



# Trainees' perspective on employability of short-term VET programmes in India. An Empirical Study of Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana in Chhattisgarh

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## ABSTRACT

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) is a short-term skill development program in India aiming to train young job seekers, make them employable, facilitate employment and to revitalize vocational education in India. Based on this premise, this paper explores young people's perceptions on the employability skills acquired during the training and the possible linkages between employability skills and actual employment status post training. It was found that trainees' perception of employability skills largely consisted of generic skills that are transferable to different sectors across many job roles. This also reflects the nature of employability skills that is most prevalent in the job market. It was also observed that more graduates were employed post training compared to school drop outs and respondents who have only completed school. This also reflects the changing dynamics of the cohorts that are enrolling themselves into vocational education and training programmes. It concludes that PMKVY can provide a space for trainees to learn employability skills and Short-term training programmes deserves their space in the VET ecosystem in India. It may not be a perfect program but has the potential to transform the skill landscape of India at a time when India is being challenged with the demographic dividend. The implications are wide ranging with the potential of enriching the discourse on employability in India and look at different models of employability beyond just job acquisition.

**Keywords** – Skill Development, India, VET, Employability, PMKVY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With a population of approximately 1.324 billion, India is the second most populous country in the world (Bank, 2008). Also, demographically, he is one of the youngest. By 2026, 64% of India's working-age population is projected to be 15 to 59 years old (Mehrotra, 2014). It has been observed that this demographic dividend is expected to increase India's per capita GDP growth by 2 percentage points per year (Mody & Aiyar, 2011). According to market exchange rates, India is already the 11th largest economy, worth her US\$1.676 trillion (OECD & ILO, 2017). It is therefore important for India to capitalize on its abundant demographic dividend, as the demand for skilled labor to complement the presence of a young population in India will only last for the next few decades from 2021 to 2040 (Mehrotra, Gandhi, and Sahoo, 2013). However, the available workforce lacks the desired skill levels and is deemed ineligible for employment by the industry, resulting in a situation where employers urgently need workers and young people trying to enter the labor market are unable to find suitable employment (Pilz, 2016; Hajela, 2012). Only 4.7% of the total workforce is estimated to have formal qualifications in India, as opposed to 68% in the UK, 75% in Germany and 96% in South Korea (MSDE, 2015). This has had a negative impact on the growth of the Indian economy in the past, and it could affect the future as well. Research shows that government agencies are focused on increasing enrollment in various skilling certification programs while facing several key issues (Mehrotra, 2014). In addition, the program is plagued with stigma and is seen only as an option for students from lower academic and socioeconomic backgrounds who aspire to white-collar employment. Lack of participation in VET courses exacerbates the skills mismatch dilemma which already exists (Majumdar, 2008). This leaves a large cohort of young Indians out of school and out of vocational training because students opt out of joining these courses. Therefore, there is a need to improve not only the capacity but also the efficiency of skill development programs in India (Beddie, 2020).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Government of India started making concerted efforts to reenergize the formal VET sector from 2004 resulting in the formulation of the National Skill Development Policy in 2009. It was further revised in 2015 towards creating an ecosystem that makes India's burgeoning working age population more skilled so that it can contribute towards the economic development of the country (MSDE, 2015). The policy was geared towards setting up various systems, processes and institutions that promised to deliver benchmark quality skilling opportunities opening employment pathways for the youth (King, 2012). Meanwhile, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) was formed in 2015 to provide governance and administrative support on skill development in India and drive its implementation. The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) and the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) were launched as ancillary

organizations to implement the policies across the country. In 2018, the Union Cabinet announced the merger of regulatory institutions National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) and the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) to create the National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET) as the sole regulatory body for all skilling and vocational training activities in the country. However, even with these attempts, the overall effort to improve the VET system has been mostly unsuccessful as the as the percentage of population with any form of formal VET is still less than 3% (MSDE, 2018).

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) is the flagship program of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of India on Short Term Skilling (STT) and was launched nationwide in 2015 with the intention to skill 100 million candidates. It was designed to scale up skilling by providing quality vocational education in India and therefore it aimed to promote skill development by catalyzing creation of large, quality, and for-profit vocational institutions (KPMG, 2016; NSDC, 2016). Thus, the major aim was to revitalize vocational education in India by complementing the ITIs with the provision of providing rapid short term skilling courses ranging from 150 to 300 hours to young job seekers. The training largely focused on first-time entrants to the labour market and mostly the school dropouts and expected to address the skill gap in India (NSDC, 2013). Since its inception in 2015, approximately 1,37,19,117 candidates have been trained. Among them, 1,09,99,126 candidates were certified and 24,45,516 were successfully employed post training (NSDC, 2021).

Employment and employability play an important role in the uptake of any vocational scheme amongst the trainees. Research on employability of VET trainees in different countries across the region has provided interesting results but is still deficient (Jayathilake et al., 2013; Sulaiman & Ambotang, 2013; Silwal & Bhatta, 2017). Our literature survey also clearly suggests that there is a lack of research on employability of VET trainees in India. Most of the studies on employability in India have been focused on the graduates from the higher education stream (Jayaram & Engmann, 2014; Khare, 2014; Unni, 2016). Employability research in VET in India has been limited to ITIs which provide for long term vocational education programs in the country unlike PMKVY which is a short-term program (Mantri & Gupta, 2015; Kumar, 2016; Ajithkumar & Pilz, 2019; Neroorkar & Gopinath, 2019).

With a mandate to train millions of candidates, it is imperative that an understanding of the development of the employability of students participating in PMKVY be determined but from a trainee's perspective which lead to the objective of this study is to evaluate the effect of PMKVY on the employability of the trainees. To achieve the objective of this study two research questions were formalized. One, what are the employability skills that students perceive they have learnt and second, how does this compare with the employment status of the respondents of the study.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an exploratory descriptive approach for data collection and analysis. The research objectives directed the choice of the methods used. It allowed for understanding in greater depth the experiences, perceptions, and feelings of the youth regarding the skill development and training. The three districts of Raipur, Korba and Raigarh had maximum enrollments of trainees in PMKVY at the time of the study and hence formed the geographical basis of this study. Purposive sampling was selected as it gave the freedom of selecting the participants who could be informative about a specific theme and provide rich information on specific research questions. The research objective demanded “depth” in the gathering of information to improve understanding of the phenomena of “employability” and hence PMKVY trainees who had already graduated from the program were selected based on their availability (Morse, 2000; Neuman, 2011; Patton, 2014; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2016). After interviewing 30 trainees, redundancy in the responses was observed hence achieving theoretical saturation and data collection was stopped at 30 samples, which became the final sample size (Coyne, 1997; Glaser & Holton, 2004; Charmaz K., 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Davoudi et al., 2016; McCrae & Purssell, 2016; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2016)

Table 1 : Trainees details

<b>Educational Status</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Postgraduates		1
Graduates	6	7
Completed School	3	6
School Drop-out	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>

Data collection was accomplished with the use of open-ended semi – structured questions which provided the scope for further probing on responses when required (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Patton, 2014). Face-to-face interviews were conducted in Hindi with ethical considerations and bilingual consent forms in Hindi and English were used. The responses were recorded as audio files with the consent of the trainees and later transcribed into English. Three PMKVY training centers in each district were asked to check with their trainees who had been trained, certified, and were employed or were looking for employment and were available in the vicinity and willing to participate voluntarily for the research. The trainees were contacted and asked to be present at the training center at a given date for the interview.



## 4. RESULTS

VET outcomes are grounded on employability of the trainees whether they are long-term programmes like ITIs or short-term programmes like PMKVY. The premise for the initiation of PMKVY in the Indian VET ecosystem was the need to provide quick turnaround of skilled manpower having basic technical and employability skills for the formal economy. The study will provide a foundation on which better understanding of short-term skill programmes will surface and consequent improvements can be affected in the program to attain better outcomes for students getting trained from PMKVY

Table 2 : Educational status of all employed participants

<b>Educational Status</b>	<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>Total Employed</b>
Postgraduates	1	1
Graduates	13	9
Completed School	9	2
School Drop-out	7	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>15</b>

Out of the 30 respondents, only 15 were able to find employment. More number of graduates were employed compared to respondents who had completed school or were school dropouts. The number of respondents who were employed stood at 15 out of the total population of the respondents (30). 10 respondents who got employed were graduate students and above. This suggests that within the scope of this study, graduates are able to take more advantage of the training than the school dropouts. The employability training affecting positively to the employment probability of graduates as compared to the school dropouts. The additional vocational education certificate might also be affecting the positive outcomes of employment searches for graduates. Only 5 respondents were school dropouts who were employed at the end of the training.

### **What are the employability skills that students perceive they have learnt**

PMKVY refers to employability as one of its objectives (NSDC, 2016). It describes the training of students to make them employable for wage or self-employment. The training schedule for the courses in PMKVY includes 40 hours of Entrepreneurship and Employability training that imparts generic skills including financial and entrepreneurship modules. Table 3 lists the trainees view on the employability

skills they had acquired over the course of the training. It was observed that PMKVY is successful in imparting the generic skills required by a participant to be employable.

Table 3: What the trainees expressed they have learned in PMKVY.

Employability: Generic Skills	
Participants Words	
Public Speaking	Communication Skills
Basic English-speaking skills	Computer Skills
Presentation Skills	Interview Skills
Conversational Skills	Body Language
Customer Service	Improved Behavior
Dressing sense	Overcoming Fear
Professional work ethic	Improved Self Esteem

## 5. DISCUSSION

Graduate employability is an ongoing issue in India (Khare, 2014; Kumar et al., 2019; Sinha et al., 2020). The lack of employment for higher and technical education graduates has been sufficiently researched and affects millions of students (Mitra & Verick, 2013; Bairagya, 2015; Mehrotra & Parida, 2019; Kumar C., 2021). The result of this research points to the enrollment of graduates into short term vocational courses. Graduates are joining PMKVY to get into formal sector employment with the addition of learning a skill and improving their employability skills. It also helps that the formal sector still prefers to hire graduates rather than VET students, so graduates start with an advantage of getting into employment faster after completing a VET course than a school/college dropout completing the same course (OECD, 2018). This phenomenon can be argued that even if the graduates did not go through the PMKVY training, they might have still got into employment. The reason they could not was because of lack of employment opportunities, or they did not possess sufficient employability skills to clear any recruitment process. Hence PMKVY acted as a finishing school for improving employability skills and gave them information on possible available employment opportunities.

Generic employability skills assist an individual in acquiring a job in various economic contexts and conditions relevant to the formal sectors. There are several models of employability that elaborate on the concept, put forward a framework to operationalize the concept and methods to measure it. The common thread that runs through all the research is the importance of generic skills as a major part of the employability construct. Generic skills can be defined as those 'core skills' or 'capabilities' that are

transferable and important for gaining employment (Kearns, 2001; Sanguinetti, 2003). These skills are pre-defined and include a set of values or attributes that makes a person employable in diverse economic conditions, contexts, and levels. These skills are transferable from one employment scenario to the other and reflect resourcefulness, adaptability and flexibility that can help to survive and sustain in an ever changing economic, business and employment context (Curtis, 2002).

The definition of employability being more about “job acquisition” and less about being prepared for a work profile can be related to the employed respondents in this research (Harvey, 2001). Out of the 15 students who were employed at the end of the training only 9 students were able to get employed in the sector in which they got trained, the rest 6 were employed in different sectors. Although PMKVY has 40 hours of English and Employability learning embedded in the course, there is no proof whether this is enough or also if we can base any judgment on it post the results of this research. Mel Fugate (2004) and Tomlinson (2012) have argued that there could be biases by employers towards hiring employees who are certain types of graduates or who have a certain level of educational degree. Although most research on Employability have been conducted on its effect on graduate students, but this could be happening in vocational education where employers may look at a graduate degree together with a vocational certificate. The high number of graduates employed placed post training points in that direction. This could be a phenomenon which might need more detailed study. Is it possible that employers are selecting or rejecting based on a graduate degree. The assumptions that may go into this kind of strategy by the employers is that the candidate would have more refined generic skills because of the time spent in the education system. This leads us to a very different way of defining employability that emerges from the research and the discussion thereof. If we also check PMKVY dashboard<sup>1</sup> it seems that only 44 per cent approximately have been placed post certification and training. In the context of employability skills, we must delve deeper as to whether skilled candidates are being rejected basis employability skills or lack of enough tertiary education or degree. In light of the demographic dividend that the country is blessed with, this does not make for happy reading.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study clearly indicate that PMKVY can provide a space for trainees to learn employability skills. Short- term training programmes is a recent phenomenon but deserves its position in the VET ecosystem in India. It may not be a perfect program but has the potential to transform the skill landscape of India at a time when India is being challenged with the demographic dividend. There are significant opportunities for further research where longitudinal studies of employed and unemployed trainees post training could be undertaken to further check empirically the outcomes of VET, the outcomes and effect of employability on trainees and the sociological effects of VET on the society and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pmkvyofficial.org/dashboard>

the family. Research on the Industry's perspective on employability could be undertaken to understand the work profile requirements of future employees and finally understanding the creation of employability models and whether 'one size fits all' is relevant in the current ever evolving labour market and employment opportunities. Lack of prior empirical research studies on short term VET courses in India has been a limiting factor during the research period. Long term VET programs have shown scope for improving employability in students by improving their knowledge and skill levels and positively affecting attitude and expectations. It also creates pathways for future employment (Mehrotra, 2018; Neroorkar & Gopinath, 2019) but this research clearly shows that short term VET programmes like PMKVY have also been successful in imparting and improving employability skills of its trainees.

## 7. SUGGESTIONS

As has been discussed, there are various models of employability that exists and then there is generic skills which we found to be evident in PMKVY. Although PMKVY states its objective to make trainees employable, however, it does not explain the definition of employability explicitly. Together with the definition, the following recommendations are made.

- Creating a separate model and curriculum on employability and making it implicit in the vocational course.
- Increasing the number of hours of the employability model basis the content
- Creating different models of employability for students with different academic achievements
- Training of Trainers for employability models

## DECLARATIONS

### Author Contributions

Mr. Prithish Behera: Conceptualization, Literature Review, Data Collection, Data Analysis, review-editing and writing, original manuscript preparation

Dr. Moksha Singh: Data Analysis and Review-editing

Dr. Shashikanta Tarai: Conceptualization and Review-editing

All authors have read and approved the published on the final version of the article)

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