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Q7

"'Earn while you learn' scheme needs to be strengthened to make vocational education and skill training meaningful." Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · GS II · 10 marks · Health, Education and Human Resources

Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector / Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Core demand of the question

- "'Earn while you learn' scheme needs to be strengthened to make vocational education and skill training meaningful." Comment
- Honour the official stem. Use **NEP 2020** and apprenticeship as the policy spine
- Keep the explanation within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Earn-while-you-learn is the missing wage-and-workplace limb of vocational education.

NEP 2020 wants internships and vocational integration; the Apprenticeship Act and **PMKVY** are the older tools.

Without stipends, poor students exit training and industry keeps unused certificates.

Strengthen by credit-linked paid apprenticeships, completion-tied incentives, and one national portal.

Meaningful skill is supervised hours on pay, not a second-class classroom stream.

Introduction

Vocational education fails when it is a classroom without a wage and a workplace. 'Earn while you learn' - internships, apprenticeships and campus jobs - is how skill training becomes a livelihood path rather than a second-class stream, and **NEP 2020** has already named that need.

Body**Why the scheme is necessary**

- Stigma still treats ITI and vocational courses as a residual after the academic board exam; a stipend and a real employer break that stigma better than a poster.
- Without earning, rural and poor students exit training to casual labour, so the National Skills Qualifications Framework never gets hours on the machine.
- Industry complains of unemployable graduates while refusing to pay learners; earn-while-you-learn is the bargain that aligns both sides.

NEP and the apprenticeship spine

- **NEP 2020** asks for internships, bagless days, and integration of vocational education from the school years, plus multiple entry-exit in higher education, which only works if workplaces take

learners on pay.

- The **Apprenticeship Act**, National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme, **PMKVY**, and internship credits in universities are the existing instruments; they are patchy in coverage and in stipend discipline.
- Dual-system models (workplace plus institute) used in pockets of manufacturing and in some polytechnics show that meaningful skill is hours under a supervisor, not only a certificate.

How to strengthen it

- Make a paid apprenticeship or internship a credit requirement for vocational qualifications, with a statutory minimum stipend indexed to the State floor wage.
- Give firms a simple tax or **PMKVY**-linked incentive that is paid only after completion and trainee placement, to cut ghost seats.
- **Recommendation:** one national 'earn while you learn' window that unifies apprenticeship portals, NEP internship credits, and campus part-time work, so the student does not navigate five schemes to get one wage.

Flow diagram

NEP 2020 vocational integration -> Earn while you learn
Apprenticeship Act and NAPS -> Earn while you learn
Earn while you learn -> Stipend workplace hours
Stipend workplace hours -> Meaningful skill and livelihood

Conclusion

- **The statement is sound:** vocational education and skill training become meaningful when the learner is paid to practise in a real firm. **NEP 2020** and the apprenticeship laws already point that way; they need a unified stipend, credit and placement spine, not another orphan scheme name.

Facts & figures

NEP 2020

Policy that integrates vocational education, internships and multiple entry-exit into the mainstream academic path.

Apprenticeship Act / NAPS

Legal and promotional frame for on-the-job training with a stipend.

PMKVY

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana; short-term skilling that still needs workplace earning to stick.

NSQF

National Skills Qualifications Framework that levels vocational competence; empty without logged workplace hours.

ITI / polytechnic dual models

Existing institute-industry pairings that show earn-while-you-learn can work when firms actually take trainees.

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