



ENHANCING EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS IN WOMEN THROUGH SKILL TRAINING IN FASHION DESIGNING

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Abstract: Developing women's professional skills are essential for advancing gender equality and economic progress. The present study aims to analyse the participation of women in the training programmes conducted at the Centre for Good Governance- Kerala Institute of Local Administration and assess utility of the fashion designing skill development course. It compares the knowledge of participants regarding specific information on fashion designing before and after the training. The study deploys questionnaire method, face-to-face interview and statistical analysis to gather the data on the aspects pertaining to the course. Analysis of data indicates that the skills and overall employability of the participants considerably increased after the training. On the basis of the results, it is suggested that the impact of skill development trainings can be maximised by government interventions in the form of supportive schemes, subsidies, follow-up facilities, intermediaries to facilitate employment possibilities and tweaking the current method of trainings by introduction of online courses and off-campus trainings.

Index terms: employability, women empowerment, skill development training, fashion designing, participation, income, rural development, poverty alleviation

I. INTRODUCTION

The data from the 2011 Census indicates that the total women workforce in India is 149.8 million. However, the workforce participation rate accounts to a mere 25.51 per cent. This suggests that there is clearly a gap in the utilisation of the human potential leading to wastage of resources.

The enormous and impartial burden of domestic obligations, which makes juggling work and life incredibly difficult, is often the reason why women decide to remain unemployed. This in combination with the need for additional income for the family pushes many women to work in the premises of their home, solving the problem. Skillsets such as stitching, tailoring, and designing clothes meets this demand and are hence highly preferred by most women. The problem at present is the lack of awareness of women on the various skill development initiatives by the government.

Numerous skill development initiatives, including the National Skill Development Initiative, the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushal Yojana (2014), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, and others, have been launched by the Indian government. The government hopes to connect with residents at the local level through these programmes and start a change-making process by assisting them in enhancing their skill sets.

Acquiring employable skillsets are extremely crucial for generating income and a livelihood out of it. This is where fashion designing can be considered as a highly promising sector due to its inexhaustible demands. Additionally, the investment requirements for starting work or an enterprise are also minimal which is another factor that persuades more women into this field. With proper guidance, the skill can be effectively acquired. The present study analyses how skill development trainings in fashion designing help women to generate an income out of it and suit employable standards.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the distribution of participants in various skill trainings with maximum female participation
2. To assess the gain in knowledge of participants regarding fashion designing using statistical analysis

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.1 Empowerment of Women

Empowering women constitutes the process of gaining authority so that they may recognise their rights and carry out their obligations to others and themselves as effectively as possible. According to Sayulu et al. (2015), women empowerment is any process that gives them more autonomy by giving them access to pertinent knowledge and control over the things that determine how well they perform.

The concept of women's empowerment is dynamic and multifaceted. It includes social, political, cultural, and economic challenges, among other things. et al., Bashir (2023). Ending gender discrimination, questioning cultural norms, and creating inclusive environments that encourage women to freely express themselves, make informed decisions, and give back to society are all highly valued. McGinley, 2008).

3.2 Involvement of women in rural development

The primary objective of rural development is to enhance the social and economic conditions of a particular population: the rural poor. It entails providing the poorest people such as tenants, landless people and small-scale farmers, who seek employment in rural areas with the advantages of development. (World Bank, 2010).

The International Day for Rural Women was established by the UN General Assembly on October 15. This is a recognition of the important role those rural women play in bringing about socioeconomic transformation. Building an inclusive future requires addressing issues with cultural prejudices and conventional gender norms (UNGC, 2023).

At a national level, women are involved in the enhancement of sanitation and hygiene practices in local communities, which entails the spreading knowledge about the programme and promoting behavioural changes. According to Joshi and Srivastatva (2020), women actively contribute to the execution of the Swacchh Bharat Abhiyan, the government's other effort aimed at enhancing rural areas' sanitation and hygiene. The functioning of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and government efforts like the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), which supports women's entrepreneurship and rural livelihoods, were also examined in the study.

3.3 Role of women in poverty alleviation

According to a study done in Bangladesh, poverty can be reduced when women are empowered by means of ownership of resources and education. A considerable degree of decision-making power would be transferred to women through their education and asset ownership. Increased female authority will guarantee that funds are allocated to worthwhile endeavours (Wouterse, 2016). A significant increase in per capita income and a steady decline in the rates of poverty are signs that women are being empowered. (Wei, 2021).

3.4 Skill development trainings- a step towards increasing women's employability

Skill training educational programs are meant to principally transmit specialized knowledge and abilities required for specific professions or vocations. It emphasizes on its practical aspect and its role in promoting the employability. (Smith, 1985). Vocational skills training for women is an important means of fostering gender equality and economic development. These initiatives challenge conventional gender norms and increase women's employability while enabling them to make meaningful contributions to the workforce and their families' well-being. (Abid, *et al.*, 2020; Naseem, *et al.*, 2021).

A study titled 'Impact Assessment of Skill Development Programme for Rural Women in District Ludhiana' stated that the trainees were actually able generate income and gain employable skills out of it. The study revealed that of 75.6 per cent of the total number of participants were elevated to the level of highly skilled workers with full employability potential. The participants who took up part time employment were 15.5 per cent of the total participants while 13.3 per cent of participants started their own small-scale business to make use of the skill learned during the training program. (Kapila, 2015)

3.5 Role of Government in the employability of women

Through the development of supportive policies and programmes that aid in women's emancipation, the government plays a significant role in promoting women's empowerment. Mahila Shakti Kendras which were initiated in 2017, involves block level activities in which college student volunteers raise public awareness of numerous significant government initiatives and programs as well as social issues (MWCD, 2017). The Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) for Women is another programme that aims to empower by enhancement of their skills and providing facilities through loans and training (GOI, 2009). Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), established in 1993, seeks to provide low-income category women the access to microcredit, with the help of which they can improve their socioeconomic status by generating income through a variety of productive and economic activities. (MWCD, 2022). Another important intervention from the government is the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW). This initiative aims to empower women economically and also concerns with elimination of violence against women. (GOI, 2013).

3.6 Significance of Skill Training Programs

Kaur et al. (2011) revealed that imparting knowledge on stain removing, preparation of soaps and detergents, identification of different types of fabrics and their dyeing methods should be given to more women.

According to Sabharwal (2015), more attention must be given to the designing of apparels for family, different embellishment of clothing, dye techniques and clothing for special children. The study by Sabharwal also suggested that in addition to conventional courses on clothing and textiles, food and nutrition, family resource management and child development must also be given to women.

Rana et al. (2013) also revealed in their study that overall gain in knowledge and skill regarding baking products will also be economically beneficial for women.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Selection of area

This research was carried out in association with Kerala Institute of Local Administration's Centre for Good Governance. Organised over four jurisdictions (Thrissur, Palakkad, Ernakulam, Malappuram), the centre offers different types of skill development trainings. The fashion design course, out of all the trainings provided by KILA, was chosen for this study's purposes since it was observed that a considerable number of women from a variety of backgrounds attended the training.

4.2 Selection of samples

The study samples were chosen from the roster of female participants enrolled in KILA's fashion design course in 2023–2024. The participant's information was obtained from the trainees' registration records at KILA CGG.

4.3 Sample size of the study

In order to survey the impact of the training on their economic status, ownership of enterprise and development of skills, Google forms were distributed to all of the female participants in the fashion design training. A total of 77 responses were gathered from the 155 female participants who attended the course. These were regarded as the study's sample size.

4.4 Inclusion criteria

All female trainees who were willing to engage in the study and fell under the age group of 18 and up were included.

4.5 Exclusion criteria

The study did not include the female participants in the training programme who were over 60 or who declined to take part in the survey.

4.6 Demographic Questionnaire method

A standardised demographic questionnaire was the primary tool used for gathering information. The effectiveness of the course and the participants' learnings (about general understanding and specific knowledge about fashion designing) were rated by the participants using the five-point Likert scale. Prior to and after the training, they were asked to rate their level of knowledge about fashion designing.

4.7 Face to face interview method

The individuals who had initiated their own businesses were also personally visited to assess the present state of their ventures and conducted in-person interviews to examine the influence of skill development training on the establishment and operation of their enterprises.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Distribution of participants according to the trainings conducted by the training centre

Umbrella making is a skill that requires expertise to make good quality and durable umbrellas as the demands for this increase rapidly around the rainy season. The training for the making of umbrellas were conducted for 87 participants in three batches. The data from Table 1 indicates that 37.93 per cent of the participants were present in the first batch of the course, 34.48 per cent were present in the second batch and 27.59 per cent were present in the third batch of the training programme.

Cloth bags are highly used among women due to their eco-friendly nature and capacity to store multiple items as well as a fashion statement. The training for the making of cloth bags were conducted for

133 participants in five batches. The data from Table 1 indicates that 21.05 per cent of the participants were present in the first batch of the course, 18.8 per cent were present in the second batch, 19.55 per cent were present in the third batch, 18.05 per cent were present in the fourth batch and 22.55 per cent were present in the fifth batch of the training programme.

Fashion designing is a field that requires high level expertise and creativity in designing clothes. Various aspects such as market trends and choices, availability of materials, evolving techniques, upgradation of instruments have to be taken into consideration while doing so. Table 1 suggests that a total of 155 participants had attended the training. It is also indicated through the table that, 20.65 per cent of the participants were present in the first batch of the course, 21.29 per cent were present in the second batch, 16.77 per cent were present in the third batch, 17.42 per cent were present in the fourth batch and 23.87 per cent were present in the fifth batch of the training programme.

Paper bag and screen printing are also skills that receive a lot of demand these days due to the increased environmental awareness and usage of sustainable products. Table 1 suggests that a total of 26 participants had attended the training in one batch during the year 2023-24.

Hand embroidery is another skill that is highly valued in the textiles market as it enhances the quality of plain garments and embellishes the beauty and aesthetics of the garments. According to the data in Table 1, a total of 49 participants had attended the training in two batches, 69.39 per cent in the first batch and 30.61 per cent in the second batch respectively.

Bakery and confectionery making is a highly rewarding industry as there is always demand for these in the market. Expertise and innovative ideas are also on the rise paving way for a means of income for those interested in it. Data from Table 1 suggests that a total of 114 participants had attended the training. It is also indicated through the table that, 33.33 per cent of the participants were present in the first batch of the course, 38.6 per cent were present in the second batch, 28.07 per cent were present in the third batch of the training.

Soap and detergent making are skills that became of high demand during the spread of the pandemic, which suggests the increased need of soaps and detergents for health and sanitation. Table 1 suggests that a total of 35 participants had taken part in the training offered by the centre and had attended in one batch.

Ornamental frontlet making were a special artistic creation which come of high use during the regional festivity of Thrissur Pooram. The frontlets created are displayed prior to the actual event and attracts art connoisseurs from various parts of the world. The training offered courses on the making of ornamental frontlets which were attended by a total of 54 participants in two batches respectively. The data from Table 1 indicates that 42.59 per cent of the participants came in the first batch and 57.41 per cent attended the training in the second batch.

Jewellery making is also a skill-oriented and requires creativity. Table 1 suggests that a total of 49 participants had attended the training in one batch during the year 2023-24.

Curry powder making is another highly useful skill that is of great demand in the food industry. The demand for chemical free organic curry powders is on the rise these days due to the increased consciousness among people on food and nutrition related aspects. According to the data in table 1, a total of 42 participants had attended the training as a single batch at the institute.

From table 1, it is evident that the maximum number of batches and participants were for the fashion designing course. This might be due to the fact that most women were interested in the skill and wanted to learn more on this aspect as they believed they would be able to effectively utilize their potential.

Table 1- distribution of participants according to the trainings conducted by the training centre

Sl. No	Skill trainings conducted by the training centre	No of participants						Total no. of participants in each training
		No of batches created						
		Batch 1	Batch 2	Batch 3	Batch 4	Batch 5	Batch 6	
1.	Umbrella making	33 (37.93%)	30 (34.48%)	24 (27.59%)	-	-	-	87
2.	Cloth bag making	28 (21.05%)	25 (18.8%)	26 (19.55%)	24 (18.05%)	30 (22.55%)	-	133
3.	Fashion designing	32 (20.65%)	33 (21.29%)	26 (16.77%)	27 (17.42%)	37 (23.87%)	-	155
4.	Paper bag and screen printing	26 (100%)	-	-	-	-	-	26
5.	Hand embroidery	34 (69.39%)	15 (30.61%)	-	-	-	-	49
6.	Bakery and confectionary	38 (33.33%)	44 (38.6%)	32 (28.07%)	-	-	-	114
7.	Soap and detergent	35 (100%)	-	-	-	-	-	35
8.	Ornamental frontlet making	23 (42.59%)	31 (57.41%)	-	-	-	-	54
9.	Jewellery making	49 (100%)	-	-	-	-	-	49
10.	Curry powder making	42 (100%)	-	-	-	-	-	42

5.2 Statistical analysis of various specific information regarding fashion designing

As per statistical data, distribution of the participants according to their ranking of the knowledge of various specific information regarding Fashion Designing were observed a significant difference compared to before and after training programme.

Knowledge regarding different types of cloth is the one of the criteria for a competent fashion designer. From Table 2, it is observed that the participants scored the highest (4.36) regarding the knowledge of different type of cloths after training programme compared to before training (2.79).

Accurate body measurements are essential to get the perfect fit dresses. The highest mean score for knowledge regarding body measurements was obtained by 'after training' programme (4.44). It was significantly different from the score obtained by before 'training programme' (2.94).

For running a stitching centre, knowledge regarding various stitching tools and their usages is necessary. From Table 2, it is identified that knowledge regarding various stitching tools and their usages after training participants scored highest (4.53) compared to before training programme (3.35).

Knowledge regarding various stitching methods is essential to design diverse kinds of outfits. From Table 2, it is observed that the participants scored the highest (4.26) regarding the knowledge of different type of cloths after training programme compared to before training (2.86).

The capability to accommodate the interests and choices of the customer is highly essential to thrive in the business. The highest mean score for knowledge regarding body measurements was obtained by 'after training programme (4.27). It was significantly different from the score obtained by before 'training programme' (2.74).

Confidence to design and stitch garments according to latest trends is also highly essential as it attracts more customers. From Table 2, it is observed that the participants scored the highest (4.25) regarding the knowledge of different type of cloths after training programme compared to before training (2.71).

Knowledge regarding basic facilities, monetary help and marketing techniques can be key to accentuate the path of business. The highest mean score for knowledge regarding body measurements was obtained by 'after training programme (4.00). It was significantly different from the score obtained by before 'training programme' (2.34).

Overall knowledge regarding fashion designing before and after the course was analysed to gain a complete picture on the utility of the training programme. From Table 2, it is observed that the participants scored the highest (4.23) regarding the knowledge of different type of cloths after training programme compared to before training (2.6).

Table 2- statistical analysis of various specific information regarding fashion designing

Specific information	Before Training		After Training		Z-value	p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Knowledge regarding different types of cloth	2.79	1.281	4.36	0.705	6.845**	<0.01
Knowledge regarding body measurements	2.94	1.38	4.44	0.752	6.650**	<0.01
Knowledge regarding various stitching tools and their use	3.35	1.275	4.53	0.68	6.141**	<0.01
Knowledge regarding various stitching methods	2.86	1.243	4.26	0.768	6.569**	<0.01
Skill and confidence to design and stitch garments according to	2.74	1.351	4.27	0.821	6.640**	<0.01

customer's choice						
Confidence to design and stitch garments according to latest trends	2.71	1.404	4.25	0.861	6.401**	<0.01
Knowledge regarding basic facilities, monetary help and marketing techniques	2.34	1.284	4.00	0.946	6.744**	<0.01
Knowledge regarding fashion designing	2.6	1.249	4.23	0.857	6.700**	<0.01

**Significant at 0.01 level

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study reveals that fashion designing is a powerful tool towards equipping women with skills necessary to generate an income and employment. It also highlights the fact that attending skill development training programs can be beneficial in gaining knowledge on various aspects that can help to thrive the business- such as market trends and adapting towards customer's choices and preferences. The results of the study are consistent with previous research underscoring the fact the skill development trainings are an important milestone in the economic emancipation of women. The findings of the study also imply that policy makers and government must tailor the current regimes towards accommodating more women into the path for economic betterment. Support from the government in the form of subsidies and schemes targeting the economically underprivileged must be undertaken. Additionally, follow-up facilities must also be set up to regularly contact the participants of the training programmes and assess their current status. This will also paint a picture on the limitations of the course which can be considered to customize training programmes in future. Finally, a combination of off-campus and online trainings can also be considered to reach out to those who find it difficult to attend the trainings in person due to household responsibilities, disabilities or distance related barriers.

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