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Vocational Education, Women Empowerment and Gender Stereotype: an empirical study of Vocational Education Programs in India

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ABSTRACT

Vocational education has been viewed as one of the most significant instruments for the socio-economic empowerment of women. Its contribution for raising the level of income and improving the economic status of women is highly cherishable. Present paper is a quantitative study of vocational education programs in India, with respect to the socio-economic empowerment of women. Objective of this study is to examine, the critical link between vocational education, women empowerment and gender-stereotypes. Two government-run Skill Development Centers have been selected from Delhi and Bihar respectively. Same number of women participants has been selected randomly from these two centers. Finding of this study suggests that the vocational education programs significantly improved the economic status of women. However, its role in the social empowerment of women is limited. It is evident that some of the vocational training programs lack the gender-sensitivity. Instead of breaking the gender stereotypes, somehow, it promotes and justifies age-old socially defined gender roles. Moreover, the impacts of these vocational trainings can be seen limited mostly to the economic improvement. The translation of economic empowerment into socio-cultural empowerment is not appreciable. This study examines, why vocational education has limited impact on socio-cultural empowerment of women? And what should be the further strategy to empower women through vocational education?

KEY-WORDS: - Vocational Education, Women Empowerment, Gender Stereotype, Empirical study

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INTRODUCTION

India is a country, where the society is male-dominated and highly patriarchal in nature¹. Traditionally, women are one of the most destitute and discriminated sections in the society. Women are still considered and treated as subordinates to their male counterparts. Economically, they are highly dependent on male members of the family. This economic dependency is the most critical hindrance for the empowerment of women². Therefore, the first essential thing is to break the chain of dependency and create economic independence among women. The subordination and segregation of women can never be justified on any ground. It is neither socially nor economically beneficial for any society. Today, when India is aspired to be a develop country; she has to abolish all forms of discrimination against women. Moreover, she needs to give utmost priority to the empowerment of women. The empowerment of women has tremendous potential for the development of India. IMF Chief, Cristina Legard has remarked that “If India could ensure the female workforce participation at par with male; it will increase India’s GDP up to 27 percent”. This statement of Ms. Legard signifies the importance of women empowerment for a country like India.

There are multiple approaches and models for empowering women³. The Capability development model is one of the most significant models of development⁴. Skill development, vocational training, etc. are the key components of the capability model. Vocational education has been considered as an important instrument for the empowerment of women. In the recent past, numerous governmental and non-governmental agencies have been started vocational education programs as a measure for empowering women. Noticeably, these institutions succeeded in uplifting a significant number of women. The vocational education programs have resulted in improving the economic status of women. However, it is evident that the impacts of these vocational education programs are mostly limited to the economic empowerment or enhancing the economic status of women. It was viewed by the economists that the improvement in the economic status will automatically translate into the improvement in the socio-cultural status. But this is not true in the context of women empowerment in India. The transformation of economic empowerment into the socio-cultural empowerment of women is very slow or hardly noticeable. It is also found that these vocational education programs lack social and gender sensitivity. Some of the components of these trainings promote gender stereotypes. These are some of the critical aspects of vocational education. It signifies the need for an instantaneous review of these training programs. The social and gender sensitive vocational education is the need of the hour for the holistic empowerment of women.

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the role of vocational education in the empowerment of women

- To examine the link between economic status and the socio-cultural status of women
- To study the Pre and Post training condition of women.
- To study the Post-training issues of trained women.

METHODOLOGY

This is an empirical and quantitative study. The sample size is 90 (45 each from two skill development centers). The skill development centers have been selected by using purposive and convenient sampling technique. These two centers include one from Delhi (Kherwadi Social Welfare Association, Jahangirpuri, New-Delhi) and other from Bihar (Pratham Education Foundation, Bodh Gaya). 45 participants from each center have been selected by using simple random sampling method. All the participants are women. The sample has been divided into two broad groups e.g. educated women group and un-educated women group. This division has been done to understand the differential impact of vocational education on different groups of women.

Inclusion criteria: Two skills centers chosen from two different states. Delhi is one of the most developed states in India. Bihar, on the other hand is one of the most backward states. Therefore, the condition of women is different in these two states. The inclusion of one most developed and one most backward state has been done purposefully in order to have a more precise understanding and generalist view about the status of vocational education in India. Moreover, this study exclusively chooses women participants to understand the impact of vocational education in empowering women. The sample includes both the freshly trained and those who are trained 2-3 years earlier. This allows the researcher to compare the impact of vocational education and to understand the post-training challenges of trained women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

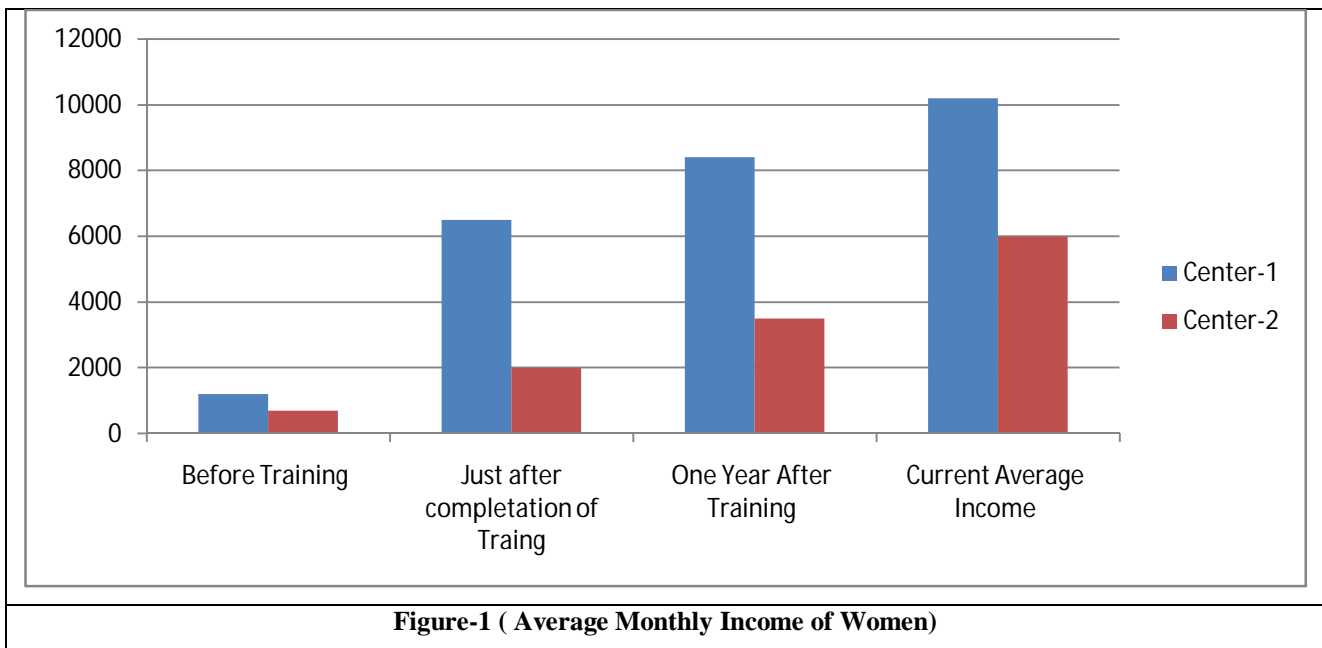
Though, this is a primary study, the researcher has reviewed some of the available literature. This has helped in developing the hypothesis and to substantiate the findings of the study. A recent study⁵ has explored various aspects of the *Feminization of Poverty*. This study illustrates the vocational education of women as an important tool for poverty eradication. This study has been conducted in the city of Mysore. It suggests, there is on an average 60 percent increase in the income of women after receiving vocational training. And this increase in the income of women directly resulted into the reduction of poverty. Therefore, there is a directly proportional relationship between the level of vocational education among women and poverty reduction. Another study⁶ has critically examined the vocational education programs from the feminist perspective. This study suggests that

the participation of women in technical trainings is negligible. They are mostly given the soft-trainings which have lesser impacts on the empowerment of women. This study indicates the male domination in the vocational training programs. Another important study⁷ conducted in the city of Coimbatore finds the double fold increase in the income of women after receiving vocational trainings. However, it says the differential impact on women trainees. This study significantly highlights the importance of formal education. Another study⁸ links vocational education with the dignity of women as it improves the social and economic status of women and boosts the self-confidence of women. Vocational education makes women financially independent which allows them to live with dignity.

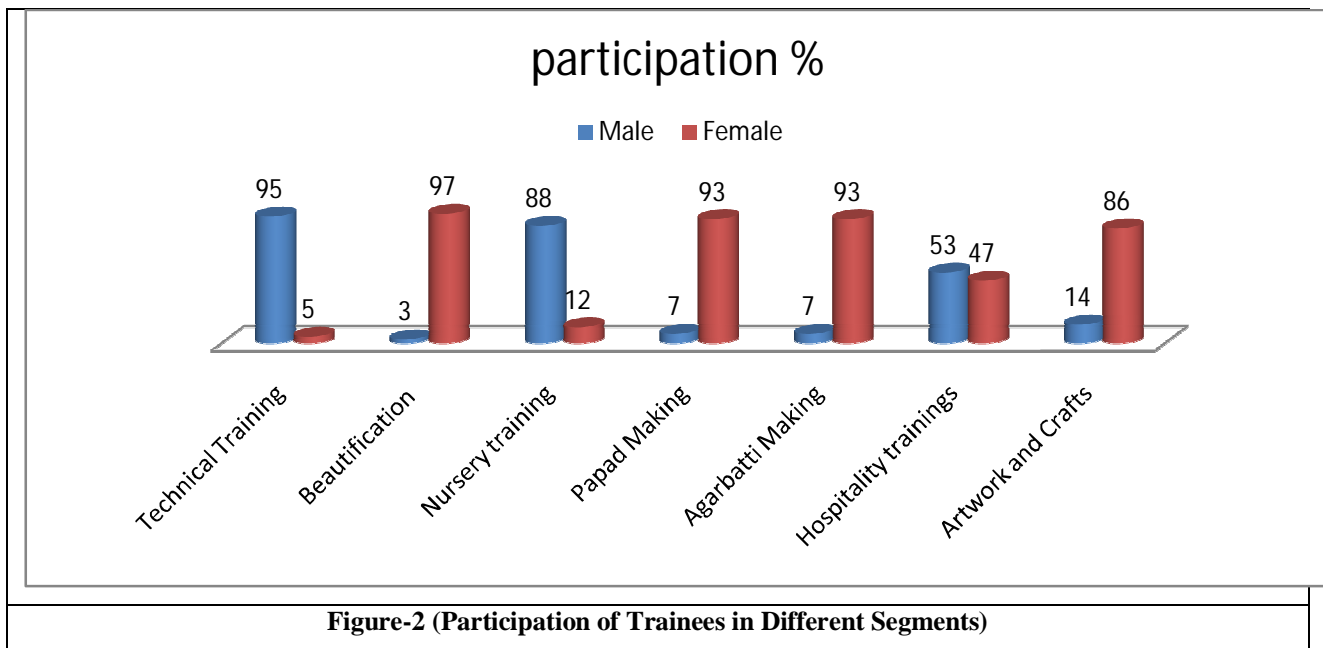
These reviews of literature have provided the researcher an insight to formulate the hypothesis to inquire about the various aspects of vocational education.

ANALYSIS

Figure-1, shows that the average monthly income at both the centers e.g. Delhi and Bihar has increased substantially after the training received by women participants. Before joining the program, average monthly income was just Rs 1200 and 700 respectively at both of these centers. Significantly, the average income after 1-2 years of receiving trainings has been increased to Rs 10200 and 6000. Moreover, this increase is in average term only. Some participants even earn more than the average. It is found that 5 women from Delhi center and 2 from Bihar center have been earning Rs 20000 or more. This much increase in the income of trainee women suggests, that there is a direct impact of vocational education in the economic empowerment of women. One key observation of this graph is that the income of women keeps rising year after year. Interestingly, not a single women share that there is any decline in her income after training. This shows the importance of vocational education in empowering people. The skills of trainees get sharpened year after year and it is getting cultivated into the increased income. Therefore, the vocational education/capability approach of the economic empowerment of women is a sustainable approach.



Second interesting fact of this study (**Figure-2**) shows, there is apparent Gender discrimination in different types of trainings. The researcher has studied the composition of different major heads of the training. The participation of female was critically low in the segments of Technical training such as Mobile repairing, computer training, solar lamp repairing, etc. However, the training on household stuffs like Cake Making, Papad Making, Agarbatti Making (incense stick), art-works and crafts, etc, are exclusively given to women participants. This fact clearly indicates the gender discrimination in the government-run training programs. This is one form of the promotion and justification to age-old socially defined gender roles. These training programs are supposed to break the gender stereotypes but instead of breaking, it promotes gender stereotypes. This also suggests the lack of gender sensitivity in the vocational education programs. These programs must not be limited to improving the economic status of women. It should have been focused more on improving the social status of women. The ignorance of social issues will not result into the holistic development of women. In the patriarchal society, there are the defined gender roles for male and female which subordinates women in the society. These defined roles are the major hindrances for the empowerment of women. Therefore, the roles need to be re-defined. It could be done by engaging more women into male-dominated practices. And the vocational education can be used as an opportunity to break these gender stereotypes. The male-dominated domains need to be filled by more women. This will give more confidence to women. Subsequently, the social status of women will improve.

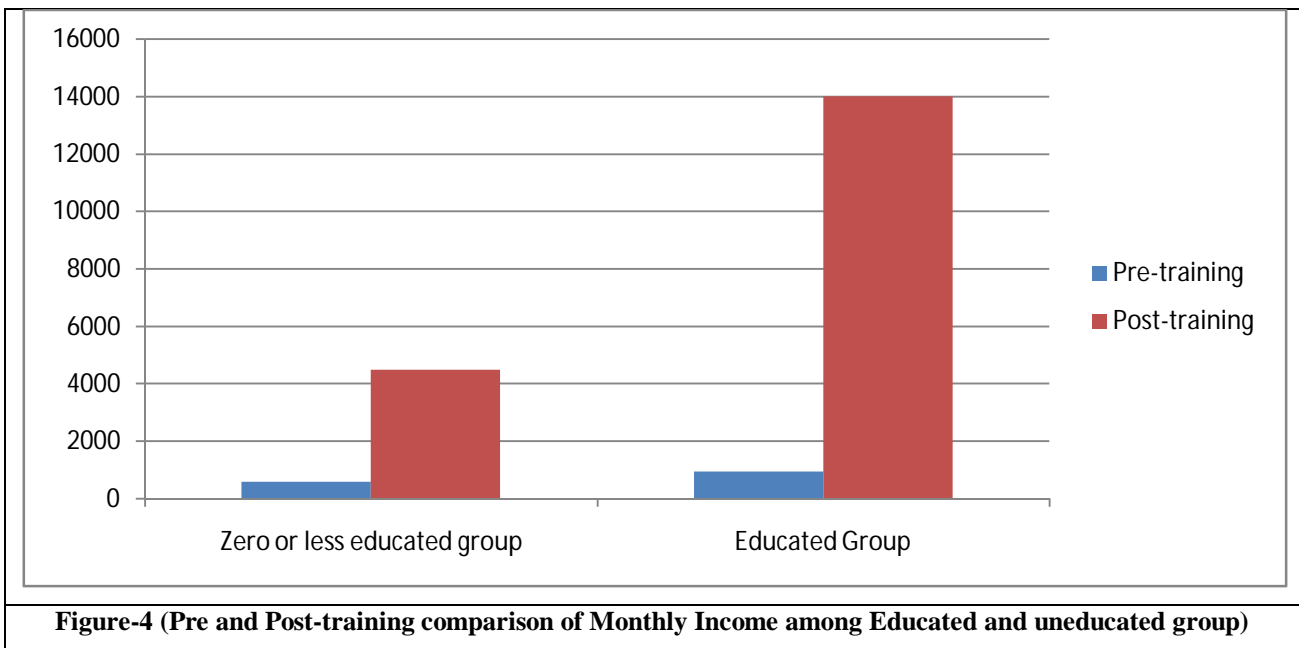


In continuation to the above, this study shows that the impact of vocational education in improving the social status of women is not much admirable and visible. Though, the economic status of women (Figure-1) has improved significantly, the transformation of economic empowerment into social empowerment is negligible. This is a very critical aspect of the vocational education programs. The following **figure-3** highlights some critical results. This indicates that before training, the percentage of malnourishment among participants was 37 and post-training it was reduced to 32. It is just the 5 points improvement in the status of malnourishment. This means there is hardly any improvement in the social status of women. Similarly, 21 percent of women shared that they were victims of domestic violence before training. And shockingly, 17 percent of women participants still facing some form of domestic violence. So there is a negligible impact of vocational education or improved economic condition on the evil of domestic violence. There is also not much improvement in the level of literacy, the role of women in household decision making, level of immunization, etc. These facts suggest that the economic empowerment of women does not necessarily lead to the social empowerment. In order to empower women socially and culturally, these vocational education programs need to be more social and gender sensitive. The social trainings such as the awareness of the rights of women, awareness about their social issues, etc have to be incorporated under these vocational training programs. Merely the improvement in economic status will not result into the holistic empowerment of women.

Social Status of Women Pre and Post Training condition (based on the responses given by participants)					
Pre Training			Post-Training		
Indicators	Yes	No	Indicators	Yes	No
1. Toilet in the home	47	53	1. Toilet in the home	88	12
2. Malnourishment among them	37	63	2. Malnourishment among them	32	68
3. Symptoms of Anemia	42	58	3. Symptoms of Anemia	36	64
4. Health check-up and immunization	38	62	4. Health check-up and immunization	45	55
5. literacy among women	77	23	5. literacy among women	84	16
6. Role in family decision making	26	74	6. Role in family decision making	32	68
7. Cases of domestic violence (any form)	21	79	7. Cases of domestic violence (any form)	17	83

(Figure-3)

One of the most significant findings (**Figure-4**) of this study suggests, there are the differential impacts of vocational education among the different category of women. This signifies the importance of formal education in vocational training. It is found that the impact of vocational education is higher among the educated women group. Higher the level of education greater is the earnings of women. Here two things are noteworthy. Firstly, educated women are being given more complex and technical trainings as per their learning capacity. Such technical trainings have more values which translate into greater impacts. Uneducated or less educated women, on the other hand, are given mostly the simple trainings which have fewer values. Secondly, in the post-training environment, educated women could use their learned skills into a more productive manner. This enhances their earnings. The researcher, has divided women into two broad groups e.g. educated women and less educated/uneducated women and studied their monthly average income in both the pre and post training condition. It finds that in the pre-training condition both of these groups had almost similar earning. But after training there is a bigger difference in their average monthly income (**Figure-4**). There is a higher jump in the income of the educated group and lesser jump among the uneducated group. In pre-training condition, the average income was Rs 600 and 950 respectively. But after training the income of educated group was jumped to Rs 14000 and the income of the uneducated group shows a lesser increase.



It is also evident that, though, these vocational trainings have been improving the employability/skills of women, the employment generation is critically low. This study suggests that only 5 percent of the trained women could have established their own venture/entrepreneurship. They have shared some of the post-training concerns. The lack of loan/capitals is the prime reason for not having their own entrepreneurship units. They are facing the challenge of job/employment scarcity in the post-training environment. In such circumstances, they are forced to work in the low paid sector. Therefore, it is an injustice to their learned skills if they are given less value. The creation of employment opportunities along with the skill enhancement trainings would have been succeeded into greater empowerment of women. Following are some of the concerns of women participants which need to be addressed effectively.

Issues faced by women (Post Training)

Lack of job opportunities

Less pay to their work

Lack of credit/loan/capital facilities to establish own entrepreneurship.

Only 5 percent of trained women have managed to establish their own venture, rest all are facing challenges of not having a job.

Before training, few participants were unmarried. Now they got married and they are not allowed to work anywhere. This is the wastage of her respective skills.

FINDINGS

The finding of this study suggests that a significant number of women have been benefited from the vocational education programs. Their earning capacity increased manifold. They have

acquired various skills through trainings which enhanced their employability and provided values to their work. Followings are some of the major findings of this study.

- ***Economic empowerment of women:*** - Vocational education and trainings have been contributing tremendously for the income enhancement of women (Figure-1). Various governmental and non-governmental agencies are providing numerous skill trainings to women. There is evidence of the many-fold increase in the income of women after receiving vocational trainings.
- ***Poverty reduction through vocational training for women:*** Study finds that the vocational education of women has a direct impact on poverty reduction. Higher is the level of training among women greater is the reduction in poverty. This finding may provide insights to the policy makers for a female-centric approach to poverty reduction. India is a country with the highest number of poor in the world. Almost 310 million people are living under the below poverty line. The rate of poverty reduction in India is very slow. One of the important factors of this slow reduction of poverty is that the women workforces are not utilized properly. A significant number of women are excluded from the economy and not allowed to go out of the four walls of the houses. In addition, they are illiterate and lack the requisite skills. When they are provided with the vocational trainings and allowed to work, it contributes greatly to poverty reduction.
- ***The universal approach of vocational training:*** It is found that the majority of the training programs using the traditional and universal approach. This approach may or may not be suitable for the indigenous context. For example, one specific training program which gains the success in Tamilnadu may or may not be suitable to the context of Bihar. The indigenous traditional practices which may have greater results are often ignored under the vocational education programs. In Bihar, there are various traditional arts and craft practices like Sujini art, Madhuwani paintings, Sikki craft, jute craft, etc. Now, these arts/crafts have the global presence and reputations. But surprisingly, the skill centers of Bihar not yet included these trainings under the vocational education program.
- The impact of vocational education on the socio-cultural empowerment of women is negligible (Figure-3). It negates the famous theory of economists. Economists believe that the improvement in economic status will automatically translate into improvement in the social status. These beliefs undermine the magnitude of social issues. But the findings of this study signify and re-enforced the importance of social issues.

- Study finds the promotion of gender stereotypes under the vocational education programs (Figure-2). It evident that the vocational education programs lack gender and social sensitivity.
- This study finds that the participation of women in the government-run vocational education programs is low. At the Delhi center, the participation of women is 31 percent and at Bihar center, it is just 27 percent.
- Post-training job scarcity for women: - It is found that a significant number of women have acquired the vocational trainings/skills which enhanced their employability. However, the condition of employment is dismal. After training, they are not getting appropriate employment and therefore, forced to work in the low paid sector. Unfortunately, their hard-earned skills getting low values. Research finds only 5 percent of trained women could have established their own entrepreneurship units. They are facing the challenges in mobilizing the capital for the ventures. The vocational training programs do not have the post-training facilities for jobs. They lack the integration approach.
- Sustainability issues: - As mentioned the training programs have the universal/ general approach and lack the indigenous/specific approach in training. For example, Bihar is a state where almost half the area is badly affected by the flood. Most of the affected people live in the tents during 2-3 peak months of the flood. During such difficult months people facing a severe challenge for livelihood. They are left with jobless. Women and children are the worst sufferers. In such circumstances, women need a specific set of skills and vocational trainings which could sustain even during the peak months of the flood. Their mobile repairing or cake making training will have no use during those months. They need specific trainings, suitable and sustainable to flood like situation.

CONCLUSION

This study appreciates the role of vocational education for the empowerment of women and thereby, advocate for more reach of vocational education programs to underprivileged, marginalized and poor women. However, it realizes the need for some fundamental changes in the programs. As discussed, there is lack of gender and social sensitivity in the vocational education programs. Secondly, the participation of women is critically low compared to men. Women are one of the most underprivileged groups. They are the worst sufferers of poverty. As the finding of this study suggests the vocational education has a direct impact in reducing poverty and enhancing the economic status of women, it is highly recommendable to include more women into its reach. The vocational education to women has multi-dimensional impacts which signify its importance in the

empowerment of women. Vocational education is the part of capacity building and skill enhancement program. The capability development approach is considered as the most appropriate and sustainable model of development. Therefore, vocational education is the key area for the holistic empowerment of weaker section including women. However, it is evident that the vocational education programs have some fundamental loopholes. This study has explained some of the critical loopholes of the training programs. Most importantly, the sorry state of post-training employment scenario needs immediate contemplation. Vocational education programs need to be focused both on enhancing the employability and employment. Providing skills without having appropriate employment opportunities will not result into the desired outcome. Here, the integration approach will multiply the outcome of training programs. There are several employment generation programs like Start-up India, Stand-up India, Mudra Loan scheme, etc, which needs to be integrated with skill centers, so that the trainee will not face any challenge of post-training unemployment. Third most important submission of this study is the need for redefining vocational education program in the Indian context. It has to be understood that the vocational education program is meant not only for enhancing economic status. It has to be redesigned in such a manner that could help the marginalized sections for their holistic empowerment. The socio-cultural empowerment has to be incorporated into the objective of the training programs. Therefore, vocational education along with the social education will multiply the outcomes of these training programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Review of the government-run vocational education programs
- Vocational trainings must be gender and social sensitive
- Trainings about the social issues of women must be given along with vocational training. The vocational education needs to incorporate the social education in the trainings.
- Women must be encouraged for the trainings in the male-dominated domains in order to break the gender stereotypes.
- Training programs must be focused on breaking the Gender stereotypes and avoid any form of promotion of age-old defined gender roles.
- The Indigenous approach needs to be adopted in the vocational education programs. The local communities must have some types of expertise in certain fields. That needs to be identified and provide training in that field. For example, in some parts of Bihar, there are different types of traditional art and craft practices. Such as the Madhuwani Paintings, Sujni craft, Sikki craft works, Jute craft, etc. If a group of women could be provided expertise training in these domains, it would have great result in enhancing their income. Unfortunately, the current vocational education programs ignoring these traditional practices.

- Vocational education programs are more focused on enhancing the employability (skills) and ignore the employment generation programs. Only 5 percent of trainees could establish their own venture. Therefore, an integrated approach is needed. Meaning thereby, the linking of vocational education programs with the employment generation programs will be instrumental in the empowerment of women.
- Before vocational education, a certain level of formal education is necessary for the greater benefits of the trainings.
- The start-up, stand-up programs of the government must be linked to vocational education programs.
- The ease in the availability of loans/credits for the trained/skilled women will have tremendous result in empowering women in India.
- These trained women must be channeled into their own federations and cooperative units for greater benefits of their learned skills.

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