

# The Present Education System and Unemployment Problems in Assam

Abu Shama Ahmed

Department of Education, Chhamaria Anchalik College, Kamrup, Assam, India

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## Abstract

Education is widely regarded as an instrument for human development, social mobility and economic transformation. Yet, the expansion of educational participation in Assam has not automatically produced adequate employment opportunities for all educated youth. This paper examines the relationship between the present education system and unemployment in Assam, with particular attention to the transition from education to work, employability, vocational preparation, regional inequalities, skill mismatch, and the changing requirements of the labour market. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical approach based on secondary sources, including government reports, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), the Economic Survey of Assam, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, and official information on skill-development initiatives. Recent official evidence indicates that Assam's unemployment rate for persons aged 15 years and above on usual status was 3.9 per cent in 2023–24, compared with 3.2 per cent at the all-India level; urban female unemployment was particularly high at 11.8 per cent. The paper argues that the problem cannot be explained simply by a shortage of educational institutions. It is connected with the quality and relevance of education, limited work-integrated learning, weak career guidance, concentration of aspirations on formal government employment, uneven access to technology and skills, and the limited capacity of local economies to absorb educated workers. The paper proposes stronger vocational and skill education, industry–institution partnerships, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship education, career counselling, digital and communication skills, local employment mapping, and closer coordination among educational institutions, government and employers. The study concludes that Assam needs an education-to-employment framework that combines academic knowledge with practical competence, entrepreneurship and lifelong learning.

**Keywords:** education system; unemployment; educated youth; employability; skill development; vocational education; assam; nEP 2020; entrepreneurship

## 1 Introduction

Education performs functions that extend beyond the transmission of information. It develops knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, social competence and the capacity to participate productively in society. In a developing and geographically diverse state such as Assam, education is also closely related to aspirations for secure employment and upward social mobility. However, the expansion of schooling and higher education creates a serious policy challenge when the labour market does not generate sufficient opportunities or when graduates do not possess the competencies required by available occupations.

The employment problem in Assam has several dimensions. There is open unemployment among educated persons, underemployment among workers who accept jobs below their qualifications, seasonal and disguised unemployment in rural areas, and a growing transition problem in which young people spend longer periods acquiring qualifications without a corresponding improvement in

access to decent work. The Assam Economic Survey has repeatedly identified the size of educated job seekers as an important challenge. Its 2023–24 edition reported a rural unemployment rate of 7.69 per cent and an urban rate of 13.32 per cent for February 2023 using the cited source series, while also reporting a large registered pool of educated job seekers. These figures are not directly comparable with the later PLFS annual usual-status estimates because the concepts and reference periods differ; nevertheless, they illustrate the significance of employment pressure in the state.

The present study therefore treats education and unemployment as interconnected but not identical phenomena. Education can improve employability, but employment outcomes also depend on economic structure, investment, labour demand, geographical mobility, gender norms, and information about vacancies, wages, transport, digital access and the quality of institutions.

## 2 Rationale of the study

Assam has experienced expansion in access to school and higher education, yet the transition from education to productive employment remains difficult for many young people. The issue deserves systematic examination because prolonged unemployment among educated youth can reduce household income, delay independent adulthood, encourage migration, increase dependence on public-sector recruitment and weaken confidence in education as a pathway to social mobility.

The National Education Policy 2020 provides an important policy framework because it seeks to reduce rigid separation between academic and vocational education, promote multidisciplinary learning, strengthen practical exposure, integrate vocational education and improve employability. The relevance of these ideas is particularly strong for Assam, where local economic opportunities vary widely across urban, rural, riverine, tea-growing, hill and border areas.

## 3 Objectives of the study

- To examine the major characteristics of the present education system in Assam in relation to employability.
- To analyse the major causes and dimensions of unemployment among educated youth in Assam.
- To identify important gaps between educational preparation and labour-market requirements.
- To examine the relevance of vocational education, skill development and entrepreneurship education for reducing unemployment.
- To suggest practical measures for strengthening the education-to-employment transition in Assam.

## 4 Research questions

- What features of the present education system influence the employability of young people in Assam?
- What are the major causes of educated unemployment in the state?
- To what extent can vocational, digital, entrepreneurial and work-integrated learning address the education–employment gap?
- What institutional and policy measures can improve the transition from education to decent work?

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## 5 Methodology

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature and is based entirely on secondary data and documentary analysis. Major sources include the Government of India's PLFS materials, the Ministry of Education's documents on NEP 2020 and higher education, the Economic Survey of Assam, and official information published by Assam's Skill, Employment & Entrepreneurship Department and Assam Skill Development Mission. The study interprets published evidence in relation to education, employability and unemployment rather than attempting to generate a new unemployment estimate. Particular care is taken to distinguish statistics based on different concepts, reference periods and survey methods.

The analysis is organised thematically around five dimensions: educational access and quality; skill mismatch; labour-market structure; social and regional factors; and policy responses. Since the paper uses secondary sources, its conclusions should be understood as analytical propositions rather than causal estimates.

## 6 Present education system in Assam and the employability question

### 6.1 Expansion with continuing quality challenges

The contemporary education system in Assam includes government, provincialised, private and other institutions across school, higher secondary, higher and technical education. Expansion has improved access, but access alone does not ensure learning quality or employability. The key question has shifted from whether young people can enter education to what they learn, how they learn it, whether learning is retained and applied, and whether institutions help students understand real occupational pathways.

NEP 2020 explicitly emphasises conceptual understanding, critical thinking, creativity, communication, teamwork, resilience, technology and multidisciplinary learning. These competencies are important because employers increasingly expect workers to combine domain knowledge with transferable skills.

### 6.2 Examination orientation and the employability gap

A persistent concern in the Indian education system is the dominance of examination-oriented learning. When students primarily prepare to reproduce prescribed content, opportunities to practise problem solving, communication, collaboration, project work and workplace behaviour may be reduced. Such a pattern can produce formally qualified candidates who nevertheless require substantial additional training after recruitment.

This does not mean that academic education is irrelevant to employment. On the contrary, literacy, numeracy, disciplinary knowledge and higher-order thinking are foundations of productive work. The problem arises when academic certification is not accompanied by opportunities to apply knowledge in authentic contexts.

### 6.3 Vocational and skill education

NEP 2020 calls for vocational education to be integrated into mainstream education and proposes exposure to vocational learning from school onwards. It also stresses that vocational areas should be selected through skill-gap analysis and mapping of local opportunities. This approach is particularly

relevant to Assam because employment possibilities are linked to agriculture and allied activities, handloom and textiles, tourism, healthcare, retail, construction, transport, food processing, information technology, services and emerging enterprises.

Assam has already expanded school-level skill education. Samagra Shiksha Assam reports NSQF-aligned skill education in 1,741 secondary and higher-secondary schools, covering 14 sectors and 30 job roles, with reported enrolment of 2,62,091 students in 2024–25. This demonstrates an institutional base upon which a stronger education-to-employment model can be built.

## **7 Unemployment situation in Assam**

Unemployment should be interpreted through appropriate statistical concepts. According to a Lok Sabha response based on the latest annual PLFS reports available for the cited period, the unemployment rate for persons aged 15 years and above on usual status in Assam was 1.7 per cent in 2022–23 and 3.9 per cent in 2023–24, compared with 3.2 per cent nationally in 2023–24. The same response reported 2023–24 unemployment rates of 3.6 per cent for rural males, 3.5 per cent for rural females, 5.7 per cent for urban males and 11.8 per cent for urban females in Assam.

The figures require careful interpretation. A low overall unemployment rate does not necessarily imply adequate employment quality. People may work fewer hours than desired, accept low-productivity work, remain outside the labour force, or engage in unpaid family work. Educated youth may also remain unemployed while waiting for jobs that match their qualifications and aspirations. Consequently, education policy should consider employment quality, earnings, occupational mobility and productivity, not unemployment alone.

## **8 Major causes of educated unemployment in Assam**

### **8.1 Skill mismatch**

One major explanation is mismatch between what educational institutions provide and what employers require. Graduates may possess subject knowledge but lack digital competence, spoken and written communication, data handling, customer relations, teamwork, problem solving, occupational certification or practical experience. The mismatch can operate in both directions: employers may struggle to find appropriately skilled candidates while graduates struggle to find suitable work.

### **8.2 Limited work-integrated learning**

Internships, apprenticeships, field projects, community-based learning and industry-linked assignments remain less widespread than classroom instruction. Without early exposure to workplaces, students may have limited understanding of recruitment practices, occupational expectations and professional conduct.

### **8.3 Preference for formal government employment**

Government employment has strong attraction in Assam because it is associated with job security, social status and predictable career progression. Public recruitment, however, cannot absorb all educated job seekers. Excessive concentration of aspirations on a relatively narrow segment of employment can lengthen the waiting period after graduation and contribute to credential inflation.

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#### **8.4 Weak entrepreneurship orientation**

Education frequently prepares students to seek employment rather than to identify problems, develop services, mobilise resources and create employment. Entrepreneurship requires financial literacy, market awareness, digital marketing, risk assessment, communication and mentoring in addition to technical competence.

#### **8.5 Regional and infrastructure constraints**

Assam's geography creates unequal access to institutions, transport, markets, digital infrastructure and employment networks. Flood-prone and char areas, remote rural communities and economically weaker households may face additional barriers to continuous education and labour-market participation. Educational planning therefore needs a strong local and regional perspective.

#### **8.6 Gender-related barriers**

Women can face constraints related to mobility, safety, unpaid care work, occupational segregation and access to suitable workplaces. The 2023–24 PLFS figures cited above show a particularly high urban female unemployment rate in Assam, indicating the importance of gender-responsive employment and skill policies.

#### **8.7 Insufficient career guidance**

Many students make educational choices without systematic information about occupations, skill requirements, earnings, career progression or emerging sectors. Career counselling should therefore begin before graduation and continue through higher education.

### **9 Education–employment relationship: An analytical discussion**

The relationship between education and employment is not linear. More years of education can raise productivity and expand occupational choices, but the benefits depend on learning quality and labour demand. If the number of degree holders grows faster than suitable jobs, the result can be graduate unemployment, underemployment or employment in occupations unrelated to the field of study.

The Assam context suggests that educational reform should therefore be combined with economic diversification. Improving curricula without expanding productive sectors will have limited effect. Similarly, creating jobs without strengthening the capabilities of potential workers can produce recruitment difficulties and costly post-hiring training.

The appropriate policy goal is an integrated education-to-employment ecosystem. Schools and colleges should provide foundational and disciplinary knowledge; skill institutions should provide occupational competence; employers should provide practical exposure; government should coordinate labour-market information and incentives; and students should receive career guidance and entrepreneurship support.

### **10 Role of NEP 2020 in addressing unemployment**

NEP 2020 provides several directions relevant to Assam. First, it seeks to reduce rigid separation between academic and vocational streams. Second, it encourages multidisciplinary education and practical learning. Third, it promotes vocational exposure, internships and stronger links between educational institutions and industry. Fourth, it emphasises technology, communication, teamwork,

critical thinking and other life skills. Fifth, it encourages higher education institutions to offer short-term skill programmes and work with industry and other organisations.

The policy framework is therefore compatible with an employability-oriented reform agenda. Its success in Assam, however, depends on implementation capacity, teacher preparation, infrastructure, local employer participation, quality assurance and systematic monitoring of employment outcomes.

## 11 Existing skill and employment initiatives

Government initiatives already provide a foundation for addressing unemployment. Assam Skill Development Mission reports short-duration skill-development programmes based on identified skill gaps and states that its programmes aim to connect trained youth with employment or self-employment. Assam's Skill, Employment & Entrepreneurship Department also maintains employment-market information functions designed to collect occupational and educational profiles and identify manpower requirements.

At the school level, NSQF-aligned vocational education covers sectors such as IT/ITeS, retail, agriculture, healthcare, tourism and hospitality, beauty and wellness, automotive, electronics and hardware, apparel, telecom, food processing and power. The next step should be to strengthen the transition from training to verified employment, apprenticeship, enterprise creation and continued learning.

## 12 Major problems in the present education system related to employment

- Excessive emphasis on certification and examinations rather than demonstrable competencies.
- Insufficient integration of vocational and academic learning in many institutions.
- Limited availability and uneven quality of internships, apprenticeships and workplace exposure.
- Weak career guidance and labour-market information at school and college levels.
- Mismatch between course offerings and local/regional economic opportunities.
- Unequal digital access and varying levels of digital literacy.
- Limited entrepreneurship education and mentoring.
- Insufficient systematic tracking of graduate employment outcomes.
- Social preference for a narrow range of prestigious occupations.
- Regional, gender and socio-economic barriers affecting participation in employment.

## 13 Measures for reducing educated unemployment in Assam

### 13.1 Establish education–employment cells

Every college and larger higher-secondary institution should have a functional career and employment cell responsible for labour-market information, career counselling, internships, placement support, entrepreneurship guidance and alumni engagement.

### 13.2 Strengthen local skill mapping

District and block-level skill mapping should identify actual and emerging demand in agriculture, food processing, handloom, tourism, healthcare, logistics, digital services, construction, renewable energy and other sectors. Courses should be periodically adjusted according to evidence.

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### **13.3 Expand apprenticeships and internships**

Employers, colleges, universities, ITIs and skill institutions should collaborate to create structured apprenticeships. Academic credit can be linked with supervised workplace learning wherever regulations permit.

### **13.4 Make digital and communication skills universal**

Students in all streams should receive practical training in digital productivity, online communication, information evaluation, data handling, presentation, teamwork and professional writing. Such competencies complement rather than replace disciplinary knowledge.

### **13.5 Promote entrepreneurship and self-employment**

Entrepreneurship should be introduced as a practical learning process involving problem identification, market research, costing, business planning, digital marketing, financial literacy and mentoring. Local entrepreneurs and alumni can serve as mentors.

### **13.6 Strengthen women's employment pathways**

Employment policies should address safe transport, flexible work, childcare support, digital work opportunities, entrepreneurship, skill training and workplace safety. Special attention is needed where female unemployment is high.

### **13.7 Improve rural and remote access**

Mobile skill centres, community digital facilities, blended learning and decentralised career counselling can help reach students in geographically difficult areas. Local institutions should partner with community organisations and employers.

### **13.8 Introduce graduate outcome tracking**

Institutions should periodically record the proportion of graduates entering employment, self-employment, higher education, apprenticeships and other pathways. Such evidence can guide curriculum revision and institutional planning.

### **13.9 Develop stronger industry–academia partnerships**

Employers should participate in curriculum consultation, guest teaching, projects, internships, apprenticeships, assessment and placement. This can reduce the distance between academic knowledge and workplace expectations.

### **13.10 Encourage multiple pathways**

Students should be encouraged to combine degrees with certificates, micro-credentials, apprenticeships and entrepreneurial experience. Recognition of prior learning and flexible learning pathways can support lifelong employability.

## **14 Educational institutions as employment enablers**

The role of educational institutions should extend beyond examination and certification. A college can become an employment-enabling institution by connecting teaching, research, community engagement, entrepreneurship and local development. Departments can identify social and economic

problems and convert them into student projects. Education departments, for example, can work with schools on educational technology, remedial education, assessment support and teacher development; commerce departments can support financial literacy and small-enterprise planning; science departments can contribute to environmental, agricultural and health-related innovation.

Such an approach also gives meaning to multidisciplinary education. Students learn not only from textbooks but from real problems, local institutions and communities. This can improve confidence, communication, problem-solving ability and social responsibility while creating networks that may later support employment.

## 15 Discussion

The evidence reviewed in this paper indicates that unemployment in Assam cannot be attributed to the education system alone. Labour demand, economic diversification, public recruitment cycles, migration, household expectations and regional inequalities also matter. Nevertheless, education has an important mediating role because it shapes the capabilities and expectations with which young people enter the labour market.

The most promising direction is not to reduce academic education but to make it more relevant, flexible and connected with practice. A student of humanities, social science, science, commerce or education can benefit from digital literacy, communication, research methods, project management and entrepreneurial skills while retaining strong disciplinary foundations. Vocational education should similarly be treated as a respected route to skilled work rather than as a second-class alternative.

Assam also needs to move from a vacancy-centred employment culture to a capability-and-enterprise culture. Government recruitment will remain important, but sustainable employment growth requires private-sector expansion, local enterprise, cooperative activity, social entrepreneurship, agricultural value addition and digital services. Educational institutions can contribute by developing the competencies and problem-solving orientations needed for these sectors.

## 16 Conclusion

The present education system in Assam has expanded access and offers a stronger policy environment for multidisciplinary, vocational and skill-based learning than in the past. However, educated unemployment remains a significant concern because educational attainment does not automatically translate into appropriate employment. The central challenge is the transition from qualification to capability and from capability to productive work.

A comprehensive response requires coordinated reform. Curricula should emphasise application and competency; vocational education should be integrated with academic pathways; internships and apprenticeships should become more common; career counselling should be strengthened; digital and communication skills should be universal; entrepreneurship should receive practical support; and labour-market information should inform course planning. These reforms should be combined with economic policies that expand productive employment across Assam's diverse regions.

Ultimately, education should not be judged only by enrolment, examination results or degrees awarded. Its wider success should also be reflected in whether learners can think critically, work effectively, adapt to technological change, create value, participate in their communities and secure

dignified livelihoods. For Assam, building such an education-to-employment ecosystem is essential for converting its young population into a productive and resilient human resource.

### 16.1 Suggestions

- Create a state-level Education–Employment Coordination Council linking education, skill development, industry and labour departments.
- Establish functional career guidance and placement units in colleges and higher-secondary institutions.
- Make structured internship/apprenticeship opportunities a major component of employability preparation.
- Expand NSQF-aligned vocational education using district-level skill-gap and employment data.
- Introduce entrepreneurship laboratories and mentoring programmes in higher education institutions.
- Strengthen digital infrastructure and digital literacy in rural, char and geographically vulnerable areas.
- Develop gender-responsive employment programmes, particularly for young women.
- Publish institution-level graduate outcome reports to improve accountability and curriculum relevance.
- Promote local economic sectors and value-added activities alongside preparation for formal employment.
- Regularly evaluate skill programmes using employment, retention, earnings and self-employment outcomes rather than training numbers alone.

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