



## Role of digital literacy and skill development programs in strengthening Indian rural economy

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### Abstract

Digital literacy and skill development are not only the foundation of the current global economy, but also the essential requirement of continuous progress in the 21st century. The path to build a new India would pass through rural India itself. In our country, the vast labour force resides in rural India only. Rural India is full of food production, fruit and vegetable production, milk production and natural resource. The need of the hour is to digitally educate every capable hand and strengthen it through skill development to make Indian rural economy self-sufficient. If we have to take India from the developing nation to the developed nation than we have to focus on the skill development of that work force of rural India. After independence, priority was given to urban development but practical efforts are being made during last few years to strengthening rural economy through various rural development programs. Through the schemes like Digital India, Skill India, Startup India, Make in India, Swayam, Pradhan mantri mudra bank Yojna, Deendayal Upadhyay Gramin Kaushal Yojna, Udaan-rural youth are being admitted for employment and for self-employment. Similarly, Efforts are being made to make the youth skilled in more than 700 different areas by establishing digital literacy and skill development centers at the district and Panchayati level. If the majority of the population of rural India is skilled, than the problem of our excesses can prove to be a boon for us. By making each hand skilled and employment oriented, we can definitely move forward towards the golden age of economic prosperity.

**Keywords:** employment oriented education, economic self-sufficiency, entrepreneurship development, digital literacy, skills training, youth force

### Introduction

About two-thirds of the population of India, which has been the potential to become an economic super power, lives in rural India. Employment unique education and skill development is the primary condition for changing the picture of industry and service sector and changing the fortunes related to the prosperity of rural India. Today India's position and role in the global economy depends a lot on how much urban and rural India is capable with digital education, financial management and overall skill development. Our share of the global population is very high where as in terms of availability of global resources our share is very low, so nurturing a huge population with limited resources is a big challenge. Therefore, it should be our endeavor to make the maximum population digitally educated and skillful and directly and indirectly connect them to the economy of the country. India has emerged as a very large global market for various products, so thousands of foreign companies have entered the Indian market, so the demand for skilled young people is also increasing. It is important to mention here that there is hardly any country left in the world market where there is no demand and consumption of Indians in the job market. Through skill development programs, rural youth can also be prepared for employment abroad. This is the reason that for the last few years, various programs are being conducted by 22 ministries of the government of India in the direction of making the youth skillful and digital literate.

### Review of Literature

The progress and progressive development of any individual, society or nation depends a lot on how self-

reliant that nation is economically capable. From this point of view, if we talk about India, then our country comes under the category of developing nations, that is, there are infinite possibilities of development in various field in our country.

We need to focus on digital literacy and skill development for self-reliance and strengthening of our rural economy. Continuous efforts are going on in this direction for the last two and a half decades but in the last few years there is hopeful progress in this direction. Today, in the leading nation towards digital literacy, India is being counted prominently day by day. "India is the second largest nation in the world after china in terms of internet users. There is a considerable possibility that by 2021 the number of internet sub-scribers in India will be around 70 crores"(1). Similarly, over all development of any nation depends to some extent on quality education and availability of experts. Availability of experts depends to a large extent on the success of skill development programs along with digital literacy. It has been mentioned in the National Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Policy 2015 that-"About 54% of India's population belongs to the age group below 25 years"(2). This large population can be made employment oriented by providing skill training, which will automatically strengthen the rural economy. The International Labour Organization (2000) defines skill development as cited in its report that-"Skills, knowledge and ability, enhance the ability of any worker to secure and sustain a job and also helps in progress

and change in work"(3).

### Objectives of Research Paper

To study and analyze the research title, the following two objectives has been set

1. To analyze various schemes, policies and programs related to digital literacy and skill development in rural India.
2. Finding obstacles in the way of practical implementation of these policies, plans and programs and presenting practical suggestions for their solution.

### Research Methodology

This study is mainly based on secondary data. The study material available in books, magazines, journals and government websites has been made the basis for analyzing the research title. Historical, descriptive and analytical method has been used for overall evaluation of the research title.

### Hypothesis

The hypothesis has been set for this research paper is that-"There is immense potential for quality enhancement in the field of digital literacy and skill development in rural India".

### Discussion on Research paper

The education system of our country has been based on quality teaching and skill development since ancient times. Even then, the goal of education was to make the citizens so capable that they could lead a self-reliant life. It means, we can say that quality education and skill development from ancient times till today have proved to be two sides of the same coin. Generally, skill development and expertise are based solely on quality education. This is why Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations, has said that "Knowledge is power, information is liberating and education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family"(4). Similarly, Nelson Mandela also believes that "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world"(5).

In this context, if we discuss the objectives of the current education system, then we come to the conclusion that the goal of our education system should not only to build superior and civilized citizens but also to make them so efficient that they can get employment and self-employment to lead a self-sufficient life. In this episode, we have to try to change the picture of rural India so that the economic, social and cultural level of the rural society can be improved. By encouraging and implementing digital education and skill-based quality education more and more in rural society, we can find an able solution to many problems of rural society such as poverty, starvation, unemployment, migration etc. and raise the standard of living of rural people.

Today, digital work and practice have become an integral part of our daily lives and there is hardly any area left that has not been affected by the information revolution. Various areas of work culture around the world such as online marketing, entertainment, social-networking, e-governance, m-governance, e-commerce and mobile apps are totally depend on internet service. In such a situation, efforts have been intensified in the last few years by the central and state governments to make digitally literate in the vast area of rural India. The Prime-Minister Rural Digital Literacy

Campaign can be seen as a commendable effort in this direction.

In the report submitted by the National Sample Survey in 2014, it was said that "only 6% of the households in rural India have a computer facility"(6), but we know that today smartphones have replaced computers, as a result, rural India is moving rapidly towards digital literacy. Under the rural digital literacy campaign, efforts are being made to increase the understanding of rural people by providing knowledge regarding web browser, search engine, email, text, wiki, blogs, photoshop, PowerPoint, video creation or editing, software, e-commerce and e-governance etc. Under the PMDISHA, this target was set "To make at least one person from each household of about 6 crore rural families digitally literate by march 2019"(7).

If we look at the practical implementation of this scheme in the last 5 years, then we find that only half goal can be achieved today. The parliamentary standing committee, related to the ministry of information and technology under the rural digital literacy campaign, in its report or cited that the scheme is going through a crisis, due to lack of resources every year, so it is not possible to achieve the target. It is to be known that the budget that was set in relation to the implementation of this scheme was cut by almost two-thirds. It should also be known here that-"Out of 6 crore rural families, only 3.19 crore families could be registered till 31st December 2019, out of which only 2.56 crore citizens were trained and only 1.88 crore citizens were certified"(8).

It is clear that the pace of making rural India digital literate is very slow. There is no doubt that different system and facilities of our rural society like Panchayati system, education system, transportation system, banking, marketing, insurance, health services are gradually coming under the ambit of digitalization. But it is not so easy to maintain these services and facilities continuously till the last person of rural India. It is also a matter of issue that the goal of rural digital literacy should not be achieved only in statistics, the characters need to be properly educated and trained in this direction. We should also keep in mind that the digital world is not only useful and full of information content but it is also a risky world. Sometime digital information, digital payment and knowledge can also be based on fraud or manipulation. Therefore, our focus should be to make rural people digitally literate as well as professionalize them.

According to the 2011 census "72.18% of our total population lives in villages while 27.82% of the population resides in cities or town"(9). The fact is that rural India is very prosperous from the point of view of production of food grains, vegetables, milk, fruits, availability of cheap labor and supply of raw materials for big industries. But the irony is that like digital literacy, this large sector is quite backward from the point of view of skill development or entrepreneurship development. If skill development changes the picture and destiny of rural India in the field of digital literacy and entrepreneurship development, it will undoubtedly affect the picture and destiny of the entire India. The National Skill Development and Entrepreneurship policy 2015 indicates that "India is the youngest nation globally. Approximately 62% of the population of this country is in the working age group i.e. 15 to 59 years and 54% of the population is less than 25 years of age"(10). Today, the need is to empower this population

through qualitative education and skill training, that this energetic population can solve the problems of rural society and make it capable and strong.

Today, rural India is not only a big market for goods, products, services and huge storehouse of cheap labor but ironically, even today our rural economy is counted as informal and unorganized sector. The ministry of skill development and entrepreneurship of the Government of India is exploring immense possibilities to make about 65% of the young and working population in India employment oriented through skill training. It is quite a satisfactory truth that in the last few years various schemes, policy and programs are being conducted by central and state government to create employment for the youth in rural areas. The goal of all these schemes is to find and revive traditional skills, exploring new areas of entrepreneurship according to market demand, employment and self-employment, creation of useful human resources equipped with professional training, developing the spirit of positivity and creativity, sense of leadership, team work and decision-making ability among rural youth.

It is also worth mentioning here that Industrial Training Institutes should work at almost every block level for skill development in rural India. "Near about 15697 ITIs functioning in the country, Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of ITIs, followed by Rajasthan, Karnataka, Bihar and Madhya-Pradesh"(11).The number of industrial training institutes has increased by 24% and the number of seats in these institutes has also increased by 44% during May 2014 to May 2017.Grading system based on 43 various parameters related to these training institutes has been started,63 courses have been upgraded and 35 new courses have been started to focus on emerging new areas. Continuous efforts are also being made to ensure employment for trained students and to increase their employment potential.

Similarly, various vocational courses are also being conducted in various higher secondary schools. Despite the broad infrastructure related to vocational education, the expected results were not achieved. The main reason behind that, in our country 50 lacs youth are getting ready for employment every year. The existing industrial training institutes in the country have the capacity to provide training only to 25 lacs youth i.e, 50% of the force. So, the extension of skill development program should be our first priority today.

Deendayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushal Yojana has been started for skill development in rural areas from 24th sept. 2014. This scheme is applicable for rural youth between 15 and 35 years of age. This scheme is being linked to various social and economic programs of the government of India such as Make in India, Digital India, Smart city, Startup India and Stand up India. The scheme is being implemented for the youth of 7294 blocks under 669 districts of 28 states and union territories. As of July 2019, over 7.9 lakh youth have successfully trained under this scheme, out of which 3.6 lakh youth have also got employment. Under this scheme, the innovative effort to create labour force according to market demand is continuing. "The data related to this scheme can be considered to be quite progressive, as it is targeted to train 28,14,195 youths under this scheme by March 2022 and training of 9,98,518 people has been completed, out of which 5,41,026 people have been employed and 4,90,333 have been certified as on April 2020"(12).

Similarly, for the purpose of providing employment to unemployed youth of Jammu-Kashmir, a scheme called UDAN is being implemented is making efforts for skill development for college and university students through various vocational and certificate courses. A scheme called "Shreyas" has also been launched in April 2019 for non-technical students under the HRD Ministry, under this scheme, an additional course work of 1000 hours has been prepared for BA,BCOM and BSC students, under which they will be trained in soft skill,ICT,and special skill development"(13).In India too, like Germany, efforts are being made to link vocational education with General education and the doors of Distance universities and open universities have been kept open for the purpose of attracting skill development among rural youth. In the same way, bringing policies like e-market, make the work culture of agricultural mandis online to honour the agriculture sector called the back bone of the rural economy, it can be beneficial that the trend of extreme migration can be greatly increased will help reduce. Entrepreneurship development is also being encouraged through online courses under the digital program called SWAYAM to pave the way for direct and indirect employment generation. Emphasis is being laid on qualitative development in view of the relevance of employment under the STRIVE project." This project sponsored by the World Bank is about 2200 crores rupees"(14).The main objective of the project conducted by the India International Skill Center is to provide skill training to the youth of the country as per the global norms so that the youth do not have to go abroad for employment. Various programs are being conducted under Skill-India to promote skill development among DIVYANGJAN.

We know that "World Youth Skill Day "is celebrated globally on 15 July every year. There is also a main objective behind this event that the global partnership in the field of skill development should be encouraged more and more. For the same purpose, agreement have been signed with 11 different countries by the government of India for the exchange of skills at the global level. Today there is hardly any country left in the world where there is no demand and consumption of Indian skills. In these circumstances rural youth can also be prepared for employment in foreign markets by providing quality training. Under the budget provisions of the 2017-18, there was a provision to set up around 100 Indian International skills centers across the country through these institutions advance training and foreign language was proposed to be included in curriculum so that the country would be tailored to the foreign markets. The quality education provided by these institutions will not only increase the demand for Indian skills in international market, but will also improve the image of the Indian economy.

It is estimated that in 2020-" The average age of India will be 29 years while in Europe 40 years, in Japan 48 years and 40 years in America"(15).In such a situation, it is very important to turn this energetic workforce towards skill development with the co-operation of private sectors to achieve the economic and social goals of rural India. To change the picture and destiny of rural India, faced with lack of technology and resources, it is extremely important to make the energetic power of rural youth self-sufficient by providing higher and qualitative training, so that the creation of a new India is possible. The strength of our rural economy depends on equal participation of man and women

at every level of skill development can easily connected women to the rural economy through self-help groups.

Following the central government, various state governments have also taken policy initiatives towards skill development such as Industry and skill development policy 2018 by Mizoram, Skill development policy 2018 by Jharkhand, Him-Kaushal policy 2018 by Himachal Pradesh and Skill development policy 2016 by Karnataka. Through such schemes, the state governments are preparing rural youth for employment and self-employment. Today, for strengthening the economy of rural India, it is very important to bring industrial units and trained workforce on a single platform so that the goal of integrated development can be achieved.

Despite these efforts adequacy of financial resources, lack of quality education and training, lack of assured employment, insufficient infrastructure, adequacy of digital literacy and awareness, decreasing rate of women in working labour, migration from rural areas to urban areas, adequacy of industrial training institutes and skill development training institutes, lack of proper co-ordination between formal and professional education, on availability of data related to demand and supply of skilled work-force on one platform, lack of review of skill development programs at high to low levels are proving to be obstacles in the way of skill development and rural self-reliance.

So, the need of the hour is to spread and promote skill development in rural youth as a career option, vocational education should be made an essential part of formal education, provide protection to young budding entrepreneurs by providing them loans at a lower rate of interest, all information related to the demand and supply of skilled work force should be collected at the block, district, state and national level, expand global partnership, economically weaker sections should be added to these programs in maximum quantity, housewives, persons who are not able to complete school and college education and rural unemployed should be given advanced training at the Panchayati level as per their merit, proper arrangement of training of trainers, work plan for skill development and training should be prepared according to the demand of various industrial units and their production quality and capacity, 100% guarantee of employment or self-employment to the skilled youth, efforts should be made to increase the employment potential of the trained youth, proper co-ordination should be established in the work plan of various ministries working in relation to skill development and proper financial management should be done by various ministries in this regard- if this is possible, certainly rural India will also be able to move forward towards self-sufficiency in accordance with the demand of national and global market.

### Conclusion

Digital literacy and skill development are the primary demand and major requirement of the global economy and market today. They are trying to enhance the clean image of both industry and services sector. Today, we Indians account for about 17% of the global population, where as we have only 2.4% of the global resources, so the nutrition and conservation of the vast population with limited resources is a big challenging such a situation, for strengthening the Indian economy, we have to focus on the skills and digital training of the large young population of

rural India. For the last few years, the work of connecting the strong hands of the marginalized rural India with the main stream of our economy is being done by the central and state governments through the implementation of various schemes. As the rural youth work force continues to benefit from these schemes, the rural society will move towards self-sufficiency- due to which the economy of India will be strengthened and our participation and contribution related to the demand and supply of the global market will increase. The day is not far when we will be able to say that the vast rural population with qualitative skills is proving to be a boon for us instead of being a curse.

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