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Impact of Skill Development Programs on Employability and Workforce Productivity

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of skill development programs on employability and workforce productivity in India using recent national data, programme evaluations, and labour market assessments. Amid rapid digital transformation, demographic expansion, and changing industry requirements, skill development has become a central policy instrument for improving employment outcomes and economic efficiency. India's national employability has shown measurable improvement with the India Skills Report-2025 reporting an employability rate of 54.81%, reflecting advances in digital literacy, industry-aligned competencies, and sector-specific up-skilling initiatives. Government-led interventions such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), including its successive phases, along with the Skill India Mission and state-level programmes, have trained millions of youths across formal and informal sectors. Evaluation reports indicate that earlier PMKVY phases recorded placement rates in the range of 40-45%, while recent programme reforms emphasizing on-the-job training, apprenticeship models, and employer participation have contributed to improved employment and retention outcomes. Despite these gains, workforce productivity improvements remain uneven, as employment growth has been concentrated in relatively low-productivity sectors, and skill mismatches persist in high-growth industries. The study adopts a secondary data based analytical approach, drawing on national skill surveys, employability assessments, and programme evaluation reports to examine the relationship between skill training, employment probability, and short-term productivity indicators. Findings suggest that vocational programmes integrating technical skills, digital competencies, and soft-skills training yield stronger employability and workplace performance outcomes. However, regional disparities, gender gaps, limited industry linkage, and weak outcome tracking continue to constrain long-term productivity gains. The study concludes that skill development programmes have positively influenced employability in India, but sustained improvements in workforce productivity require deeper industry integration, continuous curriculum revision, and targeted inclusion of women and rural youth.

Keywords: *Skill Development, Employability Assessments, Workforce Productivity, Pradhan PMKVY, Digital transformation.*

Introduction

India is undergoing a profound transformation in its labour market driven by rapid technological change, digitalization of industries, demographic expansion, and evolving global production systems. With more than 65 percent of its population in the working-age group, the country faces both a demographic opportunity and a developmental challenge. While economic growth has generated new employment avenues, persistent skill gaps, low labour productivity, and employability mismatches

continue to constrain inclusive and sustainable growth. In this context, skill development has emerged as a critical policy instrument to enhance employability and improve workforce productivity across sectors. Recent labour market indicators highlight the urgency of aligning education and training systems with industry requirements. According to national employability assessments, India's overall employability rate reached 54.81 percent in 2025, indicating gradual improvement compared to earlier years, largely due to increased focus on digital literacy, vocational education, and industry-oriented training. However, employability remains uneven across regions, genders, and educational streams, with significant deficits in advanced technical skills, soft skills, and job-readiness competencies. Simultaneously, productivity growth has been modest, as a large share of employment expansion continues to occur in low-productivity informal and service sectors.

To address these challenges, the Government of India has launched and expanded multiple skill development initiatives under a comprehensive national framework. Flagship programmes such as the Skill India Mission and the PMKVY have played a pivotal role in scaling short-term vocational training, recognition of prior learning, and certification across formal and informal sectors. By 2024, these initiatives had collectively trained several million youths, with programme evaluations reporting placement rates of approximately 40-45 percent in earlier phases. Recent reforms have placed greater emphasis on apprenticeship models, on-the-job training, industry partnerships, and outcome-based financing, aiming to improve employment sustainability and workplace performance. Despite these efforts, concerns persist regarding the translation of skill training into long-term productivity gains. Employment outcomes have improved for many trainees, yet evidence suggests that skill mismatches, limited employer engagement, and weak post-placement tracking reduce the effectiveness of training in enhancing productivity at the enterprise level. Moreover, gender disparities, rural urban divides, and unequal access to quality training infrastructure continue to limit the inclusive impact of skill development programmes.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the impact of skill development programmes on employability and workforce productivity in India using recent secondary data, national skill surveys, and programme evaluation reports. By analysing the relationship between vocational training, employment probability, and short-term productivity indicators, the study seeks to contribute empirical insights to the ongoing policy discourse. Understanding how skill development influences both labour market outcomes and workplace efficiency is essential for designing future-ready, inclusive, and productivity-enhancing workforce strategies in India's evolving economic landscape.

Objectives

- To examine the role of skill development programmes in improving employability outcomes in India.
- To analyse the relationship between vocational skill training and workforce productivity.
- To assess the effectiveness of government-led skill development initiatives in enhancing employment opportunities.
- To identify key challenges affecting the impact of skill development programmes on long-term productivity and job sustainability

Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based entirely on secondary data to examine the impact of skill development programmes on employability and workforce productivity in India. Data have been collected from recent national-level sources, including government reports of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, programme evaluation documents of the PMKVY, National Skill Development Corporation publications, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reports, and nationally recognized employability assessment surveys. In addition, relevant research articles, policy briefs, and reports published between 2020 and 2025 have been reviewed to ensure contemporary relevance. The collected data were systematically analysed using comparative trend analysis and interpretative techniques to assess changes in employability rates, placement outcomes, and short-term productivity indicators. The study focuses on identifying patterns, gaps, and associations between skill training interventions and labour market outcomes while acknowledging limitations related to data availability and outcome tracking.

Concept of Employability and Skill Development Linkage

Employability refers to an individual's ability to gain initial employment, maintain employment, and obtain new employment when required. In the Indian context, employability is not limited to academic qualifications but increasingly depends on job-specific technical skills, digital literacy, communication ability, and adaptability to workplace requirements. Skill development programmes have been designed to bridge the long-standing gap between formal education and industry expectations. These programmes focus on competency-based training, short-term vocational courses, recognition of prior learning, and certification aligned with National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) levels. By emphasizing practical exposure, hands-on training, and assessment-based certification, skill development initiatives directly enhance job readiness among youth, thereby improving their employability prospects across both formal and informal sectors.

Contribution of Government Skill Development Programmes to Employability

Government-led skill development initiatives have played a crucial role in enhancing employability outcomes at the national level. Programmes such as the Skill India Mission and PMKVY aim to provide industry-relevant skills to unemployed and underemployed youth. These programmes focus on sectors with high employment potential such as manufacturing, construction, healthcare, retail, logistics, and information technology. Evaluation reports indicate that certified trainees exhibit higher chances of securing wage employment or self-employment compared to non-trained individuals. The integration of soft skills, workplace ethics, digital tools, and entrepreneurship modules further strengthens employability by improving adaptability and confidence among trainees. Recent reforms emphasizing apprenticeship training and employer participation have also improved placement linkage and post-training employment sustainability.

Empirical Evidence on Improvement in Employability Outcomes

Empirical data from recent employability assessments and programme evaluations demonstrate a positive relationship between skill training and employment outcomes. National employability surveys show a steady increase in employability levels among trained candidates, particularly in digitally enabled and service-oriented roles. Placement rates under skill development programmes have consistently ranged between 40–45 percent in earlier phases, with improved outcomes observed in restructured programme cycles that focus on outcome-based funding and industry alignment. Skill-certified individuals also show better workforce participation rates, especially among rural youth and first-generation learners. However, variations persist across regions, gender groups, and sectors, indicating the need for targeted interventions. Overall, evidence supports the argument that skill development programmes have significantly contributed to enhancing employability, thereby fulfilling the first objective of the study. Table 1 presents a comparative overview of employability indicators in India before and after participation in skill development programmes, highlighting changes in employability rate, placement outcomes, job readiness, sectoral mobility, and digital skill adoption.

Table 1: Skill Development Programmes and Employability Outcomes

Employability	Pre-Skill Training Scenario	Post-Skill Training Scenario
Employability Rate (%)	Below 45%	54.81%
Placement Rate	Limited/Informal	40-45% (Average)
Job Readiness Level	Low	Moderate to High
Sectoral Mobility	Restricted	Improved across sectors
Digital Skill Adoption	Minimal	Significantly Increased

Source: India Skills Report 2025 and PMKVY evaluation reports.

The above Table 1 highlights the positive impact of skill development programmes in India on employability outcomes. Before skill training, the employability rate was below 45%, placement opportunities were largely limited and informal, job readiness levels were low, sectoral mobility was restricted, and digital skill adoption was minimal. However, in the post-skill training scenario, the employability rate increased to 54.81% in 2025, with an average placement rate of 40–45%. Job readiness improved to moderate and high levels, enabling individuals to perform more effectively in the workplace. Additionally, trained candidates experienced better mobility across sectors and a significant rise in digital skill adoption. Overall, the data from the India Skills Report 2025 and PMKVY evaluation reports clearly demonstrate that structured skill development initiatives have substantially enhanced employment prospects and workforce preparedness in India.

Productivity Challenges in the Indian Workforce

Workforce productivity in India has historically lagged behind global peers due to a large share of low-skill employment and limited use of technology in everyday work processes. Recent reports indicate that approximately 88% of India's workforce remains in low-competency jobs (Skill Levels 1 & 2), while only 10-12% occupy high-skill roles (Skill Levels 3 & 4), highlighting critical structural challenges in skill distribution that restrain productivity growth. Moreover, only 4.1% of persons aged 15-59 years have received formal vocational or technical training, while another 30.6% have informal training, according to the PLFS 2023-24. These figures suggest that a large portion of the workforce lacks industry-aligned competencies essential for enhancing workplace efficiency and output. Vocational skill training plays a key role in improving labour productivity by equipping workers with practical knowledge, use of digital tools, safety compliance, and operational efficiency. Skill development initiatives, including structured vocational programmes and emerging digital courses (e.g., AI, automation, advanced IT skills), aim to shift workers from basic competency roles toward higher productivity roles, ultimately boosting enterprise output and competitiveness.

Skill Training and Productivity Outcomes

Government programmes like PMKVY and the Skill India Mission aim to enhance workforce productivity by providing industry-aligned training. Between FY2021 and FY2025, over 5.2 million candidates were trained across states and Union Territories under PMKVY. PMKVY's shift toward competency-based modules, apprenticeship linkages, and employer collaboration has contributed to better workplace performance among trainees. Productivity enhancements are visible through increased job retention, faster skill absorption on shop floors, and improved output quality.

Training in digital and soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and adaptation to automation has also supported productivity gains. For example, nationwide enrolment in advanced AI courses (e.g., the Skilling for AI Readiness programme) surpassed 2.1 lakh participants, reflecting a strategic focus on future skill domains that directly influence productivity in technology-driven sectors. However, productivity improvements are not uniformly distributed across all sectors. Formal sector industries, such as manufacturing and IT, show relatively higher productivity gains compared to informal enterprises, where skill utilisation and capital intensity remain low. The low penetration of formal vocational training limits wider productivity improvements, especially among informal workers who constitute a major share of India's labour force.

Evidence Linking Skill Development to Productivity

Empirical observations from national surveys and sectoral assessments reveal meaningful correlations between skill training and short-term productivity indicators. Trained workers demonstrate higher task efficiency, reduced error rates, and enhanced technical adaptability key drivers of productivity at the workplace. Institutional reports also indicate that trained workers have higher wages and longer job retention, showing improved contributions to organisational performance. Although aggregate productivity metrics remain constrained by structural factors, the available data confirm that vocational skill development interventions have a positive impact on workforce productivity. By aligning training with industry needs, expanding digital competency programmes, and enhancing employer participation, skill development contributes meaningfully to productivity enhancement in India's evolving labour market. Table 2 compares key productivity indicators between skill-trained and untrained segments of the workforce in India, focusing on task efficiency, output quality, technology adoption, safety compliance, and job retention.

Table 2: Comparative Productivity Indicators Trained vs Untrained Workforce

Productivity	Untrained Workforce	Skill-Trained Workforce
Task Efficiency	Low	Moderate to High
Output Quality	Inconsistent	Standardised & improved
Digital Technology Adoption	Minimal	Significantly Higher
Workplace Safety Compliance	Low	Improved
Job Retention	Lower	Higher
Contribution to Enterprise Productivity	Marginal	Substantial

Source: PLFS (2023-24) and PMKVY programme evaluation reports.

The above Table 2 shows that skill-trained workers perform better than untrained workers across all key productivity indicators. They demonstrate higher task efficiency, improved and standardized output quality, greater adoption of digital technology, better workplace safety compliance, and higher job retention. In contrast, untrained workers exhibit low efficiency, inconsistent output, minimal digital adoption, and lower retention. Overall, the data indicates that vocational training significantly enhances enterprise productivity and workplace performance.

Government Skill Development Initiatives: Scale and Coverage

Government-led skill development initiatives in India have expanded significantly in scale and outreach during the last decade, reflecting the state's commitment to improving employment outcomes. Under the Skill India Mission, more than 5.4 crore (54 million) individuals have been trained through various short-term, long-term, and apprenticeship-based programmes up to 2024. Among these, the PMKVY remains the flagship intervention. Across its multiple phases, PMKVY alone has trained over 1.6 crore candidates, covering more than 700 job roles across 30+ industry sectors. The programme primarily targets unemployed youth, school dropouts, women, and informal sector workers, thereby widening access to employment-oriented training. This large coverage indicates that government initiatives have moved beyond pilot interventions to mass-scale human capital development, creating a substantial base for employment generation.

Employment Generation and Placement Outcomes

The evidence from programme evaluation reports highlights the effectiveness of government skill initiatives in improving employment opportunities. Placement data from PMKVY show that 40-45% of certified candidates secured wage employment or self-employment in earlier phases, while restructured phases focusing on apprenticeship and on-the-job training have shown placement and retention rates approaching 50% in select sectors. According to national labour assessments, trained candidates exhibit 10-15 percentage points higher employment probability compared to untrained individuals of similar educational backgrounds. Furthermore, apprenticeship enrolments under government schemes increased from 3.9 lakh in 2019 to over 9.4 lakh in 2024, strengthening school-to-work transitions. Wage outcomes also show improvement, as trained workers earn 8-20% higher entry-level wages in comparison to non-certified workers, particularly in manufacturing, healthcare, and logistics sectors. These trends confirm that skill development initiatives have made measurable contributions to employment generation.

Sectoral and Social Impact on Employment Opportunities

Government-led skill programmes have had a notable impact on employment opportunities across priority sectors and vulnerable groups. Sector-wise data indicate that nearly 60% of placements under national skill programmes are concentrated in high-absorption sectors such as construction, retail, manufacturing, healthcare, and services. Importantly, women's participation has increased steadily, with female enrolment rising from around 33% in 2018 to nearly 38% by 2024 under PMKVY and allied schemes. Rural participation accounts for approximately 55-58% of total trainees, demonstrating improved access to employment pathways for rural youth. However, challenges remain, as nearly 45% of trained candidates are absorbed into low-wage or informal employment, limiting long-term job security. Despite this, the evidence clearly indicates that government-led skill development initiatives have expanded employment opportunities at scale, particularly for first-time job seekers and disadvantaged groups. Table 3 summarises the employment outcomes of major government-led skill development programmes in India, including training coverage, placement rates, apprenticeship growth, wage advantages, and social participation indicators.

Table 3: Employment Outcomes of Government Skill Development Programmes

Skill Outcomes	Highlights
Total Individuals Trained (All Schemes)	Over 5.4 crore
Candidates Trained under PMKVY	Approx. 1.6 crore
Average Placement Rate	40-45%
Improved Placement in Reformed Phases	Up to 50% (select sectors)
Increase in Apprenticeship Enrolment	3.9 lakh (2019) → 9.4 lakh (2024)
Wage Advantage of Trained Workers	8–20% higher
Rural Trainee Share	55–58%
Female Participation	38%

Source: Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and PMKVY programme reports (2024–25).

The above Table 3 highlights the significant scale and employment impact of government skill development programmes in India. More than 5.4 crore individuals have been trained across all schemes, with approximately 1.6 crore candidates trained under the PMKVY. The average placement rate ranges between 40–45%, improving up to 50% in reformed phases and select sectors, indicating better alignment with industry demand. Apprenticeship enrolment has increased substantially from 3.9 lakh in 2019 to 9.4 lakh in 2024, reflecting stronger industry participation. Trained workers earn 8–20% higher wages compared to untrained counterparts, showing positive income effects. Additionally, rural youth constitute 55–58% of trainees, and female participation stands at 38%, demonstrating inclusive outreach. Overall, the data reflects broad coverage, improved employability, rising apprenticeship engagement, and measurable economic benefits.

Skill Mismatch and Limited Industry Integration

One of the most significant challenges limiting the long-term impact of skill development programmes is the persistent skill mismatch between training outcomes and industry requirements. Although government initiatives such as the PMKVY emphasize industry-aligned curricula, rapid technological change and evolving job roles often outpace curriculum updates. As a result, many trained candidates possess entry-level skills that are insufficient for sustained productivity growth or career progression. Industry participation in curriculum design, assessment, and placement remains uneven across sectors and regions. This weak linkage reduces the effective utilization of skills at the workplace, leading to underemployment, early job exits, and limited productivity enhancement over time.

Employment Quality, Informality, and Retention Issues

Another major constraint is the quality of employment outcomes generated through skill development programmes. While placement rates have improved, a substantial proportion of trained candidates are absorbed into low-wage, informal, or short-term jobs, particularly in construction, retail, and service sectors. Such employment offers limited job security, minimal social protection, and weak opportunities for skill upgrading. Data indicate that nearly 40-45% of placed candidates experience job discontinuity within the first year due to poor working conditions, low wages, or lack of career growth. High attrition undermines job sustainability and restricts the long-term productivity gains expected from public investment in skill training. Moreover, informal sector dominance limits firms' capacity to adopt advanced technologies, further constraining productivity improvements.

Regional Disparities, Gender Gaps, and Monitoring Limitations

Regional and social disparities continue to affect the effectiveness of skill development programmes. Advanced states with stronger industrial bases show better employment and productivity outcomes compared to economically weaker and rural regions. Similarly, despite rising enrolment, female participation remains below 40%, and women face additional barriers such as mobility constraints, care responsibilities, and limited access to high-paying technical trades. Another critical challenge is the weak monitoring and outcome-tracking mechanism. Most programmes emphasize training and placement numbers rather than long-term indicators such as job retention, wage progression, and productivity growth. The absence of robust longitudinal data limits evidence-based policy correction and reduces accountability for long-term outcomes. These structural and institutional gaps significantly restrict the sustainable impact of skill development initiatives. Table 4 outlines the major structural and institutional challenges affecting the effectiveness of skill development programmes in India and their implications for productivity and job sustainability.

Table 4: Challenges Affecting Skill Development Outcomes

Challenge Area	Issues Identified	Impact on Productivity & Job Sustainability
Skill Industry Mismatch	Outdated curricula, limited employer input	Underutilization of skills
Employment Quality	Low wages, informal jobs	High attrition, low productivity
Job Retention	Short job duration	Weak long-term outcomes
Regional Disparities	Uneven industrial capacity	Unequal employment gains
Gender Gap	Low female participation	Limited inclusive growth
Monitoring & Evaluation	Weak outcome tracking	Policy inefficiency

Source: Secondary analysis of PMKVY evaluations, PLFS reports, and national skill development studies.

The above Table 4 outlines key challenges limiting the effectiveness of skill development initiatives and their long-term productivity impact. A major concern is the mismatch between industry needs and training curricula, resulting in underutilized skills. Poor employment quality, including low wages and informal work, leads to high attrition and reduced productivity. Short job durations weaken sustainable employment outcomes, while regional industrial disparities create unequal job opportunities. Low female participation further restricts inclusive growth. Additionally, weak monitoring and evaluation systems reduce policy effectiveness by inadequately tracking outcomes. Together, these challenges significantly constrain the sustained benefits of skill development programs.

Findings and Analysis

The study demonstrates that skill development programmes in India have significantly improved employability, though their long-term contribution to overall workforce productivity remains uneven and sector-specific. Recent national data shows that the employability rate reached 54.81% in 2025, highlighting the growing effectiveness of vocational education, digital skill integration, and industry-aligned curricula. Placement rates under flagship schemes such as PMKVY ranged between 40–45%, with improved outcomes in later phases that emphasized apprenticeships, industry partnerships, and structured on-the-job training. These initiatives have particularly strengthened employment prospects for youth, first-generation learners, and rural populations by enhancing practical competencies and job readiness.

Evidence further indicates that skill-trained workers exhibit higher task efficiency, improved output quality, greater digital adaptability, and stronger job retention compared to untrained counterparts. However, productivity gains are largely concentrated in formal and technology-driven sectors, while a considerable proportion of trained candidates continue to enter low-wage or informal employment, limiting aggregate productivity growth. Persistent challenges including skill–industry mismatch, limited employer engagement, regional imbalances, and gender disparities constrain the sustained impact of these programmes.

Overall, while skill development initiatives have effectively boosted employability and short-term workplace performance, achieving long-term productivity growth requires deeper industry integration, continuous curriculum revision, stronger monitoring of post-placement outcomes, and targeted inclusion strategies to improve employment quality and economic competitiveness.

Conclusion

The present study establishesthat skill development programmes have emerged as a pivotal policy instrument for enhancing employability and strengthening workforce preparedness in India's evolving labour market. National evidence indicates improvements in placement rates, job readiness, and labour force participation, particularly among youth and rural populations, reflecting the positive impact of integrating vocational, digital, and soft skills. However, productivity gains remain uneven due to persistent skill mismatches, concentration in low-productivity and informal sectors, regional disparities, and limited industry engagement. Weak monitoring mechanisms further constrain long-term outcomes. The findings suggest that while skill initiatives significantly improve employability, their sustained contribution to productivity and inclusive economic growth requires stronger industry alignment, continuous curriculum modernization, effective outcome tracking, and targeted strategies to ensure equitable participation across regions and gender groups.

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