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IMPACT OF CAREER GUIDANCE IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY UNDER NEP 2020

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ABSTRACT

Unprecedented technological innovation, emergence of new digital pedagogies driven by technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), is reshaping the way content is delivered across classrooms. It has redefined the role of educators and students. The pathway from classroom (physical as well as virtual) to boardroom is now cobbled with multiple diverse stepping stones which if not tread carefully may become a stumbling block in a learner's career. Peer pressure, shrinking job market and global uncertainties have now more than before necessitated the need for correct guidance to allow every young mind and soul to contribute in Prime Minister Modi's dream of 'Viksit Bharat 2047'. This paper explores the role that must be played by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India, in providing effective career guidance to youth especially in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It discusses how career guidance and placement cells in HEIs can support youth empowerment, employability, and provide equitable access to opportunities. Data was collected over a period of five years i.e. from year 2020 to year 2025, from 1400 graduates of a Nagpur city-based Commerce college. Structured questionnaire and interviews were used. Analysis of the collected data reveals that correct career guidance led to decrease in dropout rates of students. Besides there was a considerable shift in career choices made by commerce students. This paper provides empirical evidence in support of the proposition that career guidance initiatives have a positive impact on students in terms of increasing the number of students who pursue further education after graduation and influences their shift from traditional commerce programs to non- traditional programs.

KEYWORDS: Career guidance, commerce students, employability, NEP 2020, Role of Higher Education Institutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of information explosion courtesy, the world wide web (internet), youngsters believe they know everything. Gone are the days when age was associated with experience. Today everything from selecting career to selecting a partner is based on results obtained through surfing the net. Advent of



technology and its gradual integration into our everyday lives have reshaped our way of life. From our waking pattern to the work modes to the digitalisation of our wallet, every decade has a new improvised pattern as compared to the previous decade. Today, even our coffee table conversations have global connotations. We no longer talk of our town or State. It is now about the globe. Career choices, selection of universities, job profiles etc all are now largely from global perspective. To cope up with this restructuring of our environment and adapt to the new pattern of working and living a change in the education system was long called for. July 2020 saw the dawn of a new era in education in India. An education system which since long was gasping for a breather was transformed with the introduction of New Education Policy (NEP 2020). NEP 2020 was introduced to equip students with 21st-century skills, foster creativity, and prepare them for a globalized world. National Education Policy, 2020 (NEP) envisions a massive transformation in education through– “an education system rooted in Indian ethos that contributes directly to transforming India, that is Bharat, sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all, thereby making India a global knowledge superpower.” (Ministry of Education, Government of India).

The Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in India need to be at the forefront as we march towards the realisation of our collective dream of an empowered, developed Bharat where every youth is a force to reckon with, every industry is self-sufficient and every home is a base of skills contributing richly to the economy.

2. OBJECTIVE

1. To highlight the perceived significance of NEP 2020 in transforming the education scenario in India.
2. To bring to fore the role of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in empowering youth through effective career guidance.
3. To understand the necessity of setting up dedicated career cells in HEI.

3. NEP 2020- VISION AND MISSION

New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is the magna carta that chalks out the Government’s vision for a transformed, upgraded, and systematic education system. It outlines the role to be played by Higher Education Institutes (HEI), faculty, and allied stakeholders in the metamorphosis of higher education in terms of Indian values, teaching, research, publication, patents, and institutional development (National Education Policy 2020). The vision of NEP is to introduce an India-centric education system that is steeped in Indian values but has a global perspective. It focuses on equitable and inclusive education, student-centric learning, and developing futuristic skills.

To give wings to its futurist ambitious policy, Ministry of Education set up Pandit Madan Mohan



Malaviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching (PMMMNTT) Centres. In collaboration with UGC HRDC, 111 Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Centres running across the length and breadth of the country have been entrusted with capacity building programs for faculty members. NEP orientation & sensitization programmes are being conducted by these centres to enable educators to impart holistic education, develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills in socio-cultural environment and encourage self-reliance amongst youth through end-to-end mentorship schemes.

A robust education system can empower youth to build the nation. NEP intends to draw a pathway between education and employment by integrating vocational education, life skills, and career readiness into the academic framework. The policy recommends the establishment of Career Counselling Cells in all HEIs to help students make informed decisions aligned with their strengths and aspirations. It also calls for the integration of career counselling and guidance into school and higher education ecosystems by making it a part of the curricula.

4. NEED FOR CAREER GUIDANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Listed below are some key factors that necessitate the need for a paradigm shift in the way HEI are perceived by students, faculty and allied stakeholders. A greater role is expected to be played by HEI in making every youth count.

4.1 RISING UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT DESPITE ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

On one hand we talk about the new empowered India while on the other hand we are grappling with the rising unemployment. Underemployment has greater negative impact on the economy as compared to unemployment (Mathew, 2023). Underemployment disproportionately affects the youth, particularly in India's large young population. This can lead to a disoriented generation of workers who are not able to realize their full potential, thereby undermining the country's demographic dividend (Jha & Mishra, 2024) (Kumari et al., 2024).

Several schemes have been floated by the Government for tackling this issue, which persistently continues to plague our collective dream of a 'Vikasit Bharat.' Under the directives of government several states have conducted '*rozgaar melas*' (job fairs) however the researcher could not find any factual data on the number of actual beneficiaries of these employment fairs.

4.2 MISMATCH BETWEEN STUDENTS' EDUCATION AND LABOR MARKET NEEDS

A problem peculiar to most developing nations is the mismatch between the skills acquired through formal education and the skills needed by the job providers. Many educated youth struggle to find employment because their qualifications do not align with the available job opportunities. Out of need and sometimes desperation, youngsters pick up menial jobs which does not do justice to their education and does not help them rise to their full potential.

4.3. THE LURE OF THE DOLLAR



Indian youth's fascination with everything foreign continues. Many youngsters still believe that an engineering degree or a masters in management from a good university will serve as a passport to their dream of earning in dollars! The craze for a degree for their ward from a foreign university often drives hapless parents into debts. Here, teachers as mentors must guide students in selecting correct courses based on their calibre and financial standing. This will help in reversing the brain drain. It will also be a positive step in the direction of building 'atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-dependent nation).

4.4 ROLE OF GUIDANCE IN ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO PURSUE FURTHER STUDIES AFTER GRADUATION

Research shows that master's degree (post-graduation) in chosen field increases the employability and enables youngsters to secure better paying jobs as compared to mere graduates. (Tamborini et al., 2015). A master's degree can provide an edge over peers who only have work experience without an advanced degree, by deepening knowledge in a specific subject. For those employed, earning a master's degree may accelerate their progression into higher-paying roles within a hierarchy (Sellers et al., 2019). Analysis of the available student data from 2015-2020 (obtained from the college records) revealed that due to absence of correct guidance, financial constraints and other varied reasons, many students discontinued education after graduation and picked up jobs which were not very financially rewarding. The need for convincing students to go for further studies became a matter of urgency.

4.5 IMPROVED CAREER DECISION-MAKING

Throughout their tenure in college/ university, students must be exposed to multiple multidisciplinary projects. It must be complimented by structured classroom guidance, including career skills. According to Dewey systematic career guidance can lead to improved academic success and better preparation for life after school (Dewey, 2003). Career guidance helps students identify their interests, talents, and values, leading to more aligned career choices (Yulianti et al., 2023).

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an exploratory case study design to investigate the role of structured career guidance in influencing students' academic progression and career decision-making within a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Nagpur, India, namely G.S. College of Commerce & Economics, Nagpur (Autonomous).

280-300 students graduate every year from Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com) program run by the college. Three to four months after graduation, all the students are required to fill a student progression form that consists of the following questions.

1. Are you employed?
2. If yes, provide details about your employer and your designation.
3. Did you receive employment through the college?
4. Are you pursuing any degree/diploma program after graduation?



5. If yes, mention the name of the program.

6. Have you enrolled in any professional degree course such as C.A., CMA, C. S. etc. If yes, specify the program.

Information thus obtained is maintained for college records.

5.1 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The time frame for this study was a period of five years beginning from year 2020 up to year 2025. All the students pursuing B. Com (Bachelor of Commerce) final year formed a part of the population. Every year around 280 students graduate from the college. Accordingly, the population for five years comprised of 1400 students (280 students per year).

SAMPLE SELECTION:

100 students from B. Com final year who posted more than 80% attendance were selected each year in the study period. Thus, the total sample size is 500 students (100 students per year * 5 years). These selected students formed a part of the study, from their final year of graduation up to the time of award of their graduation degrees (that is approx. 6 to 8 months post their results declaration).

Convenience sampling was used. It was presumed that only those students who attended college regularly could take benefit from the career guidance, training and grooming workshops conducted by the college.

These students, thus, formed the intervention group that received structured career guidance, while the remaining students only had access to general seminars and placement opportunities.

Difference in academic levels were not considered.

5.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

25% students are from rural areas, rest from urban. Male female ratio is 1:3. 57% students are from English medium rest are from Hindi and Marathi mediums. The demographic details were same for both the cohorts (intervention and control groups).

5.3 DATA SOURCES

Primary Data:

Every year, the selected 100 students were provided rigorous career counselling and guidance throughout the year by their chosen mentor teachers. The mentors held regular discussions with the selected students on topics ranging from career aspirations, tentative hurdles in pursuing further education, perceived notions about the job market, entrepreneurial dreams etc. Student progression was tracked each year by a dedicated student progression committee consisting of selected teachers of G. S. College of Commerce & Economics, Nagpur. Records of these 500 students, i.e. 100 from each year served as the base for analysis.



Secondary data: Archival student progression data from 2015–2020 was obtained from college records to provide a comparative baseline with the 2020–2025 cohort. The records of 100 regular students from each year between 2015-2020 was used. Total 500 students’ details from this cohort served as base for comparative analysis. Demographic details were same as the 2020–2025 cohort. The type of data collected from these archival records was related to initial career choices and further education pursuits.

5.4 INTERVENTION

From 2020 onwards, structured career counselling programs were gradually scaled up:

- **2020:** Two workshops on interview skills and career awareness.
- **2021–2025:** Monthly mentor–mentee sessions, career development lectures, soft skills workshops, and encouragement to pick up internship for 30 days.

5.5 VARIABLES

- **Independent Variable:** Career guidance intervention (mentor-based counselling and structured activities).
- **Dependent Variables:** Students’ academic and career choices (further studies, traditional vs. non-traditional career paths).

5.6 CAREER CHOICE CATEGORIES

- **Traditional Commerce Paths:** M. Com leading to jobs in fields of Accounting, Banking, Finance (conventional roles), MBA leading to administrative jobs.
- **Non-traditional Commerce Paths:** Post-Graduate degrees and diploma programs leading to jobs in Digital Marketing, Data Analytics, specific industry-aligned roles (e.g., in supply chain, e-commerce, IT-enabled services for commerce graduates).
- **Further Education (specialized):** LLB, MBA in specific fields, specialized professional certifications such as CMA, CFA etc. Entrepreneurship (setting up of own ventures)

5.7 HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

H1: Structured career guidance has a positive impact on students’ decision to pursue further education after graduation.

H2: Mentor-led guidance significantly influences students’ preference for non-traditional commerce career pathways compared to those who do not receive such guidance.

H0 (Null Hypotheses): There is no significant impact of structured career guidance on students’ decision to pursue further education or choose non-traditional career pathways.

5.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis employed comparative trend analysis between the two cohorts:

- **Cohort A (2015–2020):** Graduates prior to structured guidance programs.

- **Cohort B (2020–2025):** Graduates exposed to structured mentoring and counselling interventions.

5.9 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

1. Reduction in dropout rate-

Dropout rates declined significantly from Cohort A to Cohort B, with a marked increase in students pursuing postgraduate studies.

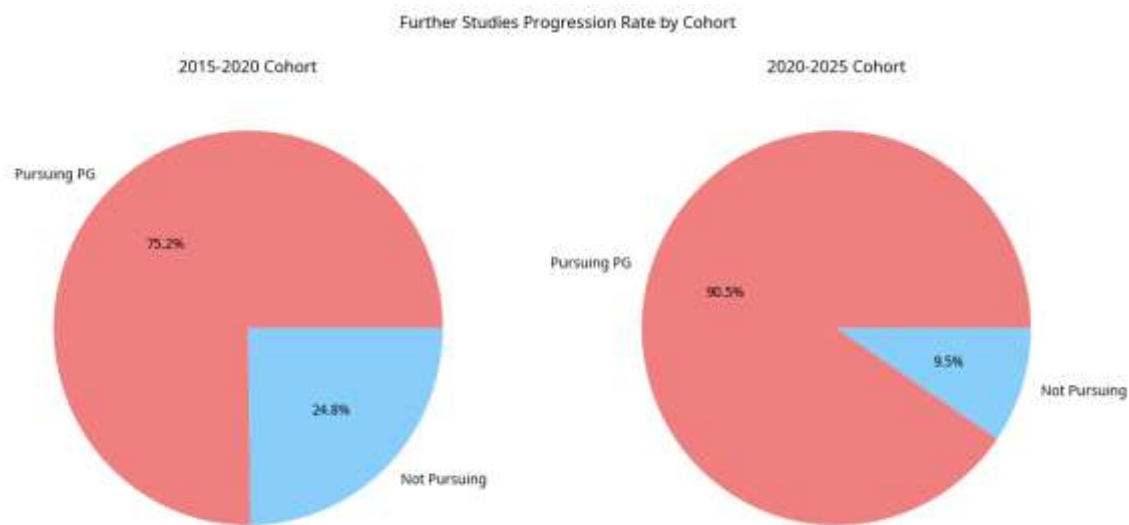


Figure 1:

Students Opting for Further Studies Progression Rate by Cohort

Analysis and Interpretation:

Cohort A: 75.2% pursued further studies. 24.98% discontinued education after graduation.

Cohort B: 90.5% pursued further studies. 9.5% discontinued education after graduation.

This 15% increase suggests that structured mentoring has a positive influence on students' decisions to continue higher education. The number of students opting out has declined.

Dropout Rates Comparison-

- Cohort A (2015–2020): The dropout rate was 25.0%. This means that out of 500 students, approximately 125 students discontinued their education during this period.
- Cohort B (2020–2025): The dropout rate was significantly lower at 9.5%. This indicates that out of 500 students, only about 48 students dropped out during this period.

Risk Difference (RD)-

$RD = \text{Dropout Rate (Cohort B)} - \text{Dropout Rate (Cohort A)} = 9.5\% - 25.0\% = -15.5\%$.

This negative value indicates a reduction in dropout rates post-intervention. Specifically, there was

a 15.5 percentage point decrease in dropout rates after the structured career guidance intervention.

Cohen’s h-

Cohen’s h is a measure of effect size that quantifies the magnitude of the difference between two proportions. We got an h value of 0.37, this means that the size of effect is moderate. So, we can conclude that the intervention had a meaningful impact on reducing dropout rates.

The above analysis can serve as a base to infer that more students are committing to advanced academic pursuits.

2. Increase in Number of Students Opting for Further Education

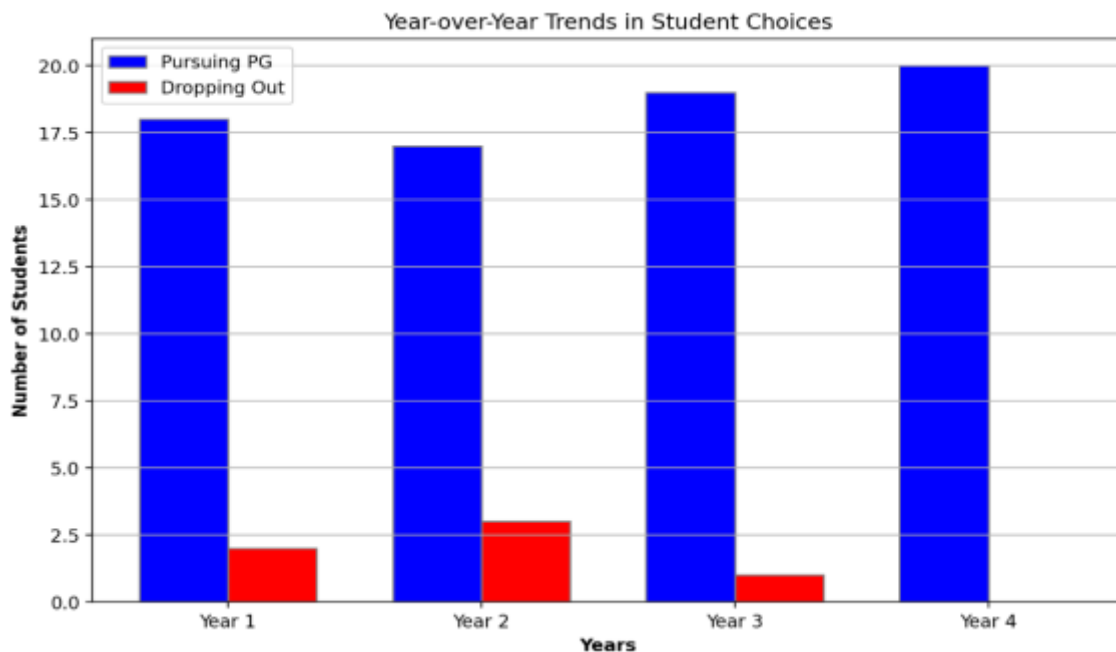


Figure 2

Year -on-Year Trend Showing increase in number of students opting for post-graduation

Analysis and Interpretation:

There is a steady increase in the number of students who after intervention of the mentor counsellor, decided to pursue further education after graduation. This shows the positive impact of career guidance on students. However, it cannot be said to be the only influencing factor. The researcher did not consider other factors such as upskilling initiatives by the Government, fee concessions etc which may also be the reasons for a greater number of students opting for further education.

3. Simultaneous Pursuit of Education and Employment

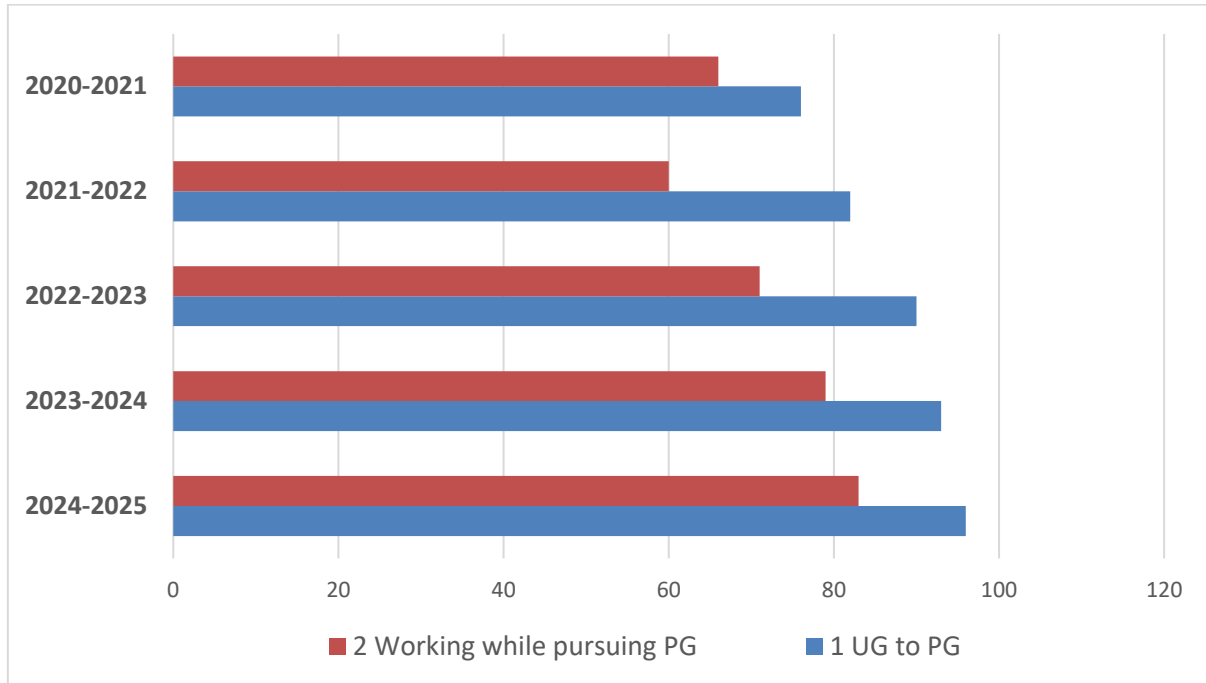


Figure 3
Students Combining Employment with Further Education

Analysis and Interpretation:

From the year 2015-2020 cohort, it was deduced that most students who discontinued education after graduation wanted to be financially independent or needed to work to support their family. In the grooming sessions and workshops conducted by mentor teachers, students were encouraged to enrol in programs that would help in upskilling. Assurances of flexible schedules for submitting assignments and enhancement of curriculum to incorporate industry ready skills were used by the college. This resulted in greater number of students enrolling for post-graduation while doing part time or full-time jobs.

4. Restricted Program Preferences Before Intervention

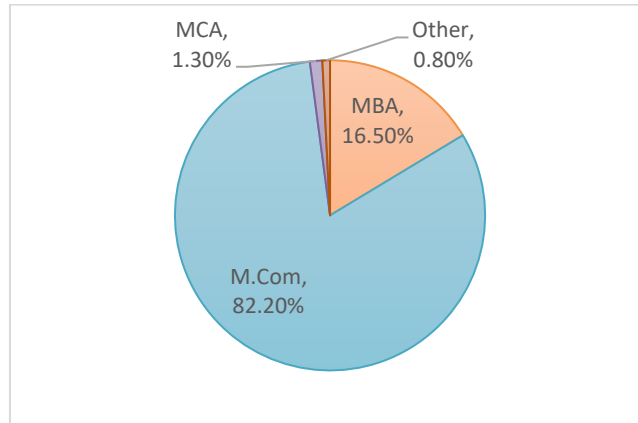


Figure 4

Course Preferences by Students During the Period from Year 2015 to 2020

Analysis and Interpretation:

The fourth figure details the program preferences of students in the 2015-2020 cohort:

- M.Com.: 82.20%
- M.B.A.: 16.5%
- M.C.A.: 1.3%
- Other: 0.80%

During this period, M.Com. was by far the most dominant choice among students, accounting for over four-fifths of preferences. M.B.A. was a distant second, and M.C.A. held a very marginal share, indicating a highly concentrated preference for commerce-related postgraduate studies.

5. Change in Program Preferences After Intervention

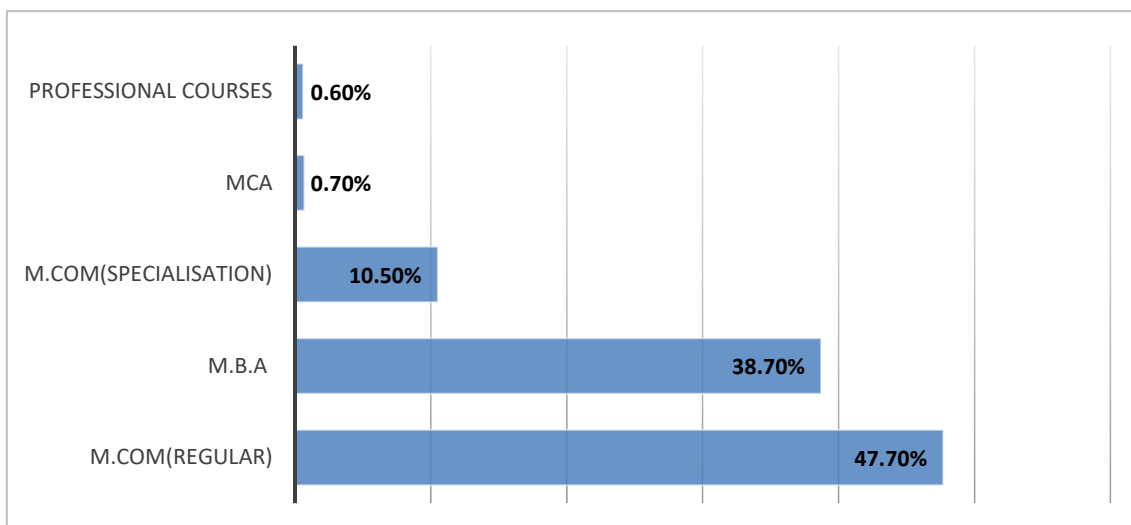


Figure 5

Course Preferences by Students During the Period from Year 2020 to 2025

Analysis and Interpretation:

Chi-Square test of independence was used to determine whether there is a significant association between two categorical variables. In this case, the two variables are:

- Cohort: The group of students (Cohort A from 2015-2020 and Cohort B from 2020-2025).
- Course Preference: The type of program students chose (e.g., MBA, M. Com, MCA, Other/Professional).

Results indicated a significant shift in distribution between cohorts, $\chi^2(3) = 127.7$. It shows that the distribution of program preferences was significantly different between the two cohorts. While M.Com. (regular) dominated in Cohort A (82.3%), its share declined to 47.7% in Cohort B. The emergence of 'M. Com' (with subject specialisation that is typically offered by autonomous colleges) and 'Professional courses' categories, albeit small, suggests a diversification of academic interests. This reinforces my point that mentor led career guidance influences students' preference for non-traditional commerce career pathways compared to those who do not receive such guidance.

6. HYPOTHESIS ANALYSIS

Analysis of the collected data shows that structured career guidance intervention led to a significant reduction in dropout rates among students, with statistical evidence supporting that this change is unlikely to have occurred by chance. The intervention appears to have had a substantial positive effect on student retention.

There is sufficient evidence to prove that mentor-led guidance significantly influences students' preference for non-traditional commerce career pathways.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY

There are certain limitations that may influence the interpretation and applicability of the findings.

- The limited sample size, and the fact that the sample is only from the commerce stream, restricts the extent to which the findings can be generalized to the broader population of Indian higher education students.
- This study relies on self-reported data collected from students. Self-report bias may affect the accuracy and reliability of the responses; students may have overestimated or underestimated their experiences and perceptions related to career guidance.
- Variations in institutional resources, regional socio-economic factors, and differing implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 across states and disciplines may



result in varying outcomes not reflected in this case study. Therefore, caution must be exercised when applying these results beyond the study setting.

8. STRATEGIES RECOMMENDED FOR IMPLEMENTING CAREER GUIDANCE IN 'HEI'

The need for career guidance and its positive impact on empowering youth and increasing their employability has been well established by the researcher. Higher Education Institutions (HEI) must proactively implement career guidance strategies. By integrating career guidance effectively, HEIs can empower students to adapt to the demands of the modern job market, thereby reducing unemployment and underemployment, and fostering a more skilled workforce essential for a developing nation. Listed below are some of the strategies that can be used, and customised depending upon local needs.

8.1 SETTING UP CAREER GUIDANCE, PLACEMENT, AND INCUBATION CELLS IN ALL HEIs

NEP has recommended setting up dedicated cells and incubation centres to guide students. The Training and Placement officers must phase out the grooming program such that every child is able to recognise his calibre and develop his ability to grow and shine in a highly competitive world. Incubation centres can contribute greatly in setting up ventures which through correct help and support from mentor teachers and industry may lead to successful Unicorn companies.

8.2 HIRING TRAINED CAREER COUNSELLORS

Experienced career counsellors can make a remarkable difference in the attitude and perception of young minds. Most 16- 22-year-olds have high dreams and a superficial idea of the avenues that will help them realise their dreams. Under parental and peer pressure kids are sometimes found pursuing courses that do not interest them. This crowd of disinterested students manage to find employment based on their educational degrees but add little value to their organisation. Underperforming employees have often been found to be misfits in their jobs when the job position and description do not align with their skills and job satisfaction

8.3 USING AI-BASED CAREER PLATFORMS FOR PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS, SKILL MAPPING, AND PERSONALIZED PATHWAYS

Evaluation of personality traits, skills, and interests, enables graduates to identify their strengths and weaknesses and make better-informed career choices (Weakley, 2024). Skill mapping helps candidates identify the gaps between their selected course and the skills needed to excel in that area of work. It clarifies what is needed to move from one role to another, making career transitions or advancements more attainable and less ambiguous (Mandloi, 2025). Long-term career management skills are necessary for sustained professional growth.



8.4 INTEGRATION WITH LOCAL ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT DATA

Local market trends, popularity of certain sectors, and employer needs in those sectors are key factors to be considered by career cells and mentors while grooming students. This can enable alignment of careers with actual opportunities in the area. Local data helps to know correctly which skills are in short supply, which industry is labour intensive and which industry has good growth prospects. This allows career counsellors to give training and education in relevant areas thereby improving employability and reducing skills mismatches.

Specific regional challenges can be addressed through collaboration between HEI and industry as faculty can guide students in conducting research and finding feasible solutions. Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and other similar bodies support research projects financially thus enabling students to earn a decent stipend while they develop analytical skills through practical exposure.

8.5 PROVIDING CAREER GUIDANCE IN REGIONAL LANGUAGES

Language is often a barrier for youth from the rural areas. As assistant professor in a Nagpur based commerce college, I have seen bright kids from rural areas, take a back seat when multinational companies come for placements. The reason being inability to converse in English. This kills their confidence. In the last 5 years, we took guest lectures in regional language i.e. Marathi and encouraged our MoU partners to guide our students in their mother tongue. Due to our (mentors and Training & Placement officers) persistent efforts, there has been a steady rise in the number of students from vernacular departments opting for professional degrees and making a name for themselves in the fields of business and management.

8.6 COLLABORATIONS FOR FINANCING EDUCATION

HEIs should have tie ups with banks and non-banking financial concerns (NBFC) to provide low-cost educational loan. Local government and philanthropists can be roped in to ease the financial burden of pursuing higher education.

8.7 MENTORSHIP SCHEME

Career counselling cells must be set up wherein student mentor ratio must be such that every mentor/teacher is able to do full justice to his role as a mentor. However, a potential counter-argument is that an ideal student-mentor ratio may be difficult to achieve due to faculty shortages and budget constraints in many Higher Education Institutions.

8.8 CHOICE FROM MULTIDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS



Multiple entry and exit options at graduation level must be explored from the context of multidisciplinary education. For example, a child pursuing LLB is given an option of selecting every year, a subject of equal credit from another course let us say Computer Applications, then he will be able to contribute in designing software tailored for the needs of a law firm.

8.9 STRUCTURED EXIT INTERVIEW OF STUDENTS

There should be systematic mapping of student progression post his exit from HEI. This will ensure timely help to those lagging.

9. CHALLENGES

Some of the major roadblocks in the path of HEIs acting as catalysts of change are listed as under:

- Many institutions grapple with faculty crunch. This increases the workload of the existing staff often leaving them with little time and patience to give personal attention to each student.
- Absence of trained counsellors in institutions is another grey area.
- Small institutions do not have infrastructure and finance needed to set up career cells and incubation centres.
- Institutions in rural areas are not able to attract big companies for campus placement.
- Many institutions, especially those from non-science field do not promote research culture amongst their students and faculty.
- There is no formal system of career counselling in high school. Children between the age group of 12-14 years are at a crucial age where correct guidance can help influence their mindset and encourage them to try new career avenues (Indian Express, 2024). This is the age where skills can be developed but sadly most schools in India focus more on subjects and grades rather than on skill development.

10. CONCLUSION

While the benefits of structured career guidance are many, skeptics believe that the effectiveness of these programs can differ based on implementation quality and the specific needs of students. A continuous evaluation and adaptation of career guidance initiatives must be a part of HEI policy. Only then will it have the desired strong impact.

Future research in this area can be undertaken to explore the long-term career trajectories of these students. Policy makers can use this research as a base and conduct comparative studies across different types of HEIs.

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