cannot be read in isolation.

A detailed study of the reports focussed to observe significance attributed to employment as an outcome of education, reveals that these policies prioritised transforming Indian society along the lines of European modernity, producing a class of educated Indians suitable for service of the British Government in India. This orientation is reflected in the Wood’s Despatch, which emphasised “...not only to produce a higher degree of intellectual fitness, but to raise the moral character of those who partake of its advantages, and so to supply you with servants to whose probity you may with increased confidence commit offices of trust.” The Despatch of 1854 on “General Education in India,” (1854, p. 6)

Observations in The Report of “The Indian Education Commission,” (1882 p. 301) which notes that a majority of the natives on completing graduation predominantly joined legal profession or the service of the colonial government among other professions suggest that while education policy was not primarily structured around employment provisions, educational outcomes were assessed in relation to the occupational positions secured by students.

An inclination among many individuals to achieve service in the Government immediately after matriculation, necessitated structural curtailment in order to encourage progression into higher education is noted in the Report of the “Indian Universities Commission” (1902, p. 48) This indicates that entry into colonial Government service was a significant priority for students during that period.

A more specific alignment of educational progression with occupational outcomes can be traced in The Calcutta University Commission Report-Appendices and Index Volume vi (1917-19, p. 4) which recommended constituting a separate board of Intermediate Education, closely linked with high schools. By emphasising intermediate-level training to prepare individuals for employment in areas such as agriculture, industrial, commercial and in government service, the report explicitly suggests that employment was conceived as a necessary outcome of education.

Observations in the interim report of Auxiliary Committee appointed under the Indian Statutory Commission (1929, p. 107) regarding the increasing proportion of low academic achievers in high percentage entering collegiate education and accordingly recommended diversification of school curricula in order to align more with rural, industrial and commercial pursuits. This suggests a more explicit policy attempt to differentiate educational pathways in relation to occupational outcomes.

A lesser-known but significant development took place in 1934 with the appointment of a committee to study the causes of increasing unemployment. The report of the Unemployment Committee United Provinces (1935, p. 187), drawing on various observations on unemployment up to that period stated, “education must be brought in line with the needs of the country. There must be some correlation between education and the use that is going to be made of the educated product. We are clearly of the opinion that in future education and employment must be viewed together.” This emphasis on an explicit connection between education and employment was reflected in its advocacy of diversified secondary education with parallel technical, commercial and vocational streams alongside academic courses.

The Bureau of Education, India report (1938-39 p. 27-28) by John Sargeant, Educational Commissioner, Government of India and drawing on the observations of Central Advisory Board of Education, emphasized the need for a radical reorganization of the education system. Its earmarked aims for different stages of education

such as the primary stage aim at achieving permanent literacy, the lower secondary stage to provide a suitable foundation for higher education or pathways for specialized practical courses, particularly in rural areas, tuned to meet rural requirements including consideration of some form of manual training to develop practical aptitudes and the higher secondary stage aimed at preparing students for admission to universities, training of teachers in rural areas, agricultural training, clerical training and training in selected technical subjects in consultation with the employers indicate a more differentiated conception of education in which progress across stages was increasingly linked to functional and occupational purposes.

The report of the Central Advisory Board of Education on “The Post-War Plan for Development of India” (1944), drawing on the observations of Abott and Wood (1936-37) emphasized the need for the integration of technical and vocational education. The report articulated a more explicit alignment between, education, labour requirements, and employment incentives by linking industrial development to the supply of specially trained personnel, and such training in turn to the prospect of decent livelihood. (1944, p. 34)

Further, the report validates the central premise of the present study by stating in direct terms, “employment bureau is an essential adjunct to any educational system. In one sense schools and colleges are the factories which turn out the most important and valuable of all of a country’s products viz., its future workers and citizens”. (1944, p. 86) These recommendations suggest that the report viewed education as requiring formal coordinating structures to facilitate transition from schooling and higher education into employment. This reflects a more explicit policy recognition that educational institutions should not merely impart instruction, but also support occupational placement through organized linkages with industry and employers.

A series of commissions appointed in the post-independence India began with The University Education Commission (1948), which observed that “education must carry out at appropriate levels a combination of general, scientific, artistic and technical education for students of varying occupational objectives” (p. 28). While the report advocated flexibility of courses, introduction to new professions such as business management, insisted on practical training particularly in agriculture, (p. 186) it has not explicitly articulated a direct link between education with employment. Moreover, earlier recommendations regarding the establishment of employment bureaux and appointment boards did not receive clear endorsement. Instead, the report substantially broadened the role of university education by bestowing the responsibility of creating knowledge and cultivating minds capable of organizing material resources and human energies together for the national development. This indicates the commission conceived quality of higher education as key source to broader intellectual and developmental force within the nation-building mission rather than making it productive from employment perspective.

Subsequently, Secondary Education Commission (1953) recommended the diversification of secondary education and emphasized the introduction of technical, commercial and vocational streams so that schooling could better respond to occupational needs. The Report (1953, p. 40-41) emphasized that, “the immediate purpose of education in relation to industry is to secure to industry the services of better qualified men, an achievement which by itself does not at once result in more employment the improvement in the content and method of education will make for increasing efficiency in industry and contribute to its expansion...” This indicates that the commission conceived secondary education reform in terms of aligning curriculum-content and pedagogy with the requirements of industry.

Although, The Apprentices Act, 1961 was enacted with the intention of providing practical training and fostering industry linkage, it originated within the domain of labour and industrial policy. Despite repeated emphasis on integration, no comprehensive or clear structural mechanism emerged to align education with employment outcomes.

The Education Commission (1964-66) provided the foundational framework upon which the National Policy on Education (1968) was formulated as the Government’s policy response and therefore the two cannot be read in isolation from each other.

The commission (1964-66) identified the need for an “education revolution’ and stated three dimensions: (p. 5) “- internal transformation so as to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the nation; - qualitative

improvement so that the standards achieved are adequate, keep continually rising and, at least in a few sectors, become internationally comparable; and - expansion of educational facilities broadly on the basis of manpower needs and with an accent on equalization of educational opportunities.” Further the Report, (p. 89) recommends the provision of higher secondary and university education to deserving individuals consistent with the demands for trained manpower. This orientation was carried forward in policy form through The National Policy on Education (1968) that emphasized the need for a continuous review of the agricultural, industrial and other technical manpower requirements in the country, and highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between output of the educational institutions and employment opportunities to be maintained (p. 42)

The National Policy on Education (1986) may be read in continuity with the Report of the Committee for Review of the National Policy on Education (1990) and the Programme of Action (1992). While the 1986 policy, in the context of educational reorganization, aimed to enhance individual employability, address the mis-match between demand and supply of skilled manpower, and provide an alternative for those pursuing higher education without particular purpose or interest (p. 13), the Review Committee (1990) advanced this orientation further by stating that “Constitution could give the political right to work and developmental planning multiple opportunities for work, the role of education is to equip the students with capability for work with socioeconomic relevance i.e. to empower people for work.” (p. 179). Further, the Programme of Action (1992), in turn, emphasized delinking degrees from jobs and manpower planning, and recommended scientific analysis of job requirements for various positions and recruitments, along with the formulation of education and training programme relation to available employment opportunities (p. 74). Over all, these documents reflect a more explicit concern with employability and work relevance yet remain less clear about institutional mechanism to require to operationalize this task.

The National Knowledge Commission Report (2006-2009, p 14) proposed community college models that would integrate general education with employment-oriented programmes by providing credit and non-credit pathways, while also enabling learners to pursue higher education later in life. This suggests an approach that prioritises employment simultaneous to education, viewing the two as mutually connected rather than separate objectives.

In recent years, policy discourse has increasingly emphasized the role of education in fostering skills, innovation and economic development. The National Education Policy (2020) has proposed a holistic and multidisciplinary education system that seeks to integrate general, vocational and technical education. The policy emphasizes skill development, flexibility in learning pathways and stronger linkages between education, employability and the evolving socio-economic needs of the country.

The NEP Report (2020, p. 43-44) notes that less than 5% of the workforce in the 19-24 age group has received formal vocational education. This is particularly significant because the need for vocational education had been recognized in policy discourse for nearly a century, at least since the Calcutta University Commission (1917-1919). The persistence of such a low participation suggests a significant policy-implementation gap. NEP (2020) observes that such a low penetration may be due to a prevalence of social status hierarchy that views vocational education as inferior to general education. In address to this challenge, the policy advocated integrating vocational education into the mainstream across school and higher education. The policy further proposed that vocational focus areas should be identified through skills-gap analysis and mapping of local opportunities. As a structural support mechanism, it advocated the National Skills Qualifications Framework across disciplines and vocations, along with alignment to the International Standard Classification of Occupations. At a broader level, the Report (p. 4-5) envisioned education as producing engaged, productive, and contributing citizens through greater integration, coordination, and synergy across all stages of education. These measures suggest that the policy approached employability not as a narrow vocational concern, but as part of a wider structural effort to align education with the knowledge, skills and capacities required for work.

A cumulative longitudinal study of these policy developments reflects a gradual evolution in the role of education in India—from a colonial instrument designed largely for administrative purposes to a broader national framework increasingly concerned with human resource development, vocational preparation and economic growth. However, the degree to which these policy initiatives explicitly articulated the linkage between education and employment has varied considerably across different commissions and policy periods.

Despite extensive scholarship on colonial and post-independence educational reforms in India, most studies have examined these commissions primarily from historical, administrative or structural perspectives. Limited attention has been devoted to systematically analysing the extent to which these policy frameworks explicitly articulated the relationship between education and employment. The present study therefore examines major educational commissions and policy initiatives in India with a specific focus on how they impacted the linkage between education and employment.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative policy analysis approach to examine the priority accorded to employment through education in India. It analyses major education policy documents, commission reports, and policy review reports, across colonial and post-independence periods. To complement the historical policy analysis contemporary official data on growth of secondary, higher secondary and higher education institutions, enrolment and pass-out were examined, together with macro-economic indicators drawn from the official employment-related reports. The aim of this analysis is to interpret how policy frameworks have conceptualized, prioritized and structured employment orientation within over time.

The study draws on official statistical sources relating to institutional growth, enrolment, certification output, and employment trends. Since no single dataset captures the relationship between educational expansion, certification output, and employment outcomes, data from multiple official sources were adapted and compiled to provide a broader indicative framework. These include UDISE+ Flash Statistics, AISHE Reports, Secondary and Higher Secondary Results Statistics, PLFS-based India Employment Report including the India Employment Report 2024. In the absence of cohort-specific transition data, secondary and higher secondary pass-out figures and higher education out-turn data were used as proxy indicators to examine broad educational transitions in relation to macroeconomic indicators such as worker population ratio, labour force participation rate, unemployment rate, youth employment status across regular, casual and self-employment categories and the education profile of employed youth. The findings should therefore be read as indicative and policy-historical rather than definitive measurement of policy impact on employment.

## RESULTS & FINDINGS

This section presents findings on enrolment patterns, institutional growth of school and higher education, educational certifications output in relation to macroeconomic indicators, employment status, and the education profile of youth in India, thereby analysing the education-employment linkage.

Table 1 presents the number of institutions and enrolment in school education and higher education revealing basic landscape of education in India during the period 2017-18 to 2021-22.

### Trends in Institutions and Enrolment Patterns in School and Higher Education

#### India: 2017-18 to 2021-22

PERIOD	SCHOOLS		HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS	
	TOTAL INSTITUTIONS	TOTAL ENROLMENT	TOTAL INSTITUTIONS	TOTAL ENROLMENT
2017-18	15,58,903	26.16 Cr	49,964	3.66 Cr
2018-19	15,51,000	26.03 Cr	48,349	3.74 Cr
2019-20	15,07,708	26.45 Cr	55,165	3.85 Cr

2020-21	15,09,136	26.44 Cr	56,205	4.13 Cr
2021-22	14,89,115	26.52 Cr	58,643	4.33 Cr

Compiled from UDISE+ Flash Statistics and AISHE Reports, Ministry of Education, Government of India

The school system due to new entrants each year is more dynamic that underwent assimilation and shows a reduction of about 70,000 schools but enrolment remains stable hovering closely around 26.5 crores. During the same period of 2017-18 to 2021-22, enrolment in higher education in contrast increased steadily rising from 3.66 crore in 2017-18 to 4.33 crore in 2021-22. While National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 asks to view both school education and higher education as a single organic continuum, the gap in terms of enrolment transition is visible and needs attention.

Table 2 is a compilation of quantitative net certification from secondary grade (Grade 10) of school education to Ph D in higher education. The rationale to include secondary grade and higher secondary pass-out is based on their eligibility to join a course of 3-year duration and a course of minimum 09 months duration respectively in higher education. Further, lot of studies on employment take the basic age of 15 yrs (which corresponds with secondary grade) for worker population ratio (WPR) and labour force participation rate (LFPR). It reveals the volume of closest educationally certified persons at various levels eligible for training or joining work force during the period of 2017-18 to 2021-22.

**Annual Educational Certifications Output**

**India: 2017-18 to 2021-22**

<b>PASS-OUTs</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2021-22</b>
Secondary-All Recog. Boards (inc Supplementary+ Pvt+ Open Schooling)	1.53 Cr	1.54 Cr	1.62 Cr	1.93 Cr	1.60 Cr
Higher Secondary-All Recog. Boards (inc Supplementary+ Pvt + Open Schooling)	1.16 Cr	1.18 Cr	1.26 Cr	1.48 Cr	1.27 Cr
Higher Education Institutions (All Courses-All modes)	0.90 Cr	0.91 Cr	0.94 Cr	0.95 Cr	1.07 Cr

Source: Compiled from Statistics of Secondary and Higher Secondary Examination Results, Dept. of School Education and Literacy and AISHE reports, Ministry of Education, Government of India

The data reveals an upward trajectory of increased certifications output from school education and higher education. The rise in Graduates from higher education crossing 1 crore in 2021-22 establishes availability of certified manpower. However, it would be naïve to presume that education correlates with better jobs on the basis of voluminous increase in the certifications. Although, the primary status of employment appears to have been in a catch and match with education but the status of employment in isolation to certifications reveals a different picture.

Table 3 While the output in terms of certified manpower has scaled significantly, its absorption into the economy remains a challenge. To study its cascading effect, the data pertaining to worker population rate, labour force participation rate and unemployment rate is included for an extended period of 2022-23, below:

**Employment in usual status for persons of age 15 yrs and above**

**India: 2017-18 to 2022-23**

YEARS	WPR	LFPR	UR
2017-18	46.8	49.8	6.0
2018-19	47.3	50.2	5.8
2019-20	50.9	53.5	4.8
2020-21	52.6	54.9	4.2
2021-22	52.9	55.2	4.1
2022-23	56.0	57.9	3.2

Source: Compiled from Director General of Employment report based on Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), Government of India.

The data clearly indicates that there is an increase in the Worker Population Ratio (WPR), Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) and decline in the Unemployment Rate (UR) including in the succeeding year 2022-23 of certifications output period (up to 2021-22). Despite the rise in WPR, LFPR to 56.0 and 57.9 respectively signalling a healthy economy, it cannot be ascertained that it is due to increase in the manpower supply based on certifications.

Table 4 represents data pertaining to two specific years of 2019 and 2022 chosen to avoid cluttering and to mainly to segregate adult employment from youth employment to study the impact of recent years certifications.

**Employment of Youth and Adults**

India: 2019 and 2022

EMPLOYMENT STATUS	YOUTH 2019	YOUTH 2022	ADULTS 2019	ADULTS 2022
Self-Employed	42%	48%	55%	58%
Employed-Regular	32%	28%	23%	19%
Employed-Casual	26%	25%	23%	22%

Source: Adapted from International Labour Organization (2024), India Employment Report 2024, based on PLFS and Employment-Unemployment Survey data.

The employment statistics of year 2022 indicate about 58 % of the adult work force and 48% of the youth work force is self-employed which by definition includes unpaid family workers is alarming. Adding to it, 25% of the youth work force is engaged in casual employment (2022-23) reveals that certifications out put to a large extent has not been able to make a significant impact in the employment market. The massive engagement of youth in self-employment indicating an over-all nearly half the worker population of India is carving a place of their own in the economy than responding to work force requirement by choice or compulsion cannot be ignored by education policy-makers.

Table 5 examines the status of educational attainment of its work force aged 15 yrs to 29 yrs for the year 2022 reveals another side of the economy's health from working population's view.

### Education Profile of Youth in India (Aged 15 yrs to 29 yrs)

#### Year-2022

NON-LITERATE	LITERATE UPTO PRIMARY	MIDDLE	SECONDARY/HIGHER SECONDARY	GRADUATE & ABOVE
5.4%	10.7%	25.7%	43.6%	14.7%

Source: Adapted from International Labour Organization (2024), India Employment Report 2024, based on PLFS and Employment-Unemployment Survey data.

On one side, while the certified manpower is predominantly seeking shelter in self-employment, other side about 41.8 percent of young individuals in 2022 had only completed elementary education or had no formal education at all. This highlights the persistent educational disparities within the youth population amidst surge in Graduates.

## DISCUSSION

Education cannot afford to produce human capital that is misaligned with labour market demands. While educational expansion may improve access and participation, its economic significance depends on the extent to which education equips learners with knowledge, skills, and capacities required for meaningful work. In view of this, the persistent gap between education and employment has a historical connotation as evidenced by the commissions appointed during the colonial period, from Wood's Despatch (1854) to Sargent Report (1944) whose recommendations were largely confined to administrative architecture, introduction of preparatory domains linked to employment such as vocational and technical education.

While these recommendations marked the beginning of the foundation for modern education in India, they fundamentally aimed at social transformation, preparing a higher class of public servants suitable for employment in the colonial government, and broader orientation towards administrative architecture than towards complementing the economy through education.

A similar pattern continued in the post-independence period; from the University Education Commission (1948) to National Knowledge Commission (2005). These reports continued emphasis on administrative architecture, along with a sustained focus on the need for expansion of vocational and technical education. At the same time, the reports extended the scope of education policy to include quality, relevance to Indian context, the need for enhanced access, enrolment and alignment with national development priorities, which formed the basis of qualitative and quantitative expansion of education in India. This indicates that education-employment linkage was increasingly acknowledged, but often with a broader developmental and manpower-oriented framework rather than through direct linkage between educational outcome and employment.

The struggle for enactment of Right to Free and Compulsory Education in India is of paramount importance that began in the colonial government. It initially began as philanthropic initiatives in selected provinces, later emerged as a private bill in the Imperial Assembly (1906) and faced repeated rejection. It took almost seven decades after independence to arrive at its final destination when it became a fundamental right in the Constitution of India in 2002 and an Act in 2009. Seen in this context, the substantial rise in institutional density and enrolment during the period 2017-18 to 2021-22 reflects the cumulative effect of a long policy emphasis on access and expansion. India has nearly 15 lakh schools with 26.52 crore enrolment and approximately 60,000

higher education institutions with 4.33 crore enrolment by 2021-22 indicating the scale of this systemic expansion.

However, educational expansion alone does not lead to alignment to employment. In order to understand the progression of learners, this study examined the transition rates across secondary to higher secondary education, and from higher secondary education to higher education using certification output as a proxy in the absence of cohort-based tracking data. The findings indicate that the transition from secondary to higher secondary education remains relatively stable between 76 %-79 %. In contrast, the transition from higher secondary to higher education exhibits greater variation, ranging from 64 % to 84 %. This sharp dip (2020-21) is likely due to pandemic disruption effect and strong rebound in (2021-22). Over all, nearly 58% of the students enter higher education has been ascertained. These patterns indicate that educational progression across stages is not seamless and uniform and that the continuum between school education and higher education remains uneven in practice.

The study further examined these educational trends in relation to macro-level employment indicators. While the quantitative expansion of education saw the rise in graduates exceeding one crore (2022) macro-level employment indicators such as the Worker Population Ratio (WPR), Labour Force Participation Ratio (LFPR) showed improvement and a decline in the unemployment rate in 2022. In order to study if there was any cascading effect of certified graduates, data pertaining to WPR, LFPR and UR of the succeeding year 2023 were purposefully included. The evidence suggests a continued increase in both worker population rate (WPR), labour force participation rate (LFPR), in 2022 and 2023 accompanied by a further decline in the unemployment rate (UR) from 4.1 in 2022 to 3.4 in 2023. Such indicators, taken alone, are not sufficient to establish that the expansion of educational certifications has translated into improved employment outcomes for educationally qualified youth.

While on one side, the broader employment indicators showed a positive sign, on the other side, in reference to youth in different categories of employment such as regular, casual and self-employed, the data points to a structural gap between educational expansion and the absorption of youth into secure and formal work. Share of youth engaged in self-employment increased from 42% in 2019 to 48% in 2022 and youth engaged in casual employment decreased from 26% in 2019 to 25% in 2022. It is important to note that self-employment by definition includes unpaid family members. It implies that near to 75% of the youth worker population are concentrated in self-employment and casual employment thereby failing to secure regular employment. This suggests that formal job-creation is not keeping pace with educational supply of educationally certified youth.

Despite the number of graduates exceeding one crore in 2022, the education profile of the youth in the 15 to 29 yrs age-group (2022) reveals a critical area of concern, pointing to a persistent gap between education and employment. A substantial proportion of the youth-about 41.8% of the youth population in 2022- possess only elementary education or no formal schooling, indicating a critical vulnerability within the education system. This pattern reflects the insufficiency of access and enrolment on one side and on the other, point towards imbalance in the quality of education.

While this study does not directly assess the learning outcomes, the limited translations of certifications into employment suggests that the competencies acquired may not adequately correspond to labour market demands. This points to underlying learning gaps and concerns regarding the relevance of the curriculum, thereby reflecting issues related to quality of education.

Evidence from The National Achievement Survey data (2017 and 2021), which provides a comprehensive assessment of learning outcomes & quality (LO) across states pertaining to school education further reinforces this concern.

Another important dimension is the limited linkage between educational institutions and labour market systems. The absence of structured industry-academia collaboration has constrained the responsiveness of education to industry needs. Work-integrated learning remains limited in scale resulting in disconnect between education and industry. It is imperative to note that that expansion of education without equitable access and adequate job creation leads to structural imbalance.

Consequently, this discussion posits that the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a more direct and actionable approach to aligning education with employment. It advocates stronger resonance with the Indian ethos to achieve higher success in quality education. It made explicit recommendations to re-draw structural pathway of school and higher education enabling greater access. Crucially, it envisions school and higher education as a single organic continuum that reflects a strategic shift towards smoother transition between these sectors. In this direction, reforms such as the National Credit Framework are important in advancing structural and competency linked progression across education including work-integrated learning, while accommodating multiple entry and exit pathways for students.

From a policy perspective, the findings indicate to move beyond an expansion-centric model towards an integrated approach that addresses access, quality, relevance and employability simultaneously. NEP 2020 reflects such a shift by emphasizing multidisciplinary education, flexibility in learning pathways and skill development. However, the effectiveness of these reforms shall depend on implementation of institutional capacity and alignment with regional economic contexts.

## CONCLUSION

The study draws aggregated quantitative evidence encompassing institutional density, enrolment patterns, transition dynamics (proxied through pass-outs and certifications) and macro-level employment indicators alongside historical policy implications to derive indicative trends on education-employment divide in India.

The study shows that while structural efforts are required to create more formal and regular jobs, fostering a conducive ecosystem for self-employment-anchored in innovation and opportunity offers a viable pathway. At the same time, casual employment through a social security policy with an increased coverage can contribute to economic strengthening. Taken together, these findings reinforce that the effectiveness of the labour market system is not only contingent on employment expansion but on the quality and sustainability of employment outcomes. In this regard, equitable access to quality education is a foundational imperative for bridging the education-employment divide and strengthening long term economic resilience.

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