



Institutional Strategies for Making Graduates More Employable – Case Study

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ABSTRACT Global education sectors are undergoing considerable transformation in teaching-learning processes to make education more relevant. Most Indian graduates lack the right employability skills. The government is taking initiatives to enhance quality in the education sector of India as a whole. However, a lot needs to be done at the institutional level too. The present study was carried out with the aim of finding effective strategies to produce graduates who are knowledgeable as well as skillful, to cater to the demand of the employment sectors. The findings presented are outcome of progressive study of observations and interventions which included Bottom-top approach as well as Top-bottom approach. Present study suggests four channel strategies by which employability skills can be instilled in the graduates to equip them with the qualities sought by the employers. These institutional level strategies if implemented will foster knowledge as well as soft skills in the graduates.

INTRODUCTION

Quality over quantity needs to be the focus of education to bring about transformational change in the society. Unskilled graduates produced by most of the higher education sectors of India are a matter of grave concern. India has highest number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and second largest student population. However, when it comes to employability these graduates are found to lack the necessary skills sought by the employment sector (Everitt 2014). A survey made by McKinsey Global Institute (2015) indicates that less than 15percent general graduates in India are globally employable as compared to 80 percent in Germany, UK and Japan and 81percent in US. The present employment sectors expect workers to have higher level of skills. Hence, the Indian students face serious challenges when they seek employment. In view of this, the government has over period of time revised and introduced multiple initiatives to revolutionize the education sector. Timely educational reforms and long-term plans for

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bringing in quality in curriculum, teaching accountability, extensive use of ICT in teaching, introduction of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have been incorporated in the education policy of India. Despite these initiatives, the HEIs failed to deliver quality education emphasized in the Higher Education vision documents because of multiple factors. Both general and professional colleges need to realize that this is a serious issue which demands drastic policy reforms and interventions to accelerate skill development even at the institution level. Many countries also emphasize the need to have teaching excellence framework and also need to measure its effectiveness (Perkins 2019). Need for synergizing the government policies with institutional strategies is emphasized in the study of Trilokekar and Masri (2016). Higher education institutes should therefore, rapidly change and evolve to provide employment opportunities to students by focusing on developing strategies for skill development in graduates. In India, there needs to be a paradigm shift in degree being “knowledge gaining process” to “knowledge and skills enhancement process”.

To do this, multiple initiatives are required by the institution. There is no clear road map to showcase strategy of making graduates employable. Therefore, the present study was undertaken with the objective of sketching a roadmap for chalking out the initiatives and explaining the ways and means by which soft skills can be instilled and enhanced in the graduates at institutional level. The present study represents a case model adopted at Parvatibai Chowgule College to foster knowledge and soft skills in the graduates.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present paper is outcome of progressive study of observations and interventions to improvise teaching-learning-evaluation processes in Parvatibai Chowgule College, an autonomous, graduate and post graduate degree college in Goa, India. The study involved two approaches. i) Bottom-top approach: where effort was taken by the faculty to transform teaching-learning processes to embed skill based activities and to foster employability skills in the students. ii) Top-Bottom approach: where systematic initiatives were taken up by the higher authorities of the institute to bring about the transformation. The study was conducted for a period of six years from 2013-14 to 2018-19, and the effectiveness of the initiatives was measured by comparing the data of students' progression, employment and feedback from the employers. Analysis of the observations helped us to bring a constructive change through the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of the institute. The interventions and initiatives taken brought a qualitative change in education. It empowered the graduates with skills such as writing, communication and interpersonal skills, irrespective of the graduates' majoring degree.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is a striking lack of consensus in the literature on how to define teaching excellence in higher education (Gunn and Fisk 2013; Land and Gordon 2015). It's a relative term and the strategies to be adopted depends on whether it is developed or developing country. In the Indian education system, the teaching learning pro-

cesses need to be relooked into seriously if we want to make graduates more employable. Even the current evaluation system needs to change as it mainly focuses on assessing the students for their 'memorizing' ability. The present study associates quality of higher education with change in the Teaching-Learning-Evaluation processes facilitate install skills in the students. There is an urgent need to provide soft skills to graduates along with subject skills and knowledge. This study discusses the interventions initiated at the present Institute, to bring about changes in the processes to instil employability skills in the graduates (Fig.1). The researchers suggest that these interventions can be discussed at four levels, viz. 'C-T-F-E', that is, Curriculum redesigning (C), Teaching-learning-evaluation processes (T), Faculty training and orientation (F) and creating conducive 'Environment' for learning (E).

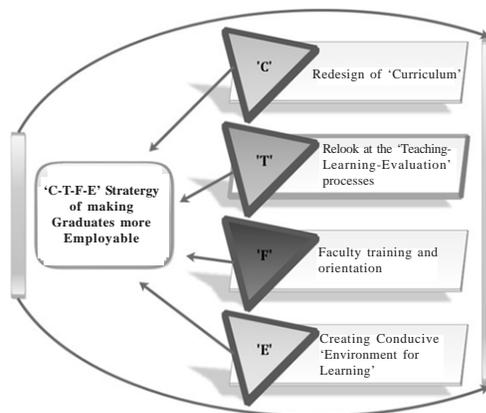


Fig. 1. C-T-F-E four point strategy for institutions to make graduates employable

Source: Nandkumar Sawant and Nandini Vaz Fernandes

A. Curriculum Redesigning (C)

There is an urgent need to relook at the curriculum in HEIs to make it impart skills in the students. Research of Lauder and Bliip (2013) shows connection between skills and employment. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and development (2012), have shown that there is a fundamental change in employment with rise in the demand for non-routine cognitive

and interpersonal skills rather than routine cognitive and repetitive physical tasks. Research of Sawant (2016) highlights issues and challenges of changing demographics, education and employability. His studies emphasized the need for incorporation of soft skills in higher education, to generate skilled employable workforce. Schulz (2008) suggested that a formal approach to tackle problem of skill deficit would be to incorporate soft skill subjects into the curriculum as the success lies in having mastery of soft skills once employed. Thus, considering the need for instilling soft skills in the students, the course structure of Chowgule College was restructured to accommodate such soft-skill embedding courses for empowering students. Irrespective of the subject they were majoring in, the curriculum consisted of special foundation courses such as Research Writing, Communication Skills, Cyber Security, Basic Statistics and Academic Writing as compulsory courses (Fig. 2). Writing skills, communication skills, critical thinking skills and interpersonal skills are of utmost importance for employers. These courses will therefore, enable student to attain commu-

nication skills, understand ethics, gain professionalism, develop scientific temper and be more skillful in interpersonal interactions. We therefore feel that it is essential for students to learn these general background courses imparting soft skills besides their subject courses which impart academic skills.

Being an autonomous institute, we were able to redesign the curriculum of the courses considering the needs of the employment sectors. Suggestions received from the employers, alumni and investigation of prospective job avenues in the industrial/employment sector for the graduates helped us in redesigning the curriculum. Internships/on job trainings were introduced as compulsory component, considering the inputs received from industry, community organizations and stakeholders. Mok and Neubauer (2016) also stated the need for improved synergy between the academic institutions and enterprises for promoting innovation, knowledge transfer, and different kinds of entrepreneurial activities. The importance of internships was emphasized by researchers in past which states that work experience and internships improve employability

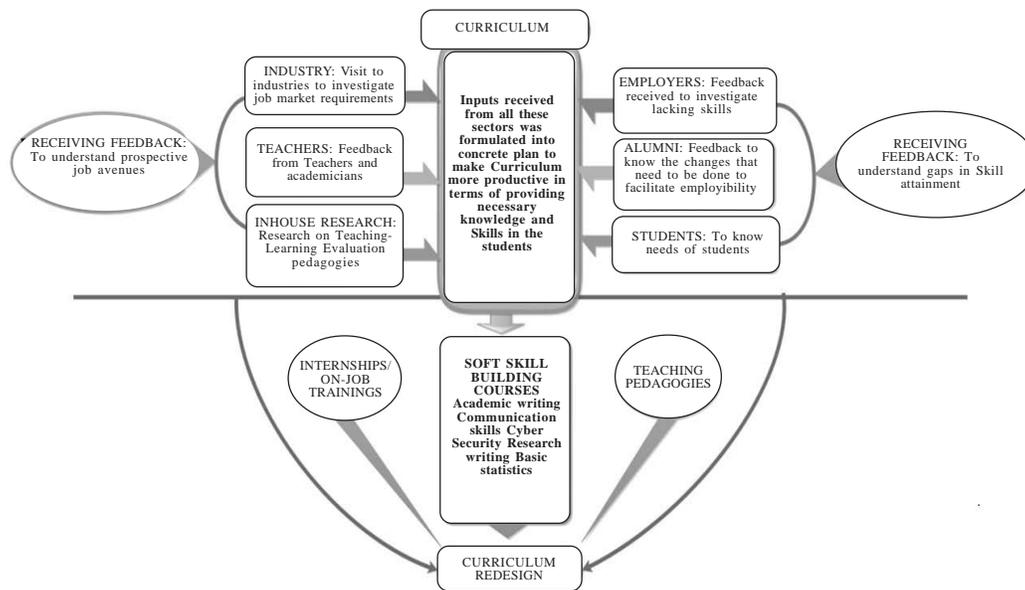


Fig. 2. Roadmap for curriculum redesign

Source: Nandkumar Sawant and Nandini Vaz Fernandes

chances (Kinash et al. 2016). We therefore, state that there is a strong need for higher education institutes to redesign their curriculum by incorporating compulsory foundation courses to introduce and enhance soft skills and by inclusion of internships to address the need of the employment sectors.

B. Relook at the ‘Teaching-Learning-Evaluation’ Processes (T)

Incorporating soft skills instilling courses in the curriculum is not sufficient. The prime focus of much needed educational transformation to improve employment skills, also calls for change in the teaching-learning-evaluation processes to help students develop soft skills. The teaching-learning-evaluation processes adopted at Chowgule College were evaluated and relooked over a period of 10 years to finally develop a method of transforming education system at institution level to enhance soft skills (Fig.3).

Adoption of teaching pedagogies which ensure development of skills in students for information collection and management, understanding and questioning, critical thinking, logical thinking, creative thinking, and knowledge application is of utmost importance. To bring about effective learning, teacher has to understand that the classroom consists of different categories of learners (Felder and Silverman 1988). Therefore, the teaching methodologies and the evaluation modes should be such that it caters to different categories of learners. According to research by the Confederation of British Industry (2011), employers seek employability skills besides academic performance. Teaching methodologies adopted by the faculty should therefore, focus on developing skills in students besides giving information. In view of this we prepared handbook of various teaching and evaluation methods for the reference of the teachers. Teachers were also trained periodically for new teaching and evaluation methods through work-

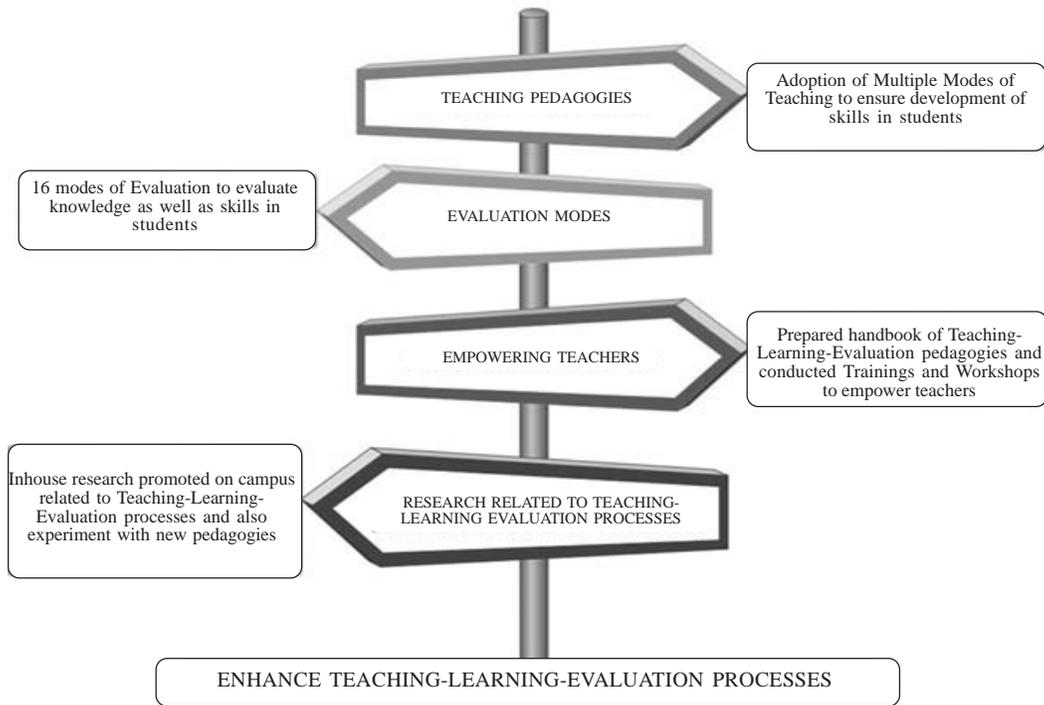


Fig. 3. Improving 'Teaching-Learning-Evaluation' processes
 Source: Nandkumar Sawant and Nandini Vaz Fernandes

shops. Introduction of group learning activities such as group assignments, problem based learning activities and other cooperative learning strategies were incorporated in the teaching-learning-evaluation processes. These activities fostering thinking skills, problem solving skills, team spirit, entrepreneur skill, and leadership skills need to be given to students whilst teaching them subject knowledge.

Evaluation of effectiveness of processes adopted is equally important. Research related to teaching-learning process is a must at the institutions if quality is to be improved. The faculty members of Chowgule College were encouraged to undertake research activities related to teaching-learning methods, quality assignment writing, peer tutoring, problem-based-learning, Process-oriented-guided-learning, Pedagogy of conducting practicals and use of ICT. The research findings were published in open access journals and the outcome was also used to improve the processes in the institute. Knowledge generated by research in education is the basis of ensuring quality of higher education. Some findings of the in-house-research is as follows: Research by Sawant et al. (2018), indicates that academic assignment writing course introduced at Chowgule College has enabled the students to learn skills such as computer skills, language and grammar, team work, mutual understanding, understanding viewpoint in different perspective. Study by Fernandes (2016) suggested that 'Multiple Teaching Mode' (MTM), is more effective mode of teaching which caters to the needs of different types of learners. MTM includes adopting teaching modes such as problem based learning, group discussions, group presentations, classroom debates, quizzes and lectures supplemented by ICT. Her study indicates that MTM improves proactive learning abilities and teaches them life skills for constructive investigation, building their team spirit and giving them opportunity to draw on their own expertise and experiences to enrich the learning process. Study by Fernandes and Sawant (2017) concludes that there is an urgent need, to relook into the teaching methodologies adopted by the teachers in higher education institutions, to make classrooms more educative and ensure effective learning. The transformation of HEIs requires a fundamental shift in how teachers ap-

proach teaching-learning processes, moving from teacher-centred model of information transfer to learner-centered 'concept-focused' and collaborative learning process (Weimer 2002). Therefore, we suggest that multiple teaching mode (MTM) be used by the teachers along with the right mixture of internships, hands on trainings, projects, group assignments and problem based learning activities to foster skills. The role of the teacher should change from 'Information provider' to 'Learning manager' (Fig. 3). Also, in-house research related to teaching-learning needs to be encouraged on the campus to improvise processes of the institute. The pedagogies of teaching and evaluation need to be continuously monitored and changed taking into consideration the findings of the in-house research related to these processes.

C. Faculty Training and Orientation (F)

In making students skillful, teachers' soft skills and subject proficiency are equally important. The attainment of these skills by the teachers will make a difference in quality of teaching and in the process of enabling students acquire the required academic and soft skills. Most teachers lack awareness of the various teaching methods that they could employ to integrate soft skills in their teaching. Therefore, it is vital to enhance soft skills and subject skills of teachers to empower them to execute their task of making graduate students more job ready. The faculty members need to be oriented to understand their changing role and responsibility. The role of the teachers is fast changing from 'information provider' to 'learning manager' to enhance learning and act as a facilitator to develop skills in students for information collection and management, understanding, reasoning, analyzing, questioning and planning the required action. Teacher should also be a means of instilling critical thinking, logical thinking, creative thinking skills and teaching knowledge application. Considering all these aspects, teachers need to be flexible to incorporate ever-changing new teaching technologies as per the needs of the rapidly changing society. A good teacher is said to be the one who adopts teaching that correlates with the educational institution's mission statement (Webbstock 1999). If the institution has a mis-

sion of improvising teaching-learning processes or enhancing quality of education, then teachers are expected to cooperate totally to achieve those objectives. Therefore, teachers have to have the knowledge of different pedagogies of teaching and also understand that there are different types of learners in a classroom. But, in most of the Indian HEIs the teachers are oblivion to the teaching methodologies to cater to different types of learners and so also the pedagogies involved, because teachers of colleges and universities do not have a formal degree in Education as it is not mandatory. This a major concern because faculty members in higher education need to also have the skills and attributes necessary to successfully use new technologies and incorporate them into course delivery. Therefore, to cover up these lacunae short term trainings and workshops related to pedagogies of teaching and learning were conducted. The aim was to empower the faculty members with teaching and evaluation tools and techniques to foster and enhance soft skills. The

IQAC of the college also prepared a faculty handbook on teaching-learning-evaluation techniques describing the processes of teaching and evaluation. Training faculty is essential for mainstreaming the new modes into the conventional provision. The researchers therefore, suggest that training higher education teachers to have effective pedagogical skills for delivering student learning outcomes, cater to different type of learners and design activities to instil soft skills in students is essential. Thus, faculty members themselves need to have the necessary soft skills to impart quality education to the students.

D. Creating Conducive ‘Environment’ for Learning (E)

The fourth factor which needs to be considered to transform higher education sector, for enhancing skills in graduates is creating an environment which is conducive for learning. Following strategies were adopted to provide a good learning environment (Fig. 4).

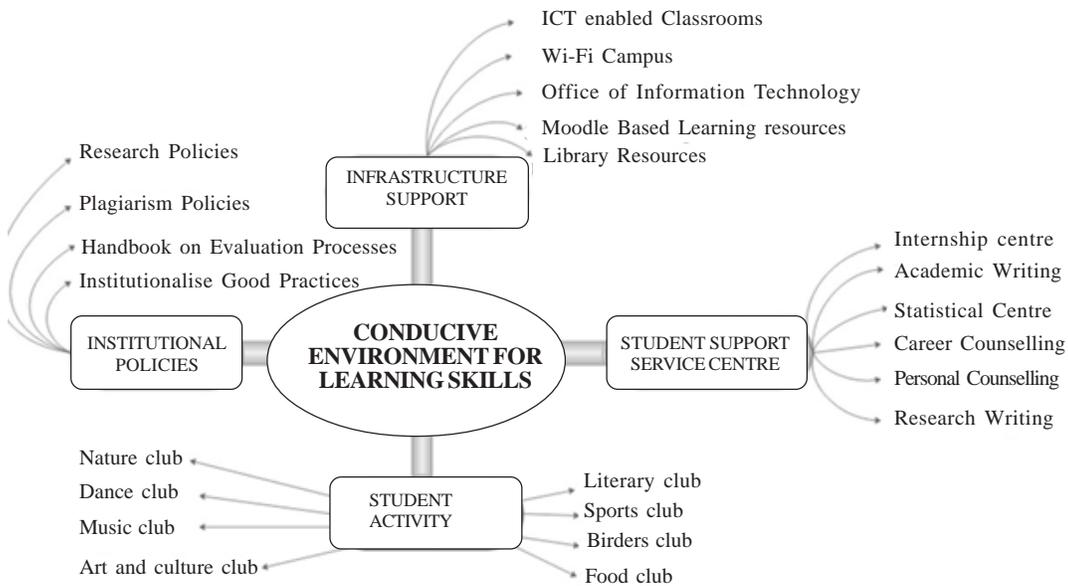


Fig. 4. Conducive environment for enhancing skills
 Source: Nandkumar Sawant and Nandini Vaz Fernandes

1) *Institutional Policies*

Bringing about reforms in the curriculum, teaching-learning processes and orienting faculty may not be adequate, if necessary, measures are not taken to see that there is a coherence of excellence across the disciplines of the institute. Various studies emphasize the need for institutional policies for quality enhancement and for academic integrity (Park 2007; Trowler and Bamber 2007). Therefore, for efficient implementation institutional policies were formulated for maintaining the quality of teaching and monitoring the processes at different levels. Framing institutional policies assured that everybody took responsibility that their own work met the expectations and specifications of the institute. The college took proactive measures in policy designing, developing action plans and implementing means to enhance the design, content and delivery of the programmes within departments or institution as a whole. Therefore, establishing centralized institutional policies is prerequisite for ensuring cohesion of excellence in an institute.

2) *Infrastructure Support*

Providing the appropriate resources and infrastructure for effective teaching-learning is crucial to establish effectiveness of the revisions proposed in the curriculum. Updating and integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for teaching and learning purposes is essential (Stensaker et al. 2007). In the present study, the classrooms and laboratories in the institute were ICT enabled. The campus too was made Wi-Fi enabled. The institution also established special audio-visual aided auditoriums and specialized research labs. As per the institutional policy, learning resources were made accessible to the students by the course faculty on moodle based tool called 'CLAAP' (Chowgule's Learn Anytime Any Place). CLAAP was likewise a medium where course curriculum, learning objectives, assessment dates and modes, laboratory manuals/journals, class and lab policies were uploaded for each course by the concerned course faculty. Extensive usage of ICT creates conducive learning environment for students. Providing infrastructural support in the

classrooms and laboratories empowers the educators to execute different pedagogical processes expected from them.

3) *Student Support Service Centre*

Most of the Indian students entering higher education are not acquainted with problem-solving skills or thinking skills in the secondary school education. Therefore, they are required to be taught these proficiencies. Students also need to be oriented to recognize the need for being proactive and master the competences that are expected as learning outcome. To attain this objective and to empower them to obtain skills more productively, the institute initiated 'Student support service' (SSS), a unique help section for students consisting of 'Writing Centre' and 'Career Counselling centre' 'Personal Counselling' and 'Statistical section' (Fig. 4). The SSS provided all assistance to students for augmenting their communication skills, academic writing skills and personality development. Year wise visits of the students at the writing centre are given in Table 1. This is indicative that there are significant number of students visiting the writing centre for the academic assignment or dissertation work or avail the services offered. It further serves as a centre for faculty members to avail expertise in soft skills which they may not be equipped with. SSS enables students to achieve holistic development. An urgent need for holistic excellence higher education sectors of Asia is also indicated in research of Mok and Nelson (2013). Hence, setting up 'Student Support Service' to create conducive environment for learning is prerequisite for enhancing skills in students.

Table 1: Year wise visit of the students at the Writing Centre

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total visits</i>	<i>New students/clients</i>
2011-12	1217	314
2012-13	1267	323
2013-14	1300	360
2014-15	1311	301
2015-16	1600	426
2016-17	943	364
2017-18	932	429
2018-19	1314	463

4) Activity Clubs of Students

Extracurricular community engagement is claimed to enhance a graduate's employability by combining experiential learning, course-work and perhaps community service. The college established 24 activity clubs for students such as nature club, dance club, music club, art and culture club, literary club, sports club, birders club and so on. These clubs provided opportunities for students to enhance their leadership skills, communication skills, task execution skills, recognize their responsibilities and builds teamwork spirit thus building their emotional intelligence. The contribution of emotional intelligence and social support is essential for adaptive career progress (Di Fabio and Kenny 2015). Student engagement activities need to be conceptualized as behaviour change activity which will impact the overall development of a student (Wilson et al. 2018). Therefore, introduction of such effective engagement programmes through establishment of various activity clubs by HEIs is essential.

CONCLUSION

The teaching-learning-evaluation processes of higher education institutes need to fixate on instilling and testing students on the marketable skills rather than just providing them subject knowledge through a degree. The C-T-F-E four key strategy adopted by Chowgule College can be viewed as an efficient mechanism of transforming higher education to bridge the gap the evident of skills in the graduates in Indian Institutions. These initiatives will empower students to attain problem-solving skills, recognize impact of their actions and take responsibility, have good communication skills, learn to analyse opportunities and make decisions, develop a sense of self-awareness and appreciation for others, work efficiently as a team and learn technique of time and people management. The strategies represented in this study will permit Indian higher education sectors to bridge the industry-academia gap, thereby making Indian graduates more employable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To revolutionize the education system to make graduates more employable, the institutions need

to take proactive role in redesigning curriculum to make it current, embed soft skills in the curriculum, adopt multiple teaching methodologies, embrace different modes of assessments, use teaching-learning-evaluation pedagogies to incorporate activities to enhance soft skills, orient faculty members to recognize their role, impart need based trainings to empower faculty, establish institutional policies for ensuring cohesion of excellence in an institute and finally create conducive environment for students to learn by developing the infrastructure and establishing Student Support Service centre.

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