

## VOCATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT AMONG RURAL YOUTH IN INDIA: A LITERATURE ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

Rural areas across the globe, particularly in developing nations, often face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to quality education, and scarce economic opportunities. These barriers contribute to a cycle of poverty, restricting the development of rural youth, who constitute a substantial portion of the population and are crucial to future progress (UNFPA). In response, empowering rural youth has become a critical development priority, with vocational training programs emerging as a key strategy for enhancing their skills, employability, and overall well-being. From a social work perspective, vocational training is not merely about skill development but also about social empowerment, inclusion, and community well-being. Developing vocational skills is important for society because it helps reduce unemployment, supports entrepreneurship, and strengthens the economy, especially for young people in rural areas with fewer opportunities. Unlike regular school education, vocational training focuses on practical, job-related skills that match industry needs, helping people either find stable jobs or start their own businesses. By providing these skills, vocational training helps turn unemployment into stable and secure livelihoods, particularly in rural areas

where education and job options are limited. This not only benefits individuals but also improves society by increasing productivity, reducing inequality, and helping local communities grow in a sustainable way. This paper examines the role of vocational skill development programs in empowering rural youth in India. By conducting a literature-based analysis, it explores the contributions of NGOs, government policies, and institutional frameworks in promoting employability and entrepreneurship. The insights gained from this study, by reviewing the existing literature and relevant studies, are valuable for those working towards creating a more inclusive and skill-oriented workforce in rural India.

**Keywords:** Vocational training, Rural Youth, Skill development, NGOs, employability, Social inclusion.

### Introduction

In the rapidly evolving world of today, India is the shining beacon of a nation with significant transformational potential. India, the world's fifth-largest economy, strikes a balance between its rich customs and contemporary advancements. The necessity of utilizing its youthful population, however, stands out as a significant obstacle. With the correct guidance, India's large youth

population could help the country's ongoing development. In contrast, the truth is that unemployment is still an issue and that this youthful workforce has not yet reached its full potential. Young people are a nation's greatest asset in the modern knowledge-based economy and are seen as both prospective and current investments in the advancement of the nation. Nearly 70% of Indians reside in rural areas, and for a variety of reasons, these young people have been denied access to numerous amenities. The young people in the countryside have riches of latent abilities and are introverted, but with the right direction and counsel, they can be shaped into responsible citizens and valuable members of the country. According to the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (2015), India is one of the youngest nations in the world, with over 62% of its population in the working-age group of 15-59 years and more than 54% below the age of 25. Each year, approximately 15 million young individuals enter the job market, yet 75% of them are not adequately prepared for employment. This presents both a significant opportunity and a formidable challenge for the nation. The primary reason for this gap is the deficiency of both technical and soft skills among the working youth, which hinders their employability and career progression. Vocational education plays a crucial role in this process by providing skill-based training through various courses in fields such as healthcare, banking and finance, computer technology, trade, tourism, and more. This type of education focuses on hands-on training and practical experience, helping students gain the skills needed for

employment and self-sufficiency. Vocational education in India plays a crucial role in building a skilled and productive workforce by offering various courses tailored to the needs of the unorganized sector. It also focuses on equipping young people with self-employment skills through a diverse range of vocational programs. The goal of vocational education is to enhance individuals' independence in entrepreneurship by leveraging their abilities. Additionally, it seeks to cultivate knowledge, attitudes, and work ethics that enable individuals to meet social, political, and economic demands while aligning with their personal strengths and characteristics.

### Conceptual Framework

In India, nearly 90% of the workforce is employed in the informal sector, where jobs often lack fixed salaries, job security, and employment benefits. This includes daily wage laborers, gig workers, and small business owners who face limited access to stable career opportunities. To bridge this gap, vocational education plays a crucial role by providing hands-on training that transforms individuals into skilled professionals, such as technicians and artists. Beyond technical expertise, skill development programs focus on practical learning through real-world experience, equipping individuals with essential competencies like communication and teamwork. A well-trained workforce not only enhances employability but also fosters self-reliance, contributing to overall economic growth.

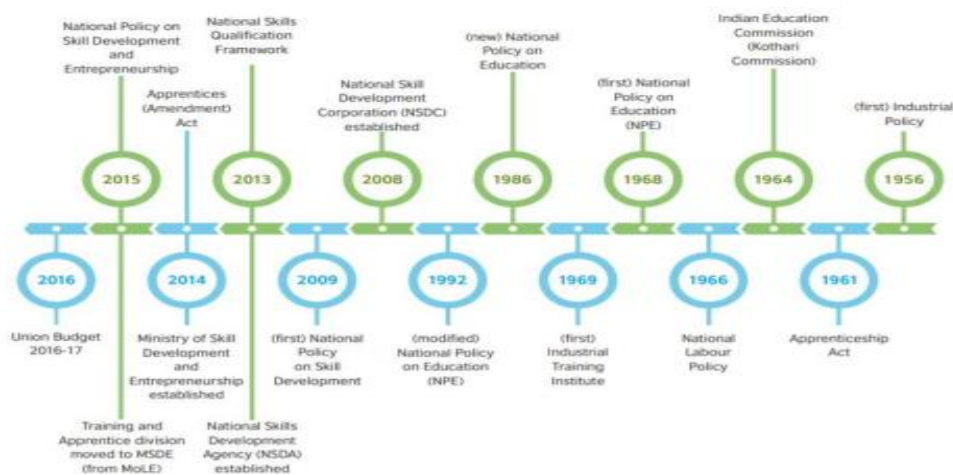
Recognizing the significance of vocational training, the National Knowledge

Commission (NKC) and the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) advocate for integrating vocational education into mainstream learning. Their emphasis on public-private partnerships and innovative teaching methods aims to make skill-based education more accessible and effective, ensuring that a larger section of the workforce is equipped with the skills needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving job market.

According to UNESCO (2015), "Vocational education and training (VET) refers to the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, and knowledge that are essential for employment or self-employment in various occupational fields."

According to IIGI-Global, "Skill Development is an aptitude and capacity developed through deliberate, sustained and systematic efforts to adaptively and smoothly carryout difficult activities involving ideas (cognitive-skills), things (technical-skills), and people (interpersonal-skills)"

"Skill development means building capacities and capabilities among the workforce through vocational training that leads to improved productivity and employment outcomes." (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of India).



### Skill Development: A Snapshot

Source: (Ernsberger, 2016)

This timeline illustrates key developments in India's skill development and education policies from 1956 to 2016. It highlights major milestones such as the establishment of the first Industrial Policy (1956), the National Policy on Education (1968, 1986, 1992), and the formation of the National Skill Development Corporation (2008).

Significant reforms include the Apprentices Act (1961), the creation of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2014), and the introduction of the National Policy on Skill Development (2009). The timeline also showcases the evolution of vocational training through industrial training institutes and national skill

frameworks. These developments emphasize India's ongoing efforts to enhance skill development and employment opportunities. Government policies, institutional frameworks, and the active involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) all have a substantial impact on the effectiveness of vocational skill development in India. Through national programs like the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY), government policies provide the foundation for boosting vocational training. With the use of financial assistance, connections with companies, and standard-setting, these strategies seek to develop a competent labor force. NGOs support these initiatives by working at the local level, spotting skill gaps in the community, organizing young people, and providing training programs that are tailored to the needs of the community. Additionally, they are essential in raising awareness, providing mentorship, and providing post-training assistance including job connections and advice on entrepreneurship. The methodological and institutional foundation for vocational education is provided by organizations such as sector-specific skill councils, vocational schools, and Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs). In order to match training with industry expectations, they are in charge of curriculum creation, certification, and cooperation with industry stakeholders. The foundation of an inclusive and successful ecosystem for vocational training is the cooperation of these three actors: institutions, NGOs, and the government. Evaluating the effects of

vocational training programs and identifying gaps that impede the socioeconomic growth of India's rural youth require a solid conceptual knowledge of this interaction.

### **Research Gap**

Even though there is a lot of talk about helping rural young people in India learn skills for jobs, there are still some problems that are not being addressed. Most of the time, people who study this stuff look at the picture and ask what the government is doing. They do not look closely enough at what is happening in specific places like Lucknow. The people and the economy in these places are very different. That makes a big difference in whether these job training programs actually work. While government programs like PMKVY and DDU-GKY have improved access to vocational training, their long-term effectiveness remains unclear, as most studies focus on placement rates rather than job retention, income stability, and career growth. Additionally, although NGOs play a key role in reaching underserved populations, there is limited comparative research on how their outcomes differ from government-led programs in terms of quality and sustainability.

Vocational skill development programs like these need to teach people skills that are not just about doing a specific job but also about working with people and using computers. They also need to think about how to use technologies, like artificial intelligence, to help people learn. But the programs are not really doing this, so people are not getting the skills they need to get jobs.

Most of the time, when people study skill development, they just look at the economics of it, like how much money it will save or make. They need to look at the social side of it too, like how it can help people feel more confident and connected to their communities. If we do not look at it this way, we will not really understand how to help young people in India. Vocational skill development is not about getting people jobs; it is about helping them have better lives.

### **Objectives of the study**

- To analyze the impact of vocational training programs on rural youth development.
- To examine the role of NGOs, government policies, and institutions in vocational training.

### **Methodology of the study**

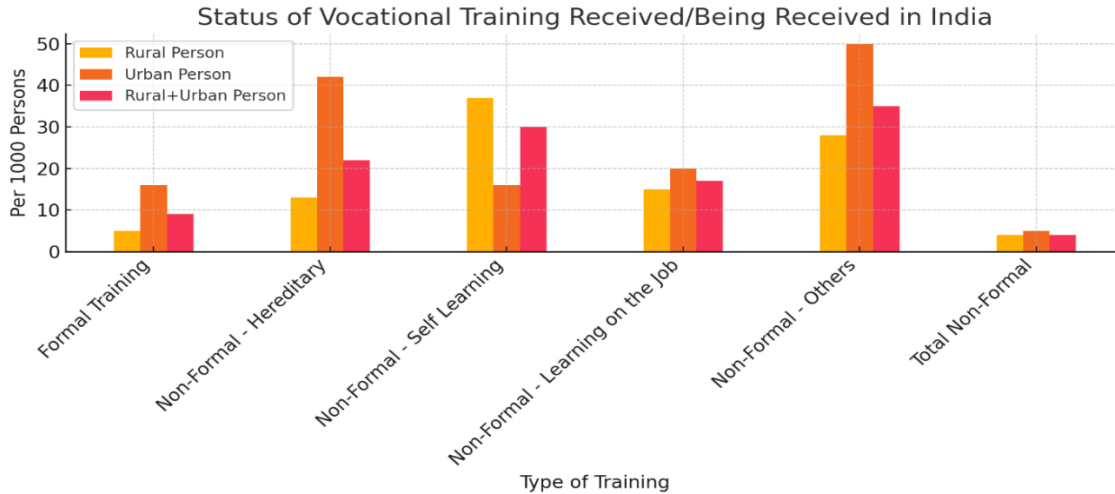
The study adopts a qualitative secondary research approach to examine vocational skill development among rural youth in India. It is exploratory in nature, aiming to develop a comprehensive understanding of existing policies, programs, and outcomes by synthesizing available literature rather than generating primary data. Data for the study is collected from a wide range of secondary sources, including government reports (such as those from the Ministry of

Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and National Skill Development Corporation), research papers, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, NGO reports, credible websites, and annual reports of regulatory bodies. These sources are selected based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the topic.

The study employs a thematic analysis method, where key themes such as employability, skill gaps, role of NGOs, policy effectiveness, and challenges in implementation are identified and analyzed across the literature. This approach helps in comparing findings from different studies and identifying patterns, trends, and inconsistencies.

### **Why Vocational Training is Essential for Rural Youth**

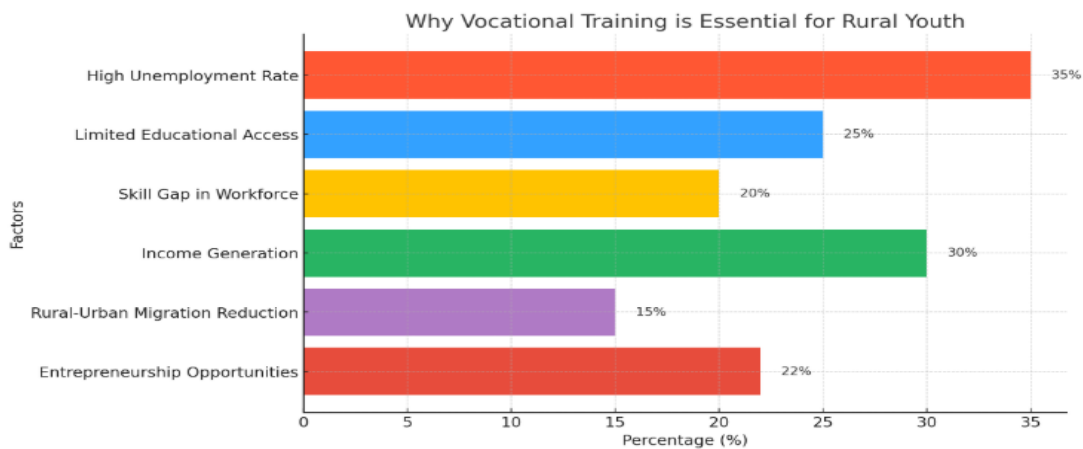
In today's swiftly transforming global landscape, the necessity of vocational skills extends far beyond the confines of urban centers, becoming an indispensable cornerstone for progress in rural areas. For young people in these communities, learning practical skills is no longer just an option—it is essential for personal growth, finding good jobs, and helping their local areas develop. This means gaining new skills and knowledge beyond regular school education, allowing them to stay competitive and succeed in a constantly changing job market.



**Source: NSS Report No. 566: Status of Education and Vocational Training in India**

The graph highlights the status of vocational training among individuals aged 15-59 in India, showing that non-formal training is more prevalent than formal training, especially in rural areas. Urban individuals have better access to formal vocational programs, while rural youth rely more on hereditary learning and on-the-job training. A significant portion of the population,

particularly in rural areas, lacks any vocational training, pointing to a gap in skill development. Gender disparities are evident, with males receiving more training than females, especially in rural regions. The findings emphasize the need for improved vocational training accessibility, particularly for rural youth and women, to enhance employability and economic growth.



**Source: ASER Centre (2022), Financial Express (2023), BORGEM Magazine (2023)**

It highlights how skill development helps reduce unemployment, bridge the education gap, and equip individuals with practical

skills for better job opportunities. Additionally, vocational training fosters entrepreneurship, enhances income

potential, and reduces migration pressures by creating local employment opportunities. Overall, it plays a crucial role in building a self-reliant and skilled workforce, contributing to economic growth and social development.

Vocational education is essential in closing skill gaps and providing a practical option to conventional education. It tackles skill shortages in the industry by providing individuals with targeted training to fulfill changing workforce needs. Through a practical, hands-on method, vocational training facilitates a smooth shift from education to job readiness. It also offers an economical and reachable educational route, enabling people to acquire important skills without facing significant financial strains. The emergence of hybrid learning, backed by online programs, has increased access, allowing learners to enhance their skills anytime and anywhere. The Skill India initiative by the Indian government has greatly aided youth empowerment through the promotion of training relevant to industries and boosting employability.

Additionally, vocational training meets industry demands, guaranteeing swift job placements and a workforce prepared for global trends, ultimately fostering economic and social advancement.

### Contributions of NGOs, Government Policies, and Institutional Frameworks

Vocational skill development has emerged as a key strategy for empowering rural youth in India by enhancing their employability, entrepreneurship capabilities, and overall socio-economic status. A well-structured vocational training ecosystem relies on the collaboration of various stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and institutional frameworks that ensure effective implementation and reach. Despite multiple initiatives, rural youth continue to face barriers such as lack of awareness, accessibility issues, inadequate infrastructure, and skill-job mismatches. This section examines the contributions of different entities in promoting vocational education and highlights the existing gaps that need attention.



The Indian government has taken significant steps to address the skill gap among rural

youth through large-scale vocational training programs. The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal

Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), introduced in 2015 under the Skill India Mission, is a flagship initiative that offers free skill training in multiple sectors, ensuring certification and placement support. As of 2023, PMKVY has trained over 13.6 million individuals, with 4.6 million successfully placed in jobs (MSDE, 2023). Similarly, the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushal Yojana (DDU-GKY), specifically designed for economically weaker rural youth, has successfully trained 1.37 million individuals, with an impressive 76% employment rate (NSDC, 2022). In addition to these national programs, state-specific initiatives such as the Uttar Pradesh Skill Development Mission (UPSDM) have also contributed to workforce enhancement by training over 2.5 million rural youth (UPSDM, 2023). The National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (NPSDE), formulated in 2015, has played a vital role in aligning vocational training with industry demands by creating 40+ Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) (Government of India, 2023). Despite these efforts, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2022 reveals that only 4.7% of India's workforce has received formal vocational training, indicating a major gap in implementation and outreach (ASER Centre, 2022). The need for better industry linkages, updated curricula, and digital training modules is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of government-led initiatives.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an essential role in filling the gaps left by government initiatives by offering localized, community-driven, and flexible vocational training programs. These

organizations focus on gender-inclusive training, entrepreneurship support, and employment-driven courses tailored to rural youth. One of the leading NGOs in skill development, Pratham, has trained over 150,000 youth across rural India in job-oriented skills such as retail, healthcare, and construction (Pratham, 2022). Additionally, SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) has empowered more than 1.5 million rural women by providing vocational training in tailoring, handicrafts, agriculture, and small-scale entrepreneurship (SEWA, 2023). Corporate-backed NGOs also contribute significantly to skill development. For instance, Tata Trusts, in collaboration with NSDC, has established 300+ vocational training centers across India, benefiting over 200,000 rural youth in sectors such as IT, retail, and construction (Tata Trusts, 2023). Reports indicate that NGO-led vocational training programs tend to have higher employment rates (55-60%) compared to government programs due to better industry tie-ups and mentorship support (ILO, 2022).

However, financial constraints, lack of scalability, and dependence on donor funding pose challenges to NGO-led vocational training initiatives. According to an ILO 2022 study, 60% of NGOs struggle with sustainable funding, which affects their ability to expand training centers and improve infrastructure (ILO, 2022). Strengthening public-private partnerships and CSR-driven funding mechanisms could help NGOs increase their outreach and improve the quality of skill training.

A strong institutional framework is essential for ensuring quality control, certification, and industry alignment in vocational training programs. In India, the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) is the primary agency responsible for coordinating and standardizing skill development programs. It has partnered with over 500 training providers and 40 Sector Skill Councils (SSCs), training more than 30 million individuals since its inception (NSDC, 2022). Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) play a crucial role in defining skill competency standards and ensuring industry alignment in vocational training. They cover various industries, including healthcare, IT, agriculture, construction, and electronics, helping to bridge the gap between training and employment (FICCI, 2023). The National Education Policy (NEP 2020) has introduced significant reforms by integrating vocational training into mainstream education. It mandates that 50% of students in higher education must have vocational exposure by 2025, emphasizing skill-based learning from an early stage (NEP, 2020). The introduction of blended learning models, digital training platforms, and credit-based vocational courses aims to enhance skill accessibility for rural youth. Despite these structured frameworks, PLFS 2022 highlights that only 2.4% of rural youth have received formal skill training, indicating the urgent need for better outreach, awareness campaigns, and digital infrastructure development (FICCI, 2023). Strengthening industry-institution collaborations and ensuring flexible learning models can help improve vocational training participation rates among rural youth.

**Success Story:** A vocational training program in Bihar effectively trained 2,162 individuals in the healthcare field, emphasizing positions like General Duty Assistants and Home Health Aides. Among these, 1,483 were female and 679 were male, underscoring a significant focus on gender inclusiveness. The program offered thorough instruction in CPR, First Aid, Pathology, Bio-Waste Disposal and Management, as well as practical experience in tracking vital signs such as blood pressure, heartbeat, and pulse. This project expanded to additional states, such as Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Jammu & Kashmir, and Uttar Pradesh, showcasing its scalability. Boasting an impressive 81% placement rate in sectors like healthcare, hospitality, and retail, this program serves as an effective model for skill-oriented employment. It demonstrates how focused vocational training can fill skill shortages, improve job prospects, and foster economic empowerment for young people in rural areas.

Vocational training is a crucial driver of economic empowerment and social mobility for rural youth in India. While government policies, NGOs, and institutional frameworks have made significant strides in skill development, persistent challenges such as funding limitations, industry alignment, and accessibility gaps must be addressed. Strengthening public-private collaborations, enhancing digital learning, and ensuring demand-driven training programs can bridge these gaps and create sustainable employment opportunities. A well-structured vocational training ecosystem will not only equip rural youth

with essential skills but also contribute to national economic growth and inclusive development.

### Conclusion

This study effectively meets its goals by investigating how vocational training programs affect rural youth and exploring the contributions of NGOs, government policies, and institutions in enhancing skill development. The results show that vocational training boosts job prospects, raises income levels, and encourages entrepreneurship in rural youth. Government programs such as PMKVY, DDU-GKY, and NSDC have been vital in increasing training prospects, whereas NGOs and private organizations have filled gaps by offering localized and adaptable initiatives. Additionally, the research emphasizes the difficulties encountered in vocational training, such as insufficient awareness, poor infrastructure, and mismatches between skills and job requirements. To tackle these deficiencies, we need more robust policy execution, improved cooperation among stakeholders, and greater investment in digital education and industry collaborations. Going ahead, a comprehensive and inclusive strategy will be crucial to guarantee that vocational training serves as a lasting solution for empowering rural youth and fostering economic growth in India.

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