



WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (VTE): OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND SOCIETAL IMPACT

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Abstract

A country must invest in its people's knowledge and skill sets to advance economically and socially. Empowering women is seen as the only means of eradicating poverty. Women who enroll in technical and vocational education programs can work for themselves, manage their families and personal lives, make better decisions, and participate in decision-making. This paper represents Vocational and Technical education from the perspectives of NEP 2020, Sustainable Development Goals on VTE, Annual Status of Education Report 2023 of youth taking vocational training and other courses, the Role of VTE on Women's Empowerment, Challenges to Women's Participation in VTE, The Empowerment of Women's Role in Social Development.

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), NEP 2020*

INTRODUCTION

The global recognition of the importance of women's involvement in development has led to a widespread focus on empowering women. Promoting gender equality is a key objective of the Millennium Prosperity Goals (MDGs), as it plays a crucial role in fostering prosperity, peace, and security. Undoubtedly, the realm of women is undergoing a progressive transformation as women are increasingly attaining greater autonomy compared to previous times (Nwachukwu, n.d.). Women's empowerment is the process of enabling women to think and act freely, exercise agency, and realize their potential as complete and equal members of society. Its primary goal is to ensure women become self-reliant, financially independent, and active players in all spheres of life. Empowering them gives them the necessary tools to live productively in the community, including suitable skills, abilities, and competencies of both mental and physical nature. Vocational education is thought to be the cornerstone that enables women to become independent and self-sufficient (Nwachukwu, n.d.). Women often possess unique training needs compared to men, in addition to their roles as contributing family workers, subsistence farmers, home-based micro-entrepreneurs, or low-paid seasonal laborers. The enhancement of domestic performance is contingent upon the development of skills, women's income-earning prospects, productivity, and employability, as well as opportunities to enhance sustainable rural development and subsistence (Ahamad et al., 2016). The process of improving women's sense of self-worth, their ability to make independent decisions, and their ability to impact societal change for the good of others as well as themselves is known as women's empowerment (Martin et al., 2022). Vocational and technical education makes women skillful so that they can participate in various fields of work. Women empowerment refers to altering the current power dynamics to benefit women and other marginalized groups who have been significantly restricted in their ability to exercise power and make independent decisions (Garbuja et al., 2016). Day by day, the requirement for vocational and technical education increases. Women are part of developing vocational and technical education if women don't participate in VTE, a section of the society will be left behind. Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) is defined by UNESCO as including not only general education but also the study of technologies and allied disciplines, as well as the acquisition of information and practical skills for a variety of jobs in the social and economic spheres. VTE includes a number of educational sectors (formal or school-based, informal or traditional apprenticeships) and educational levels (post-primary, secondary, and university).



To emphasize the significance of VTE, we must consider its transversal and longitudinal nature (Olaitan, 1996). In this study, the researcher discusses Women's empowerment through vocational and technical education. Researchers try to mention VTE from the perspective of NEP 2020. The researcher also discusses about sustainable development goal on VTE, the role of VTE on women empowerment, barriers to women participation in VTE and the empowerment of women's role in social development.

OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss Vocational and Technical Education from the perspectives of NEP 2020.
2. To explore Sustainable Development Goals on VTE.
3. To know the survey report of the Current Status of Youth taking Vocational Training or Other Courses.
4. To identify the role of women's empowerment on VTE.
5. To explore the challenges of women's participation in VTE.
6. To discuss the Empowerment of Women's role in Social Development.

Vocational & Technical Education (VTE) from the perspectives of NEP 2020

The first 21st century educational policy in India i.e. the National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes vocational as well as technical education. In the principles section of this policy, it is mentioned not to separate between academic and vocational education “no hard separations ... between vocational and academic streams, etc. to eliminate harmful hierarchies among, and silos between different areas of learning” (NEP 2020, p. 5). So, this education policy gives equal importance to vocational education as an academic stream. NEP 2020 admits that the percentage of formal vocational education in India is very low (<5%) as compared to some developed nations like the USA (52%), Germany (75%) and South Korea (96%). Keeping this short number of percentages in mind, this policy showed the urgency to expand vocational education in India (NEP 2020, para 16.1).

NEP 2020 mentions that there are a few reasons responsible for the lack of interest in vocational education. One important reason was vocational education mostly focused on grade 11-12, but there were no clear pathways or directions for higher education as compared to mainstream education. NEP 2020 recommends the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) play an important part in tackling challenges in the future. (NEP 2020, para 16.2). Another issue was students perceived vocational education as inferior to mainstream academic education. So, to overcome this issue of ‘social status hierarchy’, this policy focuses on “integration of vocational education programs into mainstream education in all education institutions in a phased manner” (NEP 2020, para 16.4). This integration will be all stages of education including higher education.

“By 2025, at least 50% of learners through the school and higher education system shall have exposure to vocational education” (NEP 2020, para 16.5). This policy suggests that ITIs, Polytechnique institutions, and local industry should collaborate with secondary schools. Schools should create Skill labs, that facilitate vocational education. Vocational education courses including short-term certificate courses will also be available for higher education students. “‘Lok Vidya’, i.e., important vocational knowledge developed in India, will be made accessible to students through integration into vocational education courses” (NEP 2020, para 16.5). Within the next decade, vocational education will be commenced in all schools and HEIs, with focus areas selected based on skills gap analyses and local opportunities mapping. Such an initiative shall be guided by a National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Education (NCIVE). NCIVE is putting in place mechanisms whereby early adopters of vocational education shall be in a position to innovate and share models and practices of success. Higher education institutions will test a multitude of models for apprenticeships and vocational education, and incubation centers will be set up in collaboration with industry (NEP 2020, paras. 16.6 & 16.7). For holistic & multidisciplinary higher education technical universities are integral parts of professional education. NEP 2020 widely accepted that technical education is necessary for the overall development of India “Technical education includes degree and diploma programs in, engineering, technology, management, architecture, town planning, pharmacy, hotel management, catering technology, etc., which are critical to India's overall development” (NEP 2020, para 20.6). As NEP 2020 proposes higher education should be multidisciplinary, technical education will be a part of and integrate with other disciplines.

Sustainable Development Goals on VTE

UNESCO placed a huge emphasis on vocational and technical education (VTE). The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) has three aims, all of which have a strong vocational education component. In target 4.3 it mentions “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university”. Here focus is given on two important points one is gender equality i.e., men and women both will get equal access, and another point is vocation and technical education should be affordable and quality. Target 4.4 mentions “By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship”. This target mainly emphasizes employability and job opportunities for skillful youth and adults. Employment and jobs are

important factors in women's empowerment (Sarkar, R., 2015). Target 4.5 states "By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations". Here also mentions eliminating gender discrimination and equal access. So, vocational and technical education is one of the very significant areas of sustainable development under goal 4 i.e., quality education.

Current Status of youth taking vocational training or other courses

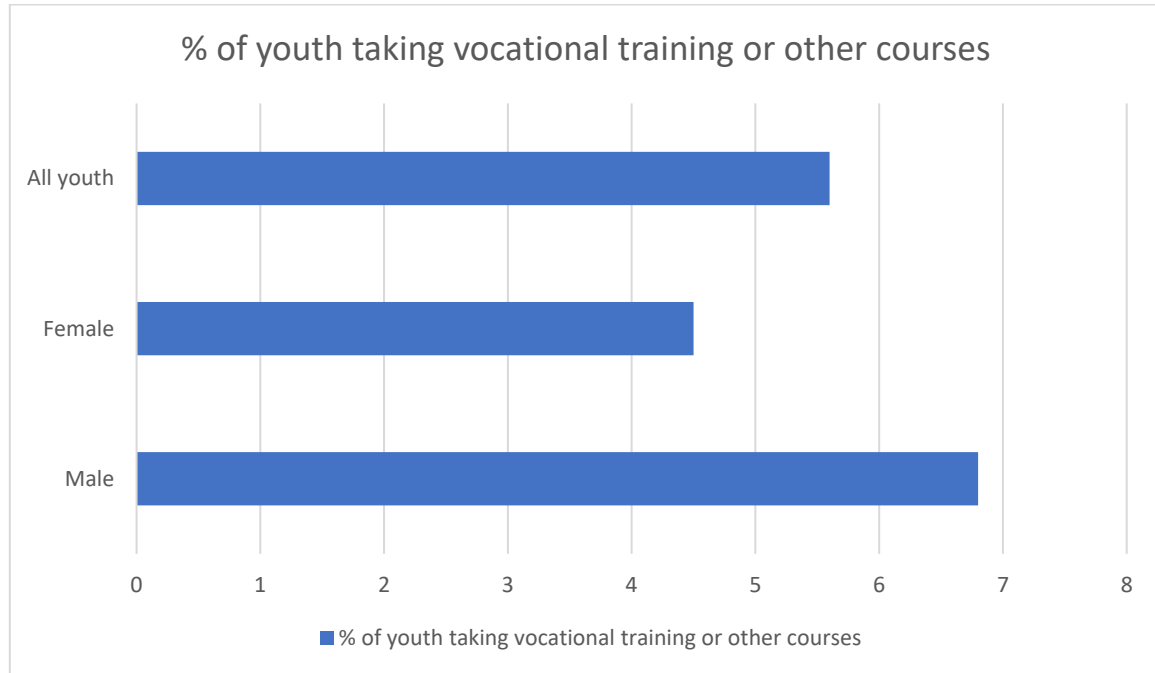


Fig. 1: Current Status of youth taking vocational training or other courses (Sources: ASER report 2023)

The above Bar Graph shows that -

- Only 5.6% of Indian youth enrolled in vocational training or other courses.
- Girls (4.5%) have a smaller percentage of young people enrolling in vocational training or other courses than boys (6.8%).

Role of VTE on Women's Empowerment

Economically independent and self-reliant: Women would be inspired, unfazed, and confident in their ability to work for themselves and be self-sufficient through vocational and technical education (Tyowuah et al., 2019). Every woman has their dreams in her life that they cannot fulfill due to patriarchal society. Vocational and technical education helps women to build up technical knowledge and skills so that women can choose the right line of work. Women's empowerment greatly depends on their access to education and economic possibilities. Even if a woman works in a low-level position such as a maid, she can still experience a sense of powerlessness. Therefore, ensuring financial stability is crucial for the empowerment of women. In this case, vocational and technical education helps women to get better position in their workplace.

Instruction and Encouraging Ability for Essential Skills: Vocational and technical education will impart the necessary training and expertise to cultivate craftswomen, technicians, and other skilled women who will contribute to the process of transforming the economy is crucial for achieving sustainable national development (Ahamad et al., 2016). Women are unable to actively engage in their emancipation as a result of their insufficient technical knowledge and competence. The primary objective of the Vocational and Technical Training course is to equip women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds with the necessary skills and self-assurance to attain economic and social autonomy. The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was established by the Government of India (GOI) to improve the general procedures that support women's holistic development (Meel et al., 2020). One of the primary techniques employed by NMEW is the allocation of resources towards the enhancement of skills and entrepreneurship, provision of microcredit, vocational training, and the formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to promote the economic empowerment of women.

Career Education

Vocational and technical education helps women to choose proper occupation so that women can be internally satisfied to do their job. Therefore, vocational and technical education provides technical experiences and abilities



that facilitate women to perform better in making occupational decisions about their special working field. A woman's career and technical education have a significant impact on her life. Knowledge is the most crucial tool for empowering women in society. Wife, mother, daughter, housekeeper, worker, citizen, etc. are just a few of the many roles that women play in society, each shaped by their biology and social environment (Hussain, 2018). Except it, women also have another identity which is obtained by their careers such as engineers, businesswomen, architects, Fashion designers, Accountants, etc. Vocational and Technical Education supports women to think outside of traditional walks of life which helps to develop their careers. Career education helps people integrate into the system of employment opportunities for transformation and national economic development (Tyowuah, 2019).

Business communication

Consumer education enhances understanding of commercial relationships and helps maintain peace in our socio-economic system. Technical and vocational education helps women grow consumer business and socio-economic skills. The program supports women in securing adequate jobs, establishing and growing businesses, and boosting productivity and incomes. Every woman plays a vital role in society. Vocational and Technical Education increases opportunity for women to enrich their knowledge about commercial aspects. It has been discovered that the majority of women are maintaining records of their daily income and expenditures, and they are also devoting any extra amount to their occupational activities. Vocational and technical education might potentially obstruct society's socioeconomic progress by teaching the general public about product and service consumption, promoting ethical business communication, and discouraging exploitation (Tyowuah, 2019).

Leadership power of women

VTE (Vocational and Technical Education) helps women to develop the power of leadership. Women's leadership roles are a result of their social, economic, and political empowerment (Garbuja et al., 2016). Leadership power of women influence others women specially who lives in village areas to engage in vocational and technical work. Consequently, women are assuming leadership roles in several local organizations, including cooperatives, mother groups, ward and village developmental committees (VDCs), political organizations, and community forestry. Leaders need to know what motivational methods to use and when to use them to get their employees to reach their full potential (Ismail et al., 2023). In this case, as a leader women play a crucial role to imply their superior knowledge. Leadership plays a crucial role in expanding vocational training possibilities for women and girls by providing motivational training. Vocational training and a setting that makes it easy to find work are important ways to give women more power and get them involved in making decisions at home (Ismail et al., 2023).

Attitudes of Women on VTE

Vocational and technical education has helped to change the attitude of women in the field where women have the opportunity to establish themselves outside of homework. It is also helped that women are not inferior to men in any respect. VTE is a great weapon against poverty and hunger as well as for women's empowerment, thus it is especially important for underprivileged, marginalized groups and women. By enhancing food security, employability, and domestic productivity, VTE can make a significant impact on the lives of many rural poor and women (Meel et al., 2020). women can appreciate themselves and their abilities in every facet of life when they are empowered. It includes being less constrained by societal norms, beliefs, and behaviors, having more agency in decision-making, and having easier access to information and resources (Momani, 2019).

Challenges to Women's Participation in VTE

Gender Stereotypes about women

In developing countries, women are one of the most marginalized groups due to gender, social, and cultural bias, as well as other stereotypes (Williams et al., 2018). Women are seen as a burden in our country. Parents think women are only fit for housework. In certain instances, parents are hesitant to enroll their daughters in school because they are responsible for the care of their younger siblings and assist with domestic tasks. In India, millions of women are forced to give up their freedoms for the good of their husbands, families, society, and community. In Indian society, girls are often trained to become good wives rather than being encouraged to pursue entrepreneurship. They are not permitted to establish connections with other businessmen, which is seen as sinful and culturally unacceptable behavior (Kaur et al., 2018).

Poor education access and retention

Analyzing access and retention can be accomplished by examining the enrolment rates at a specific level of schooling. Discrimination based on gender and unequal access to education starts the problems (Kaur et al., 2018). Indian parents always think that by sending boys to school, they can learn and earn money, which girls cannot. Hence, the drop-out rate of girls in school continued to increase. Gradually, women become illiterate. Apart from traditional education, they also started to be deprived of vocational and technical education, which is the main obstacle to women's vocational and technical education.



Lack of Self-confidence and decision-making power

Women cannot learn skilful knowledge and techniques for illiteracy so they have no self-confidence in vocational and technical education. Women face a multitude of barriers to accessing skills and productive employment (Ahamad et al., 2016). Women can make significant contributions to different parts of the economy when they have the education, knowledge, and self-assurance to do so (Vijayalekshmy, n.d.). Due to a lack of proper educational opportunities, women face a lack of self-confidence and are afraid to participate in vocational and technical education. Therefore, they are unable to decide about vocational and technical education. Except it, economic dependence and dominance of male-headed societies have reduced the decision-making capacity of women in corporate activity (Verma, 2015).

Shortage of Women VTE Institution

There is an insufficiency of well-resourced technical and vocational schools that were founded after independence. AICTE (2018–19) says that there are only 10,426 of these kinds of VET schools in the country (Joshi et al., 2023). In India, there is no adequate VTE institution for women. The vocational training for women, under the supervision of the Directorate General of Training, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, was carried out by a network of 11 institutes. This network consisted of one National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) located in Noida (established in 1977) and ten Regional Vocational Training Institutes (RVTIs) located in Mumbai (established in 1977), Bengaluru (established in 1977), Thiruvananthapuram (established in 1983), Kolkata (established in 1986), Tura (established in 1986), Panipat (established in 1986), Allahabad (established in 1991), Indore (established in 1992), Vadodara (established in 1993), and Jaipur (established in 1994).

The Teaching Medium

Another problem in the Vocational courses is the medium of instruction. In practically all of the major technical colleges in modern India, English is the most often used language of instruction. Getting technical and vocational education in English can be difficult for students who have studied Bengali, Hindi, or another regional language extensively (Joshi et al., 2023). So, Women feel disappointed and exhausted from their studies. They have no intrinsic motivation for their study. As a result, women started turning away from vocational and technical education.

Limited fields of training courses for women

In India, there are restricted vocational and technical training courses for women. So, women do not get the opportunity to attend their preferred courses. The vocational education and training opportunities available to women are frequently restricted to a limited range of professions that are dominated by women and contribute to the perpetuation of their traditional roles and obligations. While this even though it might help them make more money, it won't give them the chance to You can make money in new, non-traditional areas like green energy, information and communication technologies (ICT), and non-traditional agricultural exports (NTAE), industries where women can make more money and get better technical or management training jobs (Kaur et al., 2018).

Misconceptions about vocational training courses

In our country, there are always aspirations of a traditional education system. Especially for women, there is a trend that they are not capable of vocational and technical education. As India moves towards a knowledge economy, skills are recognized as crucial for economic growth, but the perspective of vocational education remains uncertain. It needs more time before it can be thought of as a good option for regular schooling. Most rural women in the country who want to go to vocational school don't because they don't know what employers are looking for or because there aren't any classes that match their needs (Kaur et al., 2018).

The Empowerment of Women's Role in Social Development

Ensures society's holistic growth

Women's empowerment is a socially-progressive movement because it seeks to change how society views and treats women to expand their rights and possibilities. Social development refers to establishing norms, rules, and standards that regulate human interactions. It encompasses a comprehensive strategy aimed at enhancing the overall well-being of all individuals, with a particular focus on improving the lives of those female who are economically disadvantaged or in need (Chompa, 2022).

Economic Development

The empowerment of women fosters economic growth and prosperity within communities. When women are provided with education, training in skills, and economic opportunities, they can actively engage in the labor



market, establish their enterprises, and make valuable contributions to the local economy. Interventions are necessary to promote women's involvement in the country's economic development to achieve women's empowerment. Development initiatives should prioritize addressing genuine gender needs, such as women's income and material assets, to enhance women's empowerment and reduce poverty (Bhoganadam et al.,2014).

Education and skill development

Education is the primary and crucial method of empowering women by equipping them with knowledge, skills, and self-assurance to engage in the process of development actively. It is vital for individuals, particularly girls, and women, since it serves as a gateway to various opportunities (Bhoganadam et al.,2014). Women who are educated have the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking to make informed decisions and improve their families and communities. Women with degrees are more inclined to support their children's education and community development.

Health & well-being

Women's empowerment improves community and individual health. Access to healthcare, reproductive rights, and health information empowers women to make health decisions for themselves and their families. Empowered women are conscious about their children's health so they try to access the best healthcare services from appropriate health institution. Empowered women organized various health-related awareness programs for the well-being of their families and communities.

Socio-cultural change

Socio-cultural values refer to the collective set of values, beliefs, traditions, and behaviors that exist within a society. Our views about risk-taking, careers, money, and the perfect lifestyle are all influenced by these ideals. Sociocultural values are one of the many interrelated elements that could affect a society's economic development (Vimala, n.d.). Empowered women get rid of traditional stereotypes and accept socio-cultural change fluently. At present, the woman is focusing on her academic pursuits, fitness, body shape, enriching requirements, and well-being, as well as her social association, spiritual activities, and recreational or entertaining needs (Vimala,n.d.).

Sustainable Development

Women's empowerment is a process, and sustainable development is a very broad field that includes sociocultural, economic, and environmental elements. Gender concerns have mostly been dealt with as societal issues up until now (Lohani et al., 2017). Environmental management and development depend much on women. Therefore, attaining sustainable development depends on their complete involvement. Women are aware of their basic women's rights to equity and partnership through the goal of sustainable development (Batool et al.,2022).

CONCLUSION

To make women more self-assured and independent and cultivate the capacity to participate in decision-making processes inside the home and the wider world, women must take the initiative to improve their skills (Verma.,2015). Vocational and technical education and training are essential for gaining the information and abilities needed to secure a gainful job and a comfortable living (Allen.,2020). The researcher discusses women's empowerment through VTE. The researcher describes Economically independent and self-reliant, Training and Empowerment for Necessary Skills, career education, business communication, etc as a role of VTE in women's Empowerment. As a barrier, the researcher discusses Gender Stereotypes about women, Poor education access and retention, Lack of Self-confidence and decision-making power, Shortage of Women in VTE Institutions, etc. As a social development, the researcher discusses Ensuring the holistic development of society, Economic Development, Socio-cultural change, etc. The researcher also shows the survey of ASER (Annual Status of Education Report) of 2023 which shows us the percentage of Youth taking vocational training or other courses, by sex.

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