



Vocational Training as a Psychological and Socioeconomic Lever: Empowering Marginalized Youth in Northeast India

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Abstract: Vocational training offers a transformative pathway for marginalized youth in Northeast India, a region marked by ethnic diversity, geographic isolation, and socioeconomic disparities. This article examines its impact on socioeconomic conditions through an interdisciplinary lens, integrating theoretical frameworks—Amartya Sen’s capability approach, structural inequality theory, and empowerment theory—with socioeconomic analysis. Drawing on case studies and literature, it highlights how vocational training enhances employability, self-efficacy, and social inclusion while addressing intersectional challenges like gender, tribal identity, and access disparities. Despite its potential, limitations such as infrastructure gaps and cultural barriers persist. The article advocates for holistic and informed interventions to maximize impact, offering policy recommendations to empower Northeast India’s youth as agents of resilience and progress.

Keywords: *Vocational Training, Marginalized Youth, Northeast India, Capability Approach, Empowerment Theory, Socioeconomic Conditions, Intersectionality*

1. Introduction

Marginalized youth—those from low-income, tribal, or discriminated groups—often face deep-rooted cycles of poverty and exclusion, a reality evident in Northeast India. Comprising eight states with over 200 indigenous communities, this region grapples with geographic isolation, ethnic conflicts, and economic underdevelopment, leaving its youth vulnerable. Vocational training, a skills-based educational approach, emerges as a critical intervention, bridging gaps in employability and fostering resilience. Vocational training

programs, which focus on skill development and employment readiness, have emerged as crucial factors for creating pathways to self-sufficiency and resilience among marginalized youth. These challenges not only hinder their personal development but also have far-reaching implications for societal progress. This article explores its role as a socioeconomic lever, emphasizing how it empowers youth to overcome structural barriers and reclaim agency.

1.1 The Socioeconomic Struggles of Marginalized Youth of North East India

Northeast India, is a region marked by complex socioeconomic landscape. The youth in this region, particularly those from marginalized communities, face significant challenges that hinder their development and integration into broader Indian society. These challenges stem from a combination of geographic isolation, historical neglect, ethnic conflicts, and economic underdevelopment.

1.2 Economic

High unemployment rates, informal work, and lack of skills for modern job markets, force them to reliant on informal jobs. Impact on Poverty, Discrimination in employment and wages not only limits economic opportunities but also exacerbates poverty among marginalized communities. The region's economy is largely agrarian, with limited opportunities for modern employment. Studies have shown that individuals from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) often earn significantly less than their upper-caste counterparts, even when equally qualified. They are also often being forced into hazardous and low-paying jobs. Youth unemployment rates in states like Manipur and Nagaland are alarmingly high, pushing many into informal sectors, where they often face discrimination. While discrimination exists in both in Public and private sectors, it is reportedly more pronounced in the private sector.

a. Educational

Limited Access to Traditional Education, barriers such as cost, location, and systemic exclusion access to quality education remains critical issue. Remote areas suffer from inadequate schooling, a shortage of trained teachers, and high dropout rates, particularly among tribal and lower-income groups.

1.3 Geographic & Social

Northeast India lags behind much of the country in terms of industrial growth and infrastructure development. The region's hilly terrain and poor connectivity worsen its socioeconomic woes. Many rural youth lack access to markets, healthcare, and technology.

This isolation also restricts the flow of investment and development projects, leaving local economies stagnant. Further, decades of insurgency and ethnic tensions have disrupted social cohesion and economic progress. In states like Nagaland and Manipur, ongoing conflicts have led to displacement, loss of livelihoods, and a pervasive sense of insecurity among the youth, many of whom grow up in militarized environments.

1.4 Vocational Training as a Transformative Tool

Vocational training, often referred to as technical or career education, focuses on providing hands-on skills and knowledge tailored to specific trades or professions. Unlike traditional academic pathways, it emphasizes practical learning in fields such as carpentry, plumbing, healthcare, information technology, agriculture, and hospitality. For marginalized youth, who may lack the resources or opportunity to pursue higher education, vocational training offers an accessible and efficient route to employability. Vocational training plays a crucial role in fostering economic independence, skill development, and social inclusion for individuals from diverse backgrounds.

1.5 Enhanced Employability

Vocational training equips marginalized youth with practical, job-specific skills that align with market demands. By learning trades such as carpentry, tailoring, culinary arts, computer skills, or modern industrial techniques, these individuals become more employable, increasing their chances of securing stable jobs. This is particularly crucial in Northeast India, where traditional employment opportunities may be scarce. Vocational programs align training with local labor market needs, ensuring that participants gain skills employers actively seek. Studies show that vocationally trained individuals are more likely to secure jobs compared to their untrained peers.

1.6 Breaking the Poverty Cycle

Marginalized youth often face a web of interconnected challenges like Economic Barriers with high unemployment rates and reliance on low paying, unstable jobs perpetuate poverty. These factors create a vicious cycle, where socioeconomic deprivation reinforces marginalization. Vocational training steps in as a potential circuit-breaker. Over time, this financial stability allows youth to support themselves and their families, reducing dependence on welfare or charity. Thus, vocational training supports sustainable development by disrupting cycles of poverty and exclusion, enabling marginalized communities to participate actively in the economy. By providing employable skills, vocational training enables youth to secure

sustainable livelihoods, which can benefit future generations. As these individuals improve their socioeconomic status, they can invest in their children's education and well-being, creating a ripple effect that lifts entire families out of poverty over time.

1.7 Fosters social inclusion and challenges stereotypes.

Vocational training initiatives that successfully integrate individuals from diverse backgrounds help dispel stereotypes about their abilities. For example, training PwDs in fields like horticulture, retail, and IT showcases their potential and encourages society to adopt a more inclusive mindset. In essence, vocational training not only equips individuals with technical and life skills but also promotes diversity as a central value in society and the workforce. Its intersection with diversity fosters inclusive growth, empowerment, and the breaking down of barriers.

1.8 Northeast Relevance

While challenges such as market linkages and program accessibility remain, the transformative potential of vocational training continues to offer hope for improving the lives of marginalized youth in this region. By equipping individuals with industry-specific skills, vocational programs pave the way for a more diverse workforce. Diverse training cohorts also help participants build networks and learn from peers with different perspectives and experiences, fostering mutual respect and understanding. As trained individuals reinvest their earnings and skills locally, entire communities benefit. A carpenter might build affordable housing, or a healthcare assistant might improve local clinic services. This collective progress strengthens social cohesion and reduces inequality.

1.9 Entrepreneurship and Local Economic Growth

Vocational training fosters entrepreneurial skills, encouraging youth to establish their own ventures. For instance, training in traditional crafts or modern industries can lead to the creation of micro-enterprises, stimulating local economies. This is especially impactful in rural areas of Northeast India, where small businesses can address local needs and reduce dependence on external markets.

2. Theoretical Framework

To frame the discussion on the Impact of Vocational Training on the Socioeconomic Conditions of the Marginalised Youth can be draw from multiple perspectives.

2.1 Capability Approach (Amartya Sen)

One of the key theoretical frameworks used to understand the relationship between Vocational Training on the Socioeconomic Conditions is the capability approach of Amartya Sen. Capability Theory has significantly influenced development discourse by focusing on people and their capabilities rather than goods and resources. It offers a comprehensive perspective on issues like poverty, inequality, gender bias, and social exclusion. Sen's approach is flexible, people-centric, and acknowledges differences among individuals and external factors affecting their abilities, such as social interactions, access to infrastructure, and political participation. Sen's approach focuses on expanding individuals' capabilities—their actual freedom to achieve well-being and participate meaningfully in society. Vocational education increases "functionings" (what individuals can do) and "capabilities" (the freedom to choose different kinds of lives)

2.2 Structural Inequality Framework

Another conceptual method for comprehending and examining how disparities are ingrained in societal structures and systems is the Structural Inequality Framework. It focuses on how differences between various groups—often based on qualities like race, class, gender, ethnicity, or others—are created and maintained by social, economic, and political institutions, policies, and practices. Fundamentally, this theory asserts that inequality is systematically created and perpetuated by the structure of society rather than being only the consequence of human decisions or acts. It looks at how historical trends, power relationships, and institutional mechanisms—such as labor markets, healthcare, legal systems, and educational institutions—disadvantage some groups while empowering others. This framework examines how systemic barriers like poverty, gender discrimination, and lack of infrastructure limit access to opportunities.

2.3 Empowerment Theory:

Additionally, Empowerment theory is a framework used in social sciences, psychology, community development, and organizational contexts to promote social change. It emphasizes individual empowerment, collective empowerment, process and outcome, and power dynamics. Applications include education, social work, gender equality, and health. Empowerment theory helps individuals and communities gain control over their lives and environments, promoting self-confidence, decision-making, and equity. It complements research interests in empowering marginalized communities through education and vocational

training. This theory focuses on enabling individuals to take control of their lives and make informed decisions.

By interweaving these frameworks, a comprehensive theoretical foundation can be built, that highlights the transformative potential in addressing Northeast India's unique challenges.

3. Literature Review

Studies shows vocational training's global and regional significance. Virtanen and Silliman (2021) found that vocational education in Finland boosts earnings by 6% for near-admitted applicants, though non-admission reduces employment by 20%. Study by (Dixit & Ravichandran, n.d.) shows that successful vocational education programs emphasize industry-academia collaborations and incorporate work-based learning and apprenticeships. These systems offer a competent worker force and enhance India's reputation for precise manufacturing. In addition to ongoing innovation and development, research and development investments are necessary to stay relevant. Collaboration between employers, educational institutions, and industrial chambers is essential to developing apprenticeship opportunities, curriculum standards, and matching vocational education with labor market demands. This promotes India's growing engineering and manufacturing sectors by ensuring a seamless transition from education to employment. Furthermore, job promises or internship-to-employment programs can boost student interest and promote economic expansion.

The Punjab Vocational Council's contribution to youth empowerment in District Bhakkar's rural areas was assessed. According to the study, vocational training greatly raises youths' incomes and increases their spending on food, education, and health care. The majority of respondents contributed to their family's monthly income by engaging in revenue-generating activities (Ashiq et al., 2025). However, in India, Banerjee (2016) notes that vocational training enhances manufacturing wages but fails to equalize earnings across castes, reflecting persistent structural inequities. Suresh and Shobana (2023) highlight Skill India's success in Northeast India, boosting rural employability, yet call for localized curricula to address cultural and economic contexts.

Vocational training aligns with empowerment theory by fostering self-efficacy. McGrath and Yamada (2023) argue that large-scale skilling initiatives falter without student engagement, a barrier tied to perceived relevance and incentives. Kumar et al. (2019) reveal

urban-rural disparities in training access, with marginalized groups like Scheduled Tribes (STs) less likely to benefit, underscoring intersectional challenges. These findings suggest that vocational training's impact hinges on psychological buy-in and systemic alignment.

4. Case Studies

4.1 Colombian Program

A government-led initiative in Colombia provided three months of classroom training and three months of on-the-job training for disadvantaged youth. The program significantly improved employment rates and earnings among participants.

4.2 Centum Work Skills India

This program, one of the largest vocational training initiatives in India, focuses on skilling disadvantaged youth, including those from minority communities. It operates across 15 states and has successfully trained over 167,000 individuals, with more than 70% securing waged employment.

4.3 Tripura Bamboo Mission

The Tripura Bamboo Mission exemplifies an intersectional approach by training tribal youth, particularly women, in bamboo-based entrepreneurship, aligning with cultural practices and local resources.

4.4 Meghalaya MeghLAMP

Similarly, the Meghalaya Livelihoods and Access to Markets Project (MeghLAMP) integrates indigenous knowledge into vocational training, boosting participation among Khasi and Garo communities. These programs show higher retention and employment rates when intersectionality is prioritized—women trainees, for instance, reported a 30% income increase in bamboo handicraft cooperatives.

5. Intersectionality in Vocational Training

Intersectionality, a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, refers to the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability, and how these overlapping identities create unique experiences of advantage or disadvantage. In the context of vocational training programs—structured initiatives designed to equip individuals with job-specific skills—this framework offers a lens to understand and address the diverse needs of participants. As workforce demands evolve in an increasingly

globalized and technology-driven economy, ensuring that vocational training is equitable and inclusive requires an intersectional approach. In the context of vocational training programs (VTPs), this lens is critical for understanding and addressing the needs of marginalized groups in Northeast India, a region marked by ethnic diversity, historical neglect, and socio-economic disparities.

Intersectionality in vocational training programs is not just a theoretical exercise—it's a practical necessity for creating pathways to economic mobility that work for everyone. By acknowledging and addressing the unique challenges faced by individuals at the intersections of multiple identities, these programs can move beyond equal access to true equity. As the workforce continues to diversify, vocational training must evolve to ensure no one is left behind, transforming potential into opportunity for all.

6. Challenges & Limitations

Despite its promise, vocational training is not a panacea. Rural youth in Northeast India face several challenges in accessing and benefiting from Skill India programs. Vocational training initiatives in Northeast India, such as those under the Skill India Mission or the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), aim to bridge skill gaps and boost employability. However, their implementation often overlooks intersectional realities. Programs tend to focus on standardized trades—carpentry, plumbing, or IT skills—that may not align with the region's cultural practices or economic needs, such as handicrafts, organic farming, or tourism. Language barriers also persist, as training materials are rarely available in local dialects, thus, disproportionately affecting tribal participants with limited proficiency in Hindi or English.

6.1 Limited infrastructure and access in rural areas.

Rural youth in Northeast India face several challenges in accessing and benefiting from Skill India programs. These include limited access to training centres, inadequate awareness and information about these programs, and language and cultural barriers. The lack of sufficient centres in remote areas makes it difficult for rural youth to participate in these programs, leading to long travel distances. Additionally, many rural youth are unaware of the various skill development opportunities available to them, making it difficult for them to take advantage of these programs. Despite government efforts, these barriers hinder the effective implementation of Skill India programs in the region.

6.2 Mismatch between training and local job markets.

Some programs offer skills that do not align with local job markets or emerging industries. For example, training may focus on traditional crafts with declining demand rather than modern trades like IT, renewable energy, or tourism, which could offer broader opportunities in the region.

6.3 Socio-cultural barriers (e.g., gender norms, stigma).

Cultural norms and gender roles in some Northeast Indian communities may discourage participation, particularly for women or certain ethnic groups. Additionally, the stigma attached to vocational trades as "less prestigious" compared to formal education can deter youth from enrolling.

6.4 Funding shortages and lack of post-training support.

Many vocational programs are designed as short-term interventions, lacking follow-up support such as job placement services or advanced training. This limits their long-term impact on socioeconomic improvement, as youth may struggle to translate skills into sustainable employment. Due to resource constraints, programs often operate on a small scale, reaching only a fraction of the marginalized youth population. This leaves large segments of the target group—especially in remote or conflict-affected areas—unserved.

6.5 Dependence on External Factors

The success of vocational training is tied to broader economic conditions, such as the availability of industries or investment in Northeast India. In a region with slow industrial growth, trained youth may find limited opportunities to apply their skills locally, forcing migration to other states.

7. Policy Recommendations

Policymakers play a critical role in addressing policy gaps to ensure vocational training effectively improves the socioeconomic conditions of marginalized youth in Northeast India. Integrating vocational training into holistic development initiatives requires strategic planning, coordination, and a deep understanding of the region's unique challenges—such as geographic isolation, cultural diversity, and economic underdevelopment.

7.1 Tailor Programs

Policymakers must ensure vocational training aligns with the specific economic and cultural landscape of Northeast India. For instance, emphasizing skills in tourism, traditional

crafts, horticulture, or renewable energy can leverage local strengths. Current gaps often stem from generic training models that overlook this regional variation.

7.2 Improve Access

Many marginalized youth in remote areas lack access to training centres due to poor transportation and communication networks. Policymakers can address this by investing in mobile training units, digital platforms, or decentralized skill centres, ensuring inclusivity for tribal and rural populations.

7.3 Holistic Integration

The obstacles faced by marginalized youth in Northeast India—poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, and limited access to resources—are interconnected. Vocational training, if implemented in isolation, risks being a temporary fix rather than a transformative tool. For example, a youth trained in carpentry but lacking market access or startup capital remains underemployed. Holistic development initiatives that combine skill-building with economic opportunities, social support, and infrastructure development address these root causes comprehensively.

7.4 Support System

Policymakers should foster market linkages, incentivize local industries, and promote entrepreneurship through microfinance and mentorship programs. Training initiatives should be paired with broader development efforts, such as healthcare, housing, and nutrition programs, to increase socioeconomic gains. Community and cultural inclusion should be included in training programs, ensuring cultural relevance and trust among marginalized groups.

8. Conclusion

Vocational training empowers Northeast India's marginalized youth, breaking cycles of poverty and fostering equity. Inclusive, region-specific efforts are essential to overcome barriers and unlock the region's potential. Investing in these youth builds a resilient future. Vocational training offers a lifeline to marginalized youth, bridging the gap between exclusion and opportunity. Its ability to enhance employability, generate income, and empower individuals makes it a cornerstone of socioeconomic progress. However, its full potential depends on overcoming barriers to access and ensuring relevance in a dynamic world. For

policymakers, educators, and communities, investing in vocational training is not just a strategy for youth development but it is a commitment to build a future.

Empowering these young individuals could not only transform their lives but also position Northeast India as a vital contributor to the nation's progress.

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