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Skilling Need of Youth in West Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya

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Abstract

The rise of literacy in India in recent decades has inevitably been accompanied by increasing unemployment among youth. The growth in the number of qualified young people has not, unfortunately, translated into the availability of skilled, employable personnel in the country. In the era of globalization, liberalization, and privatization, the employability of educated youth is closely linked to the acquisition of essential skills. The growing problem of skilled unemployment in India is often wrongly attributed to a shortage of jobs. In reality, with ever-increasing global demand for Indian talent, the services sector in India remains perennially hungry for fresh talent. According to estimates, over the next few years, 10 million more people will join the ranks of the unemployed, bringing the total to 220 million. The Government of India also forecasts the creation of 1 million additional job vacancies, but it expects that this will not be sufficient to counter the effects of population growth. As of July 2023, the unemployment rate in India stood at 7.95%. In March 2023, the unemployment rate in Meghalaya was 2.63%, and for rural areas it was 1.85%. Today, India is recognized as one of the youngest nations in the world, with over 50 percent of the population under the age of 30. It is further estimated that by 2025, India will account for 25 percent of the total global workforce. Recognizing the urgent need for skill development among youth, the Government of India has launched several initiatives through the National Skill Development Council (NSDC) and various Sector Skills Councils. These initiatives aim to expand vocational training institutions, introduce schemes for skill development, and identify industries with high employment potential. The mission of these initiatives is to train nearly 500 million people across different fields. The mission also emphasizes upgrading the skills of youth to international standards through significant industry involvement. For Meghalaya,

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skill development is critical from both socio-economic and demographic perspectives. In the West Jaintia Hills District, the majority of youth have limited access to appropriate skill education and training. The district does not yet have a well-institutionalized system of vocational training to meet the needs of educated but unemployed youth. Therefore, the adoption of the right approach is required to establish a high-quality framework of skill education and training for the youth in West Jaintia Hills District. The present paper is the outcome of empirical research conducted in selected villages of West Jaintia Hills District to identify the skilling needs of the youth. It also suggests intervention mechanisms to provide the desired skills in line with the needs and aspirations of the youth in the district.

Keywords: *Youth Unemployment, Skill Development, Employability, Vocational Training, National Skill Development Council (NSDC).*

Introduction

India occupies around 2.4% of the world's landmass but is home to 17.5% of the world's population - approximately 1.2 billion people. Population density is higher in urban areas, while nearly 75% of India's population resides in about six lakh villages. There are visible disparities between rural and urban regions, rich and poor, highly educated and lesser educated, and forward and backward areas. Resourceful people, particularly those in urban settings, have access to better education and professional training. In contrast, the vast majority of those living in rural areas and urban slums have limited education and rarely undergo technical, professional, or vocational training. For most of these groups, quality higher education is unaffordable. Consequently, they tend to work in the low-paid, unorganized sector, where individual productivity is only a fraction of that in the organized sector of the Indian economy. In an increasingly competitive environment, the unorganized sector must enhance the productivity of its workforce to ensure survival and growth. However, a paradox exists: the informal sector cannot afford to employ highly educated and professionally trained manpower, as such individuals typically aspire to more challenging, rewarding, and satisfying careers. Therefore, the only viable option for the informal sector is to rely on relatively low-paid workers trained through non-formal skill development systems. There is, therefore, an urgent need to train millions of youths every year through a nationwide network of non-formal skill development initiatives. Such programs must attract beneficiaries from all sections of Indian society, with special emphasis on Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), women, school dropouts, minorities, persons with disabilities, economically weaker sections, and other underprivileged groups.

1.1 Profile of Jaintia Hills District

The total area of Jaintia Hills District in Meghalaya is 3,819 km², with a population density of 103 people per square kilometre. According to the 2011 Census, the district had a total population of 395,124, comprising 196,285 males and 198,839 females. There were 66,028 families residing in the district. The overall sex ratio was 1,013 females per 1,000 males. Of the total population, 7.2% lived in urban areas, while 92.8% resided in rural areas. The average literacy rate in urban areas was 91.1%, compared to 59.1% in rural areas. The sex ratio in urban areas was higher at 1,079, while in rural areas it stood at 1,008. Children aged 0–6 years accounted for 90,911 individuals, constituting about 23% of the total population. This included 46,011 male children and 44,900 female children. The child sex ratio was 976, lower than the overall district sex ratio of 1,013. The total literacy rate of the district was 61.64%, which was considerably lower than the state literacy rate of 74.43%. Male literacy stood at 58.14%, while female literacy was slightly higher at 65.06%. The district also recorded 207,597 illiterates. Jaintia Hills is predominantly inhabited by tribal communities, with Scheduled Tribes constituting about 95.2% of the total population. In terms of religion, Christians form the majority at 68.74%, followed by Hindus (3.15%), Muslims (0.42%), Buddhists (0.07%), Sikhs (0.01%), and Jains (0.01%). About 27.60% of the population reported belonging to "other religions." Of the total geographical area, only 8 km² falls under urban regions, while 3,811 km² is classified as rural. In urban regions, the literacy rate was 91.1%, with male literacy at 91.83% and female literacy at 90.44%.

1.2 Need and Justification of the Study

India, being largely an agrarian economy, derives a significant share of its GDP from villages and rural areas. Rural development and prosperity are therefore deeply integrated with the nation's overall growth. In this context, skilled workers and entrepreneurs are the need of the hour, with the government committed to strengthening the skill landscape in the coming years. Mobilizing the available youth and workforce and transforming them into skilled individuals is critical for harnessing the potential of India's burgeoning youth population. Although India possesses abundant resources, there is often a lack of knowledge on how to utilize them effectively. This is where skill development becomes essential. With the right skills, individuals can convert raw materials into finished products without depending on others for processing. Skill development thus forms the foundation of industrial growth, enabling the creation of a robust industrial economy. Such an economy would strengthen India's GDP while reducing overdependence on agrarian and service-based sectors.

1.3 The Problem

The challenge of skilling India is enormous, as recent studies indicate that employers find only about 25% of Indian graduates "employable" in the organized sector. The informal sector, which comprises nearly 93% of the workforce, lacks a structured skilling mechanism, as most skill development takes place on the job. There is therefore an urgent need to reorganize the skill development ecosystem and promote initiatives tailored to the needs of industry to improve the quality of life of the population. Skill development initiatives will help actualize the country's latent potential, and a national policy on skill development is already in progress to address this challenge. In Meghalaya, youth employability has declined due to a lack of skills and experience, highlighting the need to place greater emphasis on skill training. The exodus of rural youth to cities is another factor contributing to unemployment. According to data released by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (Shillong Times, February 3, 2022), the unemployment rate in Meghalaya is the third lowest in India at 1.5%. However, rural youth are less skilled compared to their urban counterparts, who often pursue professional courses in fields such as engineering and medicine, largely due to differences in financial resources. Although rural areas are rich in raw materials for industries, prosperity will not be achieved unless employment opportunities are created locally. The creation of new avenues of employment in rural areas is therefore viewed as the most effective way to reduce distress migration from villages to cities.

1.4 The Mandate of Skill Development Programmes

The skill development programmes selected for training should be designed on the basis of a need assessment survey and the felt needs of the locality. Greater emphasis must be placed on meeting the growing demands of the service sector. Each identified college should conduct a survey to determine the priority skill training requirements of a cluster of 10 to 20 villages.

The skill programmes offered should be flexible, non-formal, and open to all, without any restrictions based on age, gender, or educational qualifications. Special attention should be given to targeting poor and deprived sections of society in both urban and rural areas, particularly women, SCs/STs, OBCs, minorities, school dropouts, street children, persons with disabilities, economically weaker sections, and other underprivileged groups. To promote self-employment in the service sector, training should emphasize multi-skill development. For employment in production centres, training may focus either on specialized designated skills or multi-trade

skills, depending on local needs and industry requirements. The possibility of sharing financial, infrastructural, and skill resources across institutions, organizations, and agencies should also be explored. Trainees' achievements, in terms of competencies developed, should be recognized through certificates that indicate their proficiency levels. Such certification, issued by community colleges, will assist employers in recruitment decisions. Community colleges may also collaborate with potential employers to jointly issue certificates to programme participants. Furthermore, community colleges should establish an effective feedback mechanism to track the post-training outcomes of trainees, particularly their transition into self-employment or wage employment.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

1. To study the socio-economic conditions of the people living in the villages in and around DDU Community College, Wahiajer;
2. To find out the vocational needs of the unemployed youth from the surveyed villages.

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

The study is delimited to the villages in and around DDU Community College, Wahiajer.

1.7 Universe of the Study

The universe of the study comprises of all the 124 villages in Thadlaskein block of Jaintia hills district, Meghalaya.

1.8 Sample

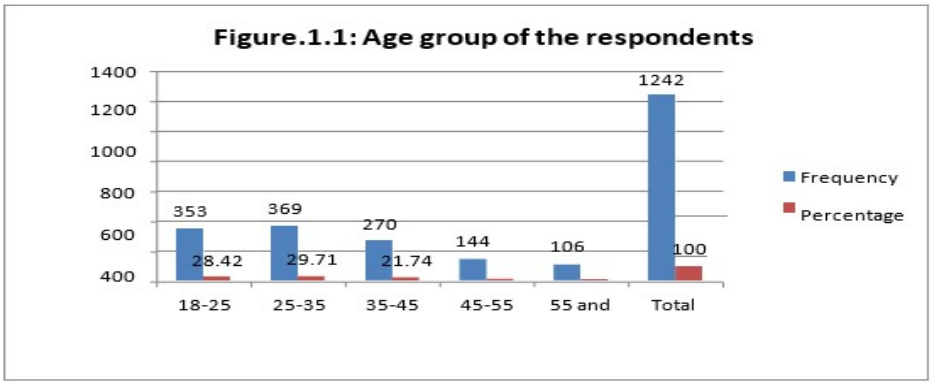
The sample of the study was 1242 households across 20 villages covering 1242 respondents using random sampling method.

1.9 Tools Used

In order to study the socio-economic conditions of the people in and around Wahiajer and find the vocational needs of unemployed youth, an interview schedule was developed by the investigators.

1.10 Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Figure 1.1: Age group of the respondents



The figure 1.1: shows the age group of the respondents. The data revealed that maximum number of the respondents were in the age group of 25-35 years (29.71 percent), followed closely by the 18-25 years age group (28.42 percent), and followed by respondents from age group of 35-45 years (21.74 percent). In the age group of 45-55 there were 11.60 percent respondents and in the age group of 55 and above, there were 8.53 percent respondents.

Figure. 1.2: Sex of the respondents

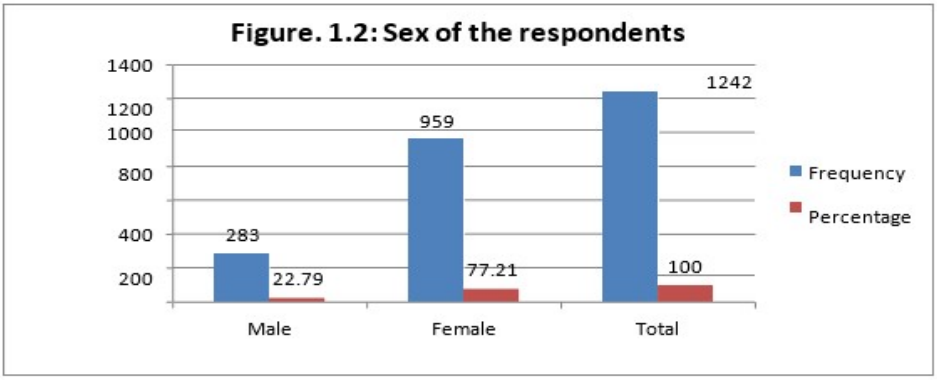


Figure 1.2 reflects the sex of the respondents. It was found that 77.21 percent of the respondents were females and 22.79 percent were males.

Figure 1.3: Type of family

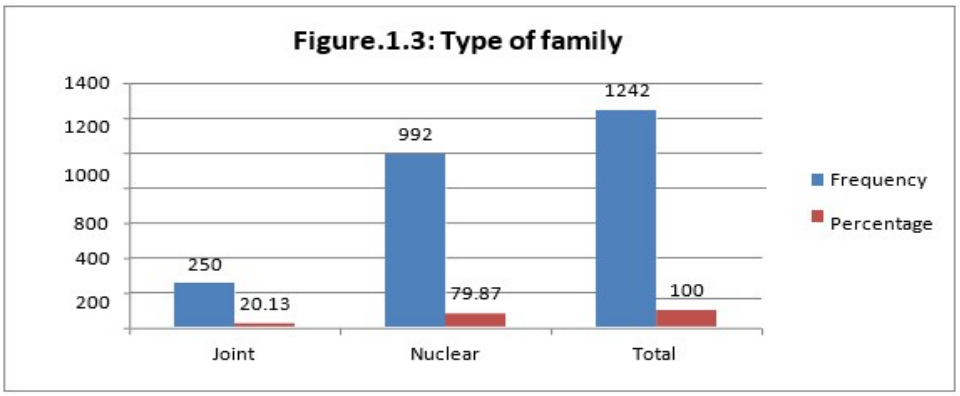


Figure 1.3. shows that with regard to the type of family of the respondents, it was found that 79.87 percent were nuclear families and only 20.13 percent were joint families.

Figure 1.4 : Family size of the respondents

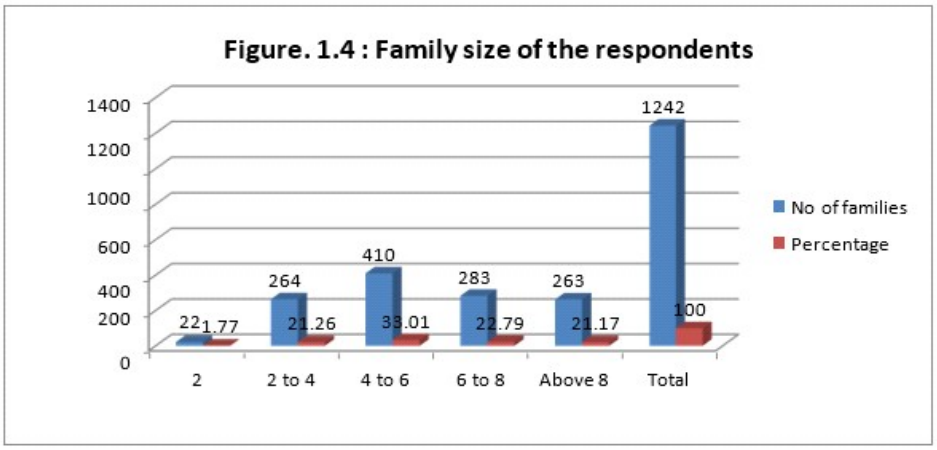


Figure 1.4. shows the family size of the respondents. It was found that 410 families constituting to 33.01 percent had family members of 4 to 6 members, 283 families constituting to 22.79 percent had 6 to 8 members, 264 families constituting to 21.26 percent had 2-4 members, 263 families constituting to 21.17 percent had more than 8 members and only 22 families constituting to 1.77 percent had 2 members.

Figure 1.5: Religion of the respondents

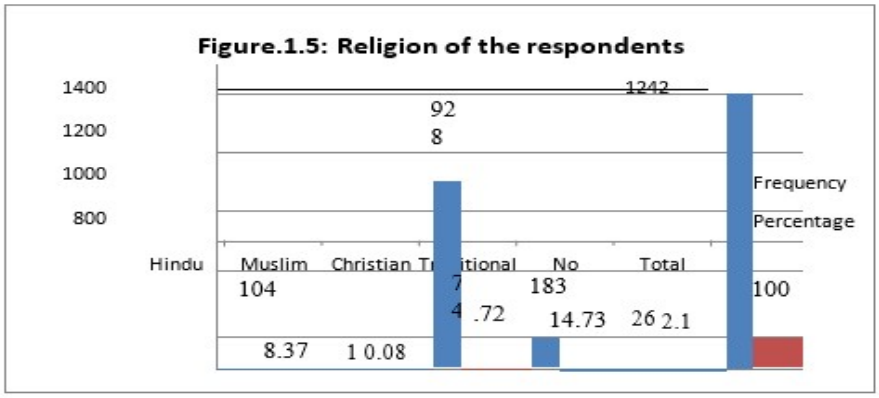


Figure.1.5 shows the religion of the respondents. It was found that 74.72 percent belong to Christian religion, 14.73 percent followed traditional religion, 8.37 percent were Hindus and 0.08 percent Muslims. There was no response from 2.10 percent respondents with respect to their religious status.

Figure 1.6: Tribal sub group of the respondents

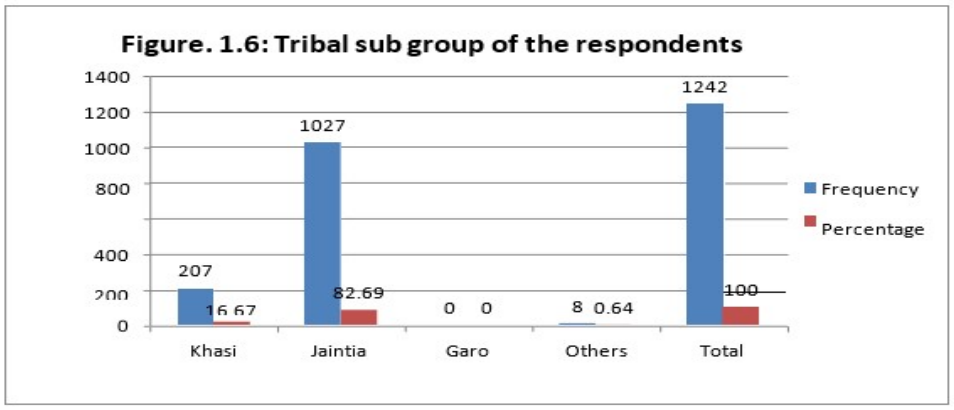


Figure 1.6: Shows the tribal subgroups of the respondents. It was found from the data that 16.67 percent respondents were Khasi's, 82.69 percent are Jaintia's and 0.64 percent constituted other subgroups.

Figure 1.7: Marital status of the respondents

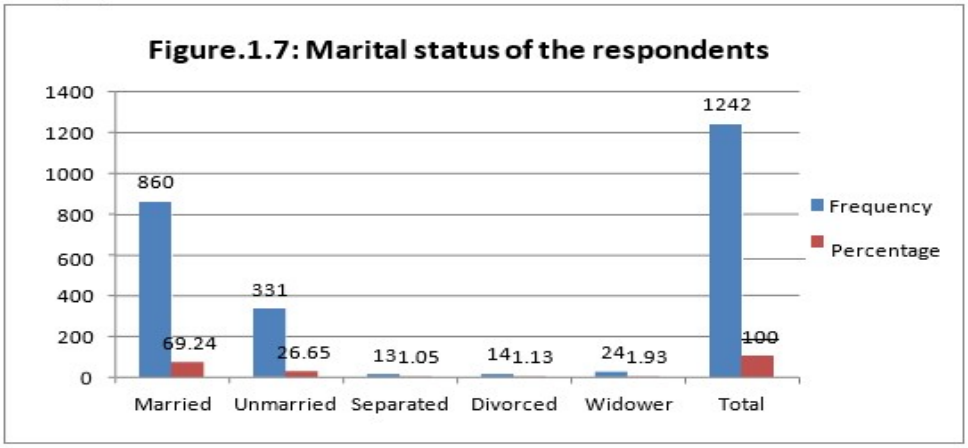


Figure 1.7: Shows the marital status of the respondents. It was found from the data that out of 1242 respondents, 69.24 percent respondents are married, 26.56 percent are unmarried, 1.05 percent are separated, 1.13 percent are divorced and 1.93 percent are widowers.

Figure. 1.8: Income of the respondents per month

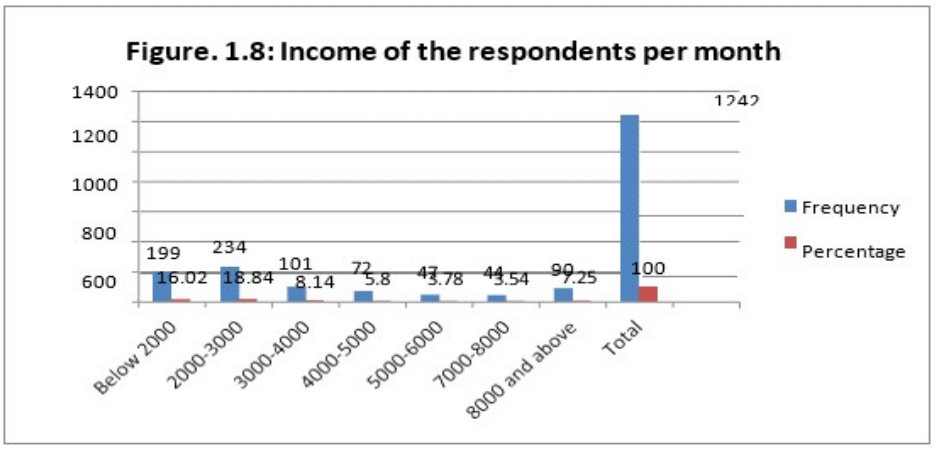


Figure.1.8 reflects the monthly income of the respondents. It was found from the data that 36.63 percent respondents have no income. 18.84 percent of the respondents have income of Rs 2000-3000 per month, 16.02 percent have income less than Rs 2000 per month, 8.14 percent have income between Rs 3000-4000 per month, 5.80 percent have income between Rs 4000-5000 per month, 3.78 percent

have income between Rs 5000-6000 per month, 3.54 percent have income between Rs 7000-8000 per month and 7.25 percent have income above Rs 8000 per month.

Figure 1.9: Occupational status of the respondents

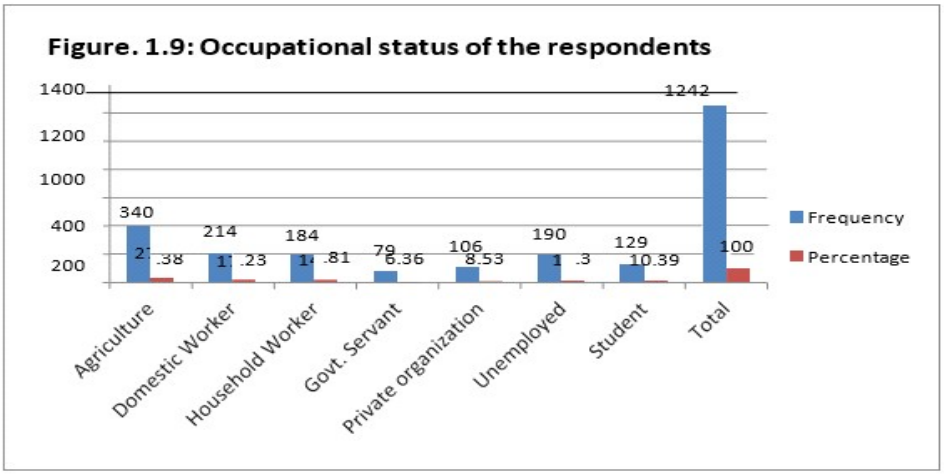


Figure.1.9 shows the occupational status of the respondents. It was found that 27.38 percent practiced agriculture, 17.23 percent work as domestic servants, 14.81 percent work as household workers, 6.36 were government servants, 8.53 percent work in private organizations, 15.30 percent were unemployed and 10.39 percent were students.

Figure. 1.10: Educational status of the respondents

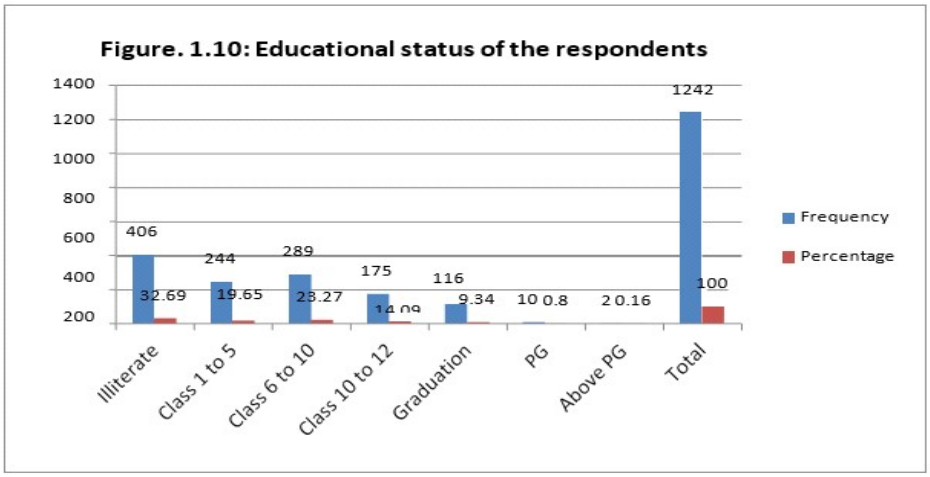


Figure 1.10. shows the educational status of the respondents. It was found that 32.69 percent were illiterates, 19.65 percent studied up to grade V, 23.27 percent studied from grade VI to X, 14.09 were between grade X to XII , 9.34 percent were graduates, 0.80 percent were post graduates and only 0.16 percent had qualification above PG level.

Figure 1.11: Last educational status of the respondents

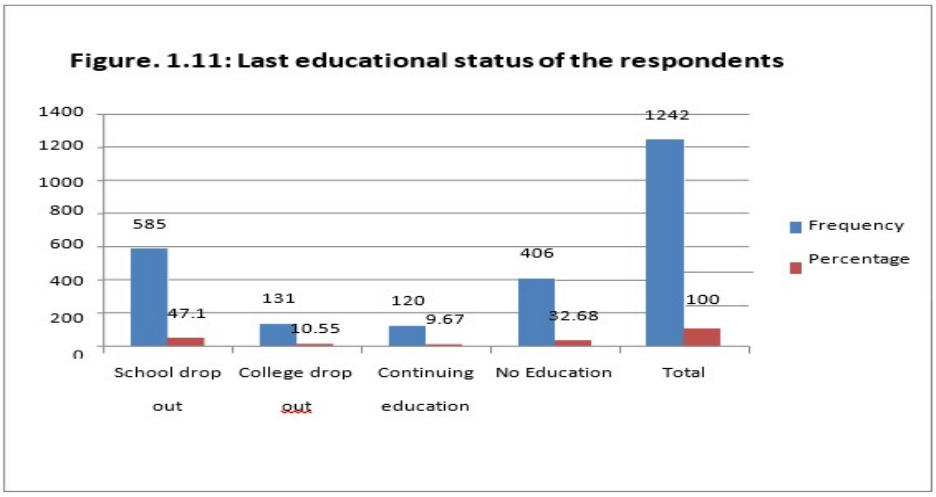


Figure1.11 shows the last educational status of the respondents. It was found that 47.10 percent were school dropouts, 10.55 percent were college dropouts and only 9.67 were continuing their education at present.

Figure.1.12: Present employment status of the respondents

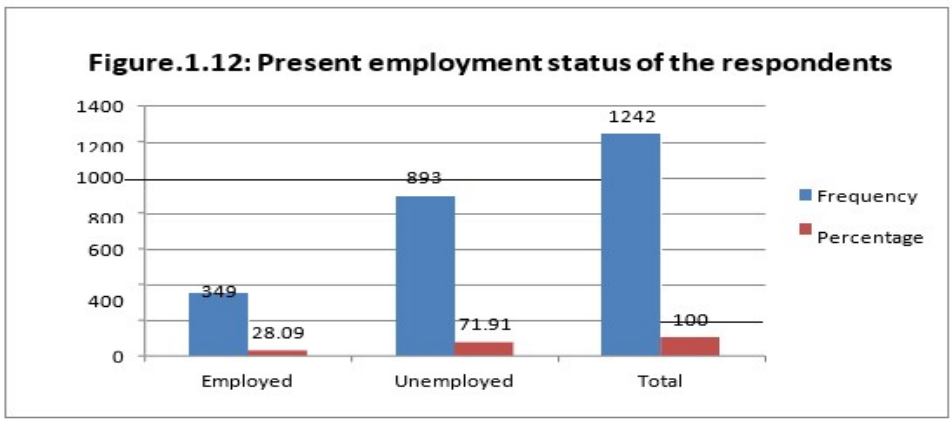


Figure.1.12. shows the present employment status of the respondents. It was found that 28.09 percent were employed in some occupation or the other and 71.91 percent were unemployed.

Figure.1.13: Number of unemployed in the house

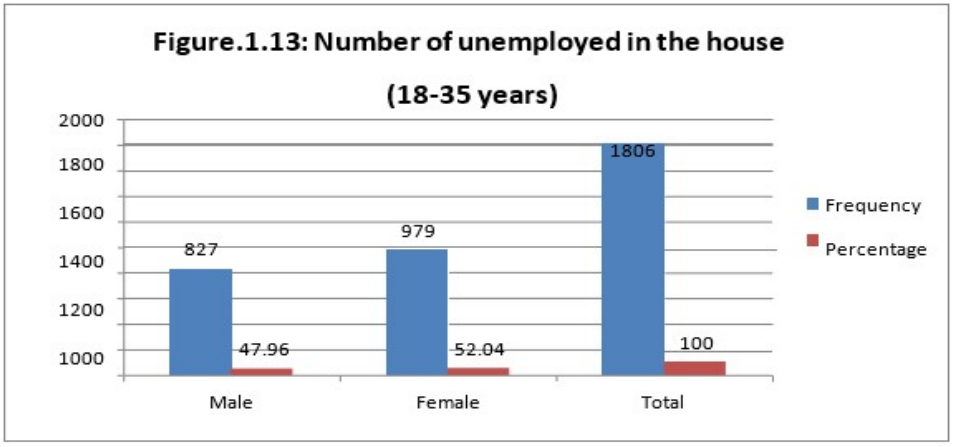


Figure.1.13 shows the number of unemployed persons in the household. It was found that nearly 1806 persons in the age group of 18-35 years from 1242 houses were unemployed. The unemployed males in this age group were found to be 47.96 percent and the unemployed females were 52.04 percent.

Figure.1.14: Primary source of income

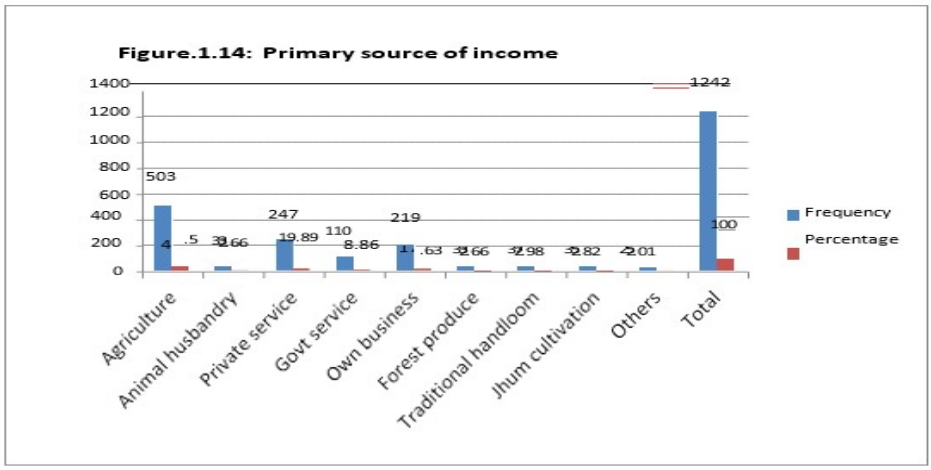


Figure.1.14 shows the primary occupation of the respondent's family.

It was found that 40.50 percent are agriculturists, 2.66 depend upon animal husbandry, 19.89 percent have private sector jobs, 8.86 percent are in government services, 17.63 percent depend upon their own business, 2.66 percent depend upon forest produce, 2.98 percent depend upon traditional handloom, 2.82 percent practice Jhum cultivation and 2.01 percent depend upon other work.

Figure.1.15: Land holdings of the family

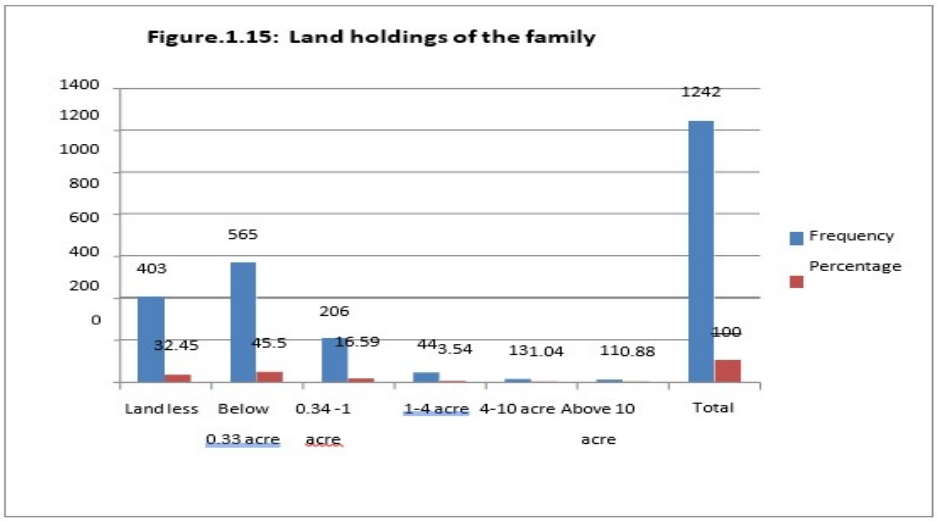


Figure 1.15 shows the land holding of the family. It was found from the data that 32.45 percent of the households are landless. Further 45.50 percent have land below 0.33 acres, 16.59 percent have 0.34-1 acre, 3.54 percent have 1-4 acres, 1.04 percent have 4-10 acres and 0.88 percent have more than 10 acres of land.

Figure.1.16 shows the type of the land holdings. It was found that 6.92 percent have wet land, 15.30 percent have dry land, 45.33 percent have land on hilly slopes and 32.45 percent have no land.

Figure. 1.16: Type of land

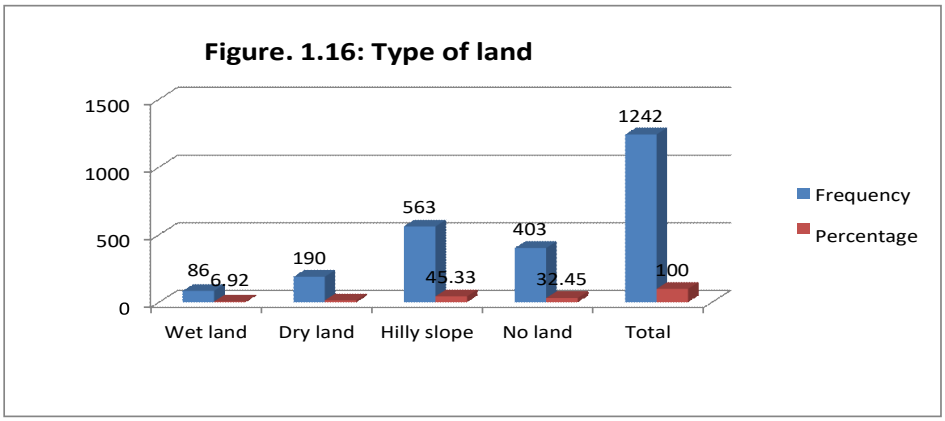


Figure. 1.17: Type of food crops grown

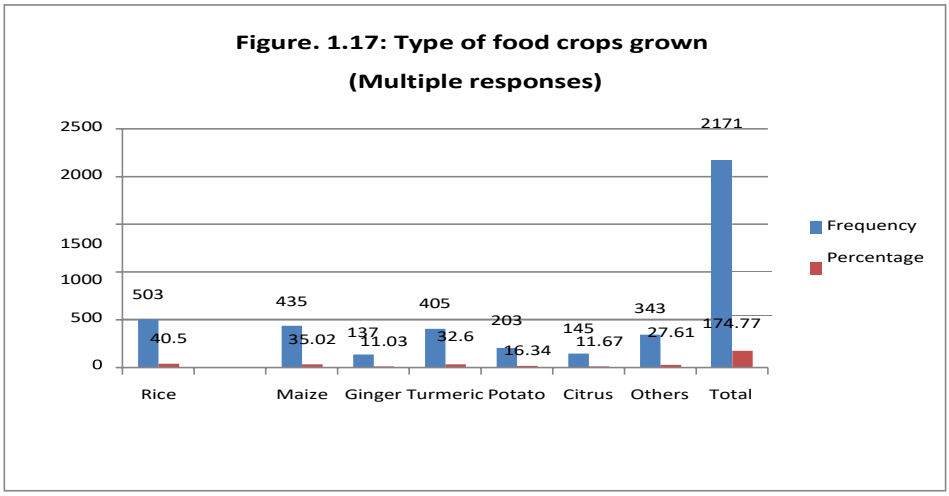


Figure.1.17 shows that the food crops grown by the respondents family members. It was found that 40.50 percent grow rice, 35.02 percent grow maize, 11.03 percent grow ginger, 32.60 percent grow turmeric, 16.34 percent grow potato, 11.67 percent grow citrus and 27.61 per cent grow other crops.

Figure.1.18: Other food crops grown

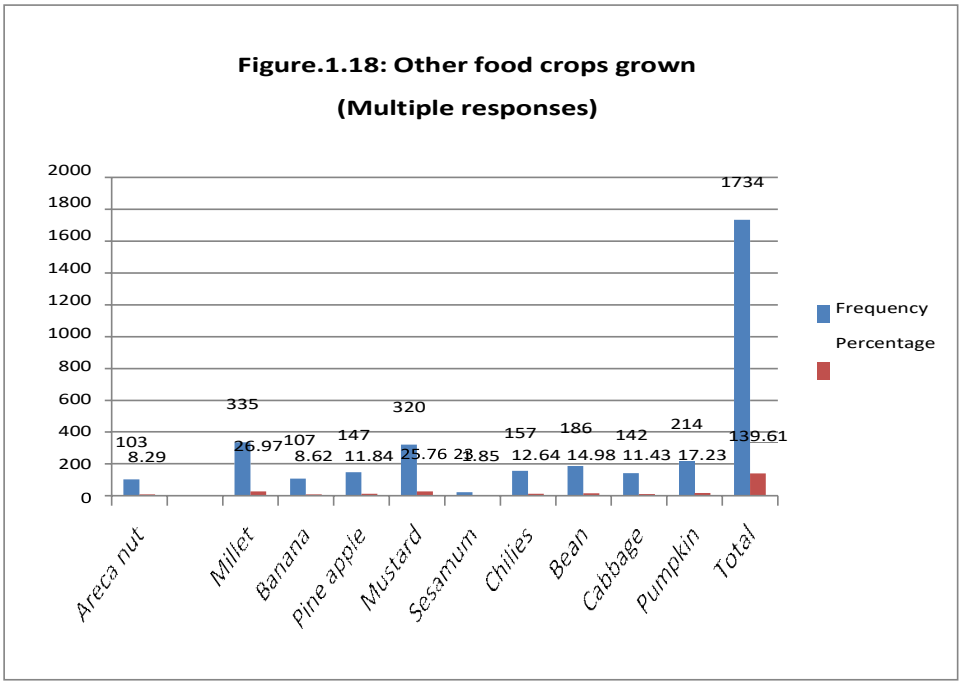


Figure.1.18 shows the other crops grown by the respondent's family. The data show that 8.29 percent grow areca nut, 26.97 percent grow millet, 8.62 percent grow banana, 11.84 percent grow pineapple, 25.67 percent grow mustard, 1.85 percent grow sesame, 12.64 percent chillies, 14.98 percent grow bean, 11.43 percent grow cabbage and 17.23 percent grow pumpkin.

Figure 1.19: Family Member's Interest in Vocational Training Programmes

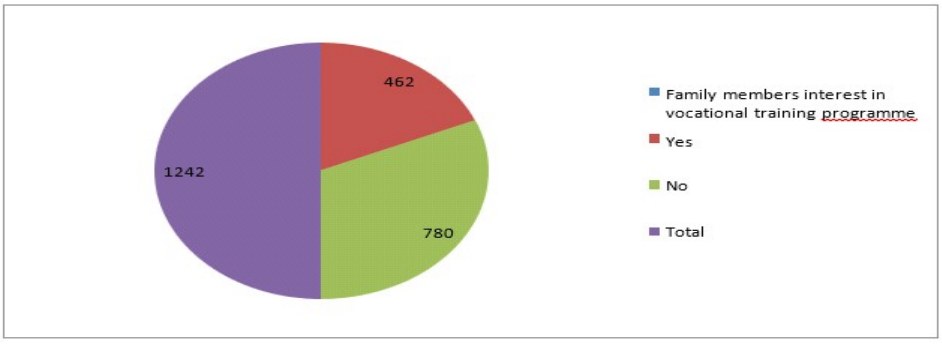
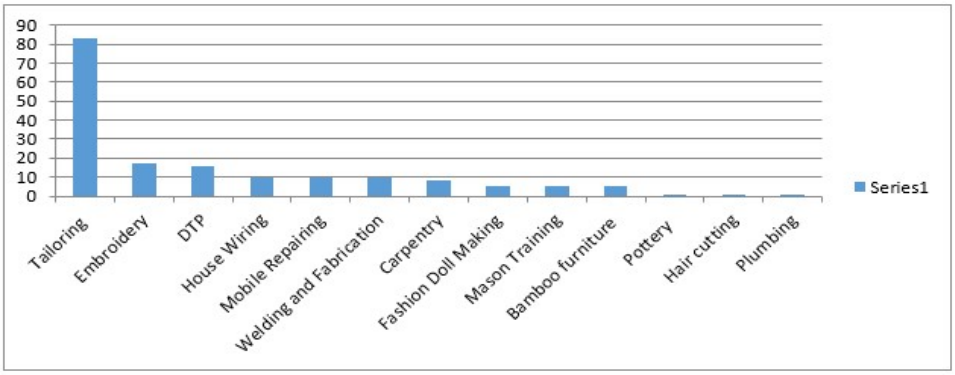


Figure.1.19. shows the family members interest in vocational training offered by DDU community college, Wahiajer. It was found that out of 1242 households, nearly about 37 percent of the households constituting to 462 members are willing to undergo vocational training programmes under DDU community college.

Figure 1.20: Interest in Vocational Trades by the Respondents



The data shows the vocational trades which the respondents are interested in. Out of 1242 respondents, it was found that 171 respondents were interested in vocational training programmes. The most favoured vocational training programme was cutting and tailoring (83 respondents), embroidery (17 respondents), DTP (16 respondents), house wiring (10 respondents), mobile repairing (10 respondents), welding and fabrication (10 respondents), carpentry (8 respondents), fashion doll making, mason training and bamboo furniture making (5 respondents each), pottery, hair cutting and plumbing (1 each). But nearly about 37 percent of the households had members who are interested in vocational training programmes, according to the opinion of the respondents.

1.11 Main Findings

The survey was conducted across 1,242 households in 20 villages located in and around the DDU Community College, Wahiajer. Data were collected from one member of each household. Of the 1,242 respondents, nearly 30% belonged to the 25–35 years age group, followed by those aged between 18–25 years. Among the respondents, 77% were female and 23% male. Family composition analysis revealed that almost 80% of the families were nuclear, while 20% were joint families. About 33% of families had 4–6 members. In terms of religion and ethnicity, 75% of respondents identified as Christian, with 82.69% belonging to the Jaintia tribes. Regarding economic status, nearly 37% of respondents reported having no income. Agriculture was the main occupation for about 28% of households. Educational

status indicated that almost 33% of respondents were illiterate, and 47% were school dropouts. The survey further identified 1,806 unemployed individuals aged 18–35 years across the 1,242 households, comprising 48% males and 53% females. With respect to agriculture, rice, maize, and turmeric were found to be the principal crops, while millet, mustard, pumpkin, chilies, and cabbage were also commonly cultivated. In terms of livestock, poultry and piggery were the most popular activities among respondents. Out of the 1,242 households, 171 respondents had availed of loans from banks for purposes such as business, agriculture, or self-employment.

1.12 Recommendations

India enjoys a demographic dividend, with more than 60% of its population in the working-age group. This youth bulge presents a unique opportunity for the country to accelerate growth and supply skilled manpower to the global market. According to the World Bank, India's working-age population will outnumber its dependent population for at least three decades, until 2040.

The National Higher Education Commission estimated that by 2020, the average age of India's population would be 29 years, compared with 40 years in the USA, 46 years in Europe, and 47 years in Japan. Over the next two decades, the labour force in industrialized nations is projected to decline by 4%, while India's will increase by 32%. However, with 93% of the labour force engaged in the unorganized sector, a major challenge lies in equipping this vast population with employable skills to secure decent work and improve their quality of life.

The estimated incremental human resource requirement for skill development across India between 2012 and 2022 is 12.03 crore. To meet this demand, the country's skill development infrastructure must expand several fold, as the current capacity is less than one-fourth of the target. Between 2015 and 2022 alone, an estimated 104.62 million fresh entrants to the labour force were projected to require skilling or vocational education. At present, 21 ministries and departments of the Government of India are engaged in skill development programmes.

Despite these efforts, several challenges remain. The foremost is expanding the capacity of existing systems to ensure equitable access, while maintaining quality and relevance. This requires robust linkages between industry and training institutes, along with continuous professional development for trainers. Additionally, convergence between school education and government-led skill initiatives must be strengthened and aligned with the Labour Market Information System (LMIS). Other pressing needs include the creation of institutional mechanisms for research and development, quality assurance, examinations, certification, affiliation, and accreditation. Ultimately,

skill development must be made both attractive and productive to inspire youth participation. Motivating young people to view skilling as a pathway to social mobility, employability, and entrepreneurship will be critical to leveraging India's demographic advantage.

1.13 Conclusion

Skill development is one of the essential ingredients for India's future economic growth as the country transforms into a diversified and internationally competitive economy. Skills and knowledge are the key drivers of both economic growth and social development. Countries with higher levels of skills and better-quality training are able to adjust more effectively to the challenges and opportunities of the modern world of work. In India's growth story, skill development is emerging as a defining element. To harness this potential, two major shifts are required. First, the relationship between education, employment, and skill development needs to be redefined. Second, given India's massive youth population, it is unrealistic to expect the conventional education framework alone to provide the required upskilling.

The target group for skill development must include all segments of the labour force: fresh entrants, those already employed in the organized sector, and the vast majority working in the unorganized sector. Current skilling capacity stands at just 3.1 million annually, while India had set a target of skilling 500 million people by 2022.

Central and state governments, particularly through the Ministry of Rural Development, have initiated a range of schemes to train youth and enable them to access better employment opportunities. In November 2014, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship was established to drive the 'Skill India' agenda in a mission mode. Funding allocations under the National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) have consistently increased to support these efforts. Flagship initiatives such as *Startup India*, *Stand-up India*, *Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana*, and *Aajeevika* have also been launched, underscoring the need to promote rural entrepreneurship. Rural entrepreneurship is especially significant as it not only generates employment for migrating youth but also brings prosperity back to the villages, thereby strengthening the rural economy. Despite these efforts, several challenges persist. Expanding the capacity of existing skilling systems while ensuring equitable access, quality, and relevance remains a formidable task. This requires robust linkages between industry and training institutes, supported by continuous knowledge upgrading for trainers. Stronger convergence between school education and government-led skilling programmes must also be fostered and aligned with

Labour Market Information Systems (LMIS). Furthermore, institutional mechanisms for research, development, quality assurance, examinations, certification, affiliation, and accreditation need to be reinforced. Above all, skill development must be made attractive and productive, motivating young people to actively aspire for it.

There is also a pressing need to create an environment where lifelong learning becomes appealing, accessible, and sustainable. Achieving this requires innovative, flexible solutions that move beyond traditional approaches. This includes scaling up online opportunities, leveraging existing schemes and employment infrastructures, and introducing programmes that focus on "taking learning to the people." Shorter, modular courses that learners can access anytime and anywhere would better suit diverse lifestyles and help bridge skill gaps quickly. Now more than ever, India must focus on reskilling and lifelong learning. While the current policy frameworks provide a foundation, what is needed is a long-term, future-ready plan that addresses unemployment, skills shortages, and productivity challenges. By investing in lifelong learning and rural entrepreneurship, India can not only meet domestic needs but also position itself as a global hub for skilled talent.

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