FOSTERING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: EVALUATING THE ROLE OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS OFFERED BY HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN MUMBAI

Dr. (CA) Gajanan Wader, Ms. Sunita Amit Panja

Principal,
MES Pillai College of Arts, Commerce and Science, Panvel
Contact no: 9892061548
Email Id: gwader@mes.ac.in

Research Scholar,
Pillai Ph.D Research Centre
Contact no: 9890766271
Email Id: sunita.panja@rapodar.ac.in

Abstract

Women's empowerment is a critical aspect of achieving gender equality and fostering inclusive societies. In the context of higher educational institutions, skill development programs play a pivotal role in empowering women by providing them with opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary for personal and professional growth. This study aims to investigate the impact of skill development programs on women's empowerment in higher education institutions.

This study seeks to explore the impact of skill development programs on women's empowerment within the context of higher education. By evaluating the experiences, perceptions, and outcomes of female respondents, this research aims to shed light on the effectiveness of such initiatives in fostering women empowerment. Through a comprehensive examination of the relationship between skill development programs and women's empowerment, this study endeavors to provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and practitioners seeking to promote gender equality and inclusivity in higher education settings. The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of education in promoting women's empowerment and inform the development of strategies to enhance gender inclusivity and equality in higher education contexts

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, Skill Development Programs, Higher Educational Institutions*

INTRODUCTION

In the landscape of higher education, the empowerment of women has emerged as a critical focal point in recent years. With an increasing recognition of the importance of gender equality, institutions are turning their attention to the development of curriculum and programs tailored to empower women.

As higher education institutions strive to create more equitable and inclusive environments, the design of curriculum and the implementation of skill development programs have become pivotal avenues for advancing women's empowerment. By addressing gender disparities and providing opportunities for skill enhancement, these initiatives aim to equip women with the tools and knowledge necessary to navigate academic and professional spheres successfully.

Curriculum and skill development provide tailored education and training that address gender-specific needs and challenges. Gender-inclusive curriculum ensures equitable access to education, while skill development programs enhance women's confidence, competence, and employability. By acquiring relevant skills and knowledge, women gain economic independence and are better positioned to take on leadership roles. Moreover, these initiatives challenge gender stereotypes, promote diversity, and create supportive networks, fostering a more inclusive environment where women can thrive academically, professionally, and personally. Ultimately, curriculum and skill development helps in breaking down barriers, empowering women to fulfill their potential, and advancing gender equality in society.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- To assess the effectiveness of skill development programs in enhancing various dimensions of women's empowerment, including academic achievement, career advancement, leadership skills, and self-confidence.
- To identify various skill development programs helpful in promoting women's empowerment.

https://www.gapbodhitaru.org/

● To suggest suitable measures to higher educational institutions for implementing policies for enhancing women empowerment through education system.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

● **Kushwaha and Lal (2018),** in their paper on *"Impact of Education and Skill Development on Women Empowerment"* identified the need for developing gender-responsive Strategies for skill development for women–who are no less than men.

● **Ebrahimi, R., Choobchian, S., Farhadian, (2022)** in their paper *"Investigating the effect of vocational education and training on rural women's empowerment"* concluded that among the four dimensions of VET, the role of content and educator are more than other dimensions and these dimensions of training had improved the economic empowerment of rural women, which was often at the lowest level.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study had employed a quantitative research design focusing solely on female participants. A structured questionnaire was developed to gather data on the impact of skill development programs on women's empowerment in higher education institutions. The questionnaire included items related to program participation, academic achievement, confidence levels, leadership skills, and perceptions of women's empowerment. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to select a representative sample of female students from diverse higher education institutions. Data collection was conducted electronically or in-person, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. Quantitative data analysis involved descriptive statistics and inferential analyses to examine relationships between program participation and women's empowerment outcomes. Ethical considerations were strictly followed throughout the research process to protect participants' rights and confidentiality.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

(H0): There is no significant relationship between participation in skill development programs and women's empowerment outcomes in higher education institutions.

(H1): There is a significant relationship between participation in skill development programs and women's empowerment outcomes in higher education institutions.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

For the purpose of research, primary data was collected from 25 female students across 10 colleges in Mumbai through structured questionnaire. The respondents were mostly in the age group of 18-25 years, pursuing either graduation or post-graduation programmes and two of the respondents are pursuing Ph.D.

Responses from participants who participated in Skill Development programmes and courses:

Chart no. 1 represents Participation in Skill Development programmes and courses:
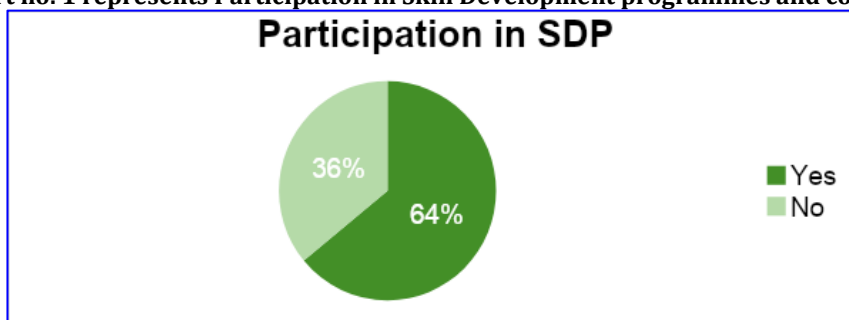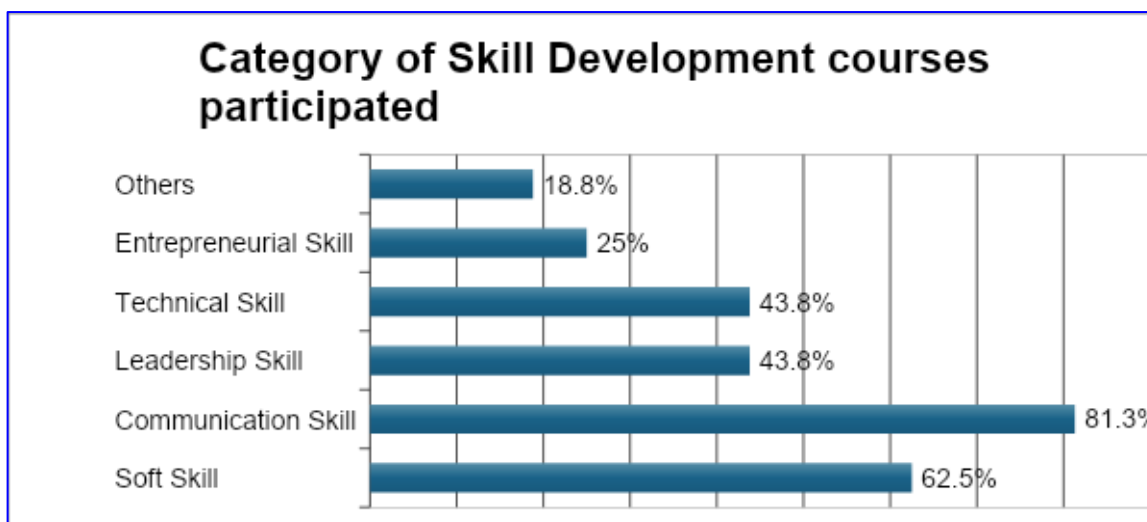

Source: Data compiled by researcher

64% of the respondents have participated in skill development programmes in the college whereas 36% of the respondents admitted that they haven't participated in any of the skill and ability enhancement courses in their college.

Courses/Programs opted by the respondents:

Chart no. 2 represents Participation in Skill Development programmes and courses

Category of Skill Development courses participated

Others	18.8%
Entrepreneurial Skill	25%
Technical Skill	43.8%
Leadership Skill	43.8%
Communication Skill	81.3%
Soft Skill	62.5%

Source: Data compiled by researcher

Majority of the respondents had participated in Communication skills (81.3%) and soft skill (62.5%), followed by equal number of respondents(43.8%) opting for Technical Skill and Leadership skill courses whereas Entrepreneurial skill courses are taken up by 25% of the respondents.

Impact on the overall academic achievement:

Table no. 1 represents the level of academic achievements of the respondents

Academic achievement	% of Respondents
Below Average	NIL
Average	NIL
Good	50%
Very Good	25%
Excellent	25%

Source: Data compiled by researcher

Out of the respondents (16) who have participated in the various skill and ability enhancement courses, 50% of the respondents(8) feels that these courses have fairly impacted their academic performance whereas 50% (8) of the respondents admits that they have done exceedingly well with respect to their academic achievements.

Confidence level in Academic abilities:

**Table no. 2 represents the Confidence level in academic abilities of the respondents:**

Academic achievement	% of Respondents
Not Confident	NIL
Low	NIL
Moderate	43.8%
Fair	43.8%
Extremely Confident	12.5%

Source: Data compiled by researcher

The above data reflects that participation in skill and ability enhancement courses increases the confidence level of the female students with respect to their academic abilities ranging from moderately confident to extremely confident.

Leadership Skill in respondents:

Charts no. 3 represents level of Leadership Skill in respondents:

https://www.gapbodhitaru.org/

Level of Leadership Skills
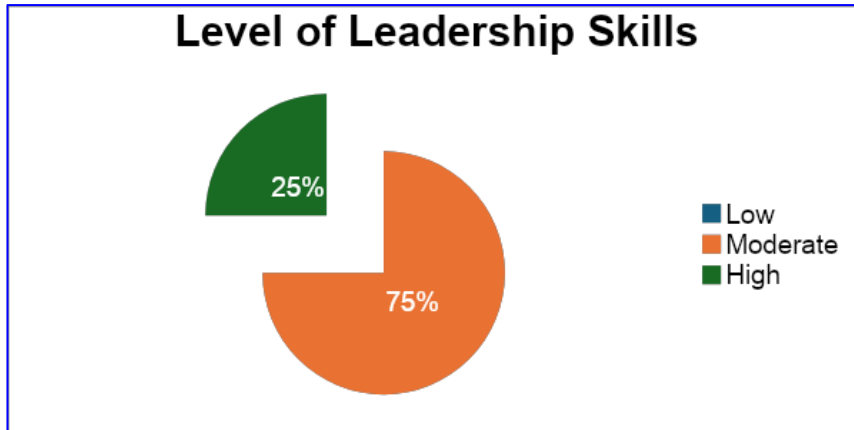
Source: Data compiled by researcher

It is observed that majority of the respondents possess moderate leadership skills. There's a significantly smaller group with high leadership skills

Participation in skill and ability enhancement program has contributed to my sense of empowerment as a woman?

Table no. 3 represents the perception of respondents about contribution of skill development course towards women empowerment

Perception Level	% of Respondents
Strongly Disagree	NIL
Disagree	NIL
Neutral	25%
Agree	43.08%
Strongly Agree	31.3%

Source: Data compiled by researcher

A significant majority of the respondents (43.08% - agreed and 31.3% - strongly agreed) believe that the course enhances their overall skills and abilities, thereby contributing to women's empowerment. Notably, a quarter of respondents (25%) remained neutral on the matter, with no respondents expressing disagreement or strong disagreement.

Responses from participants who participated in Skill Development programmes and courses:
Have you ever considered participating in a skill development program offered by your institution?
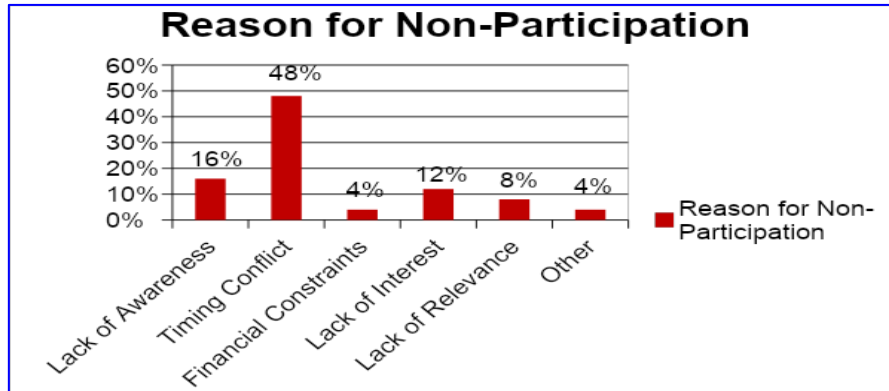
Interest in participation
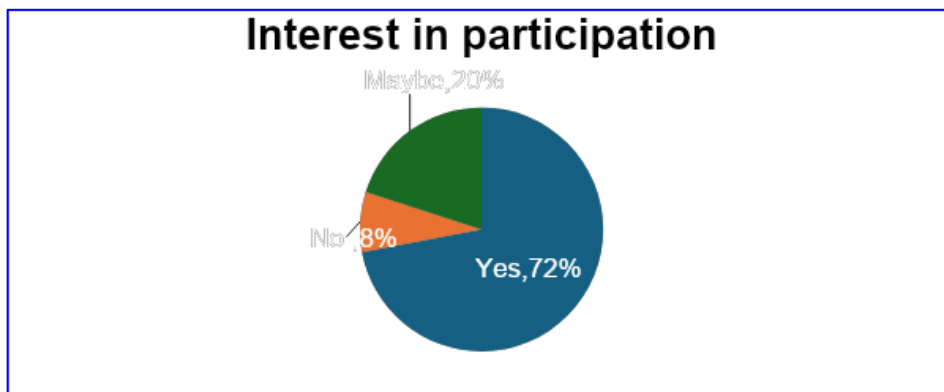
Source: Data compiled by researcher

72% of the respondents expressed interest in participating in the skill and ability enhancement programs, indicating a significant level of enthusiasm. 20% remains unsure about participation, suggesting they may require further information or clarification to make a decision. Whereas 8%, consists of individuals who have indicated that they are not interested in participating.

Reason for non –participation in Skill Development program:

Chart no. 4 represents the reasons for non-participating in skill development courses:
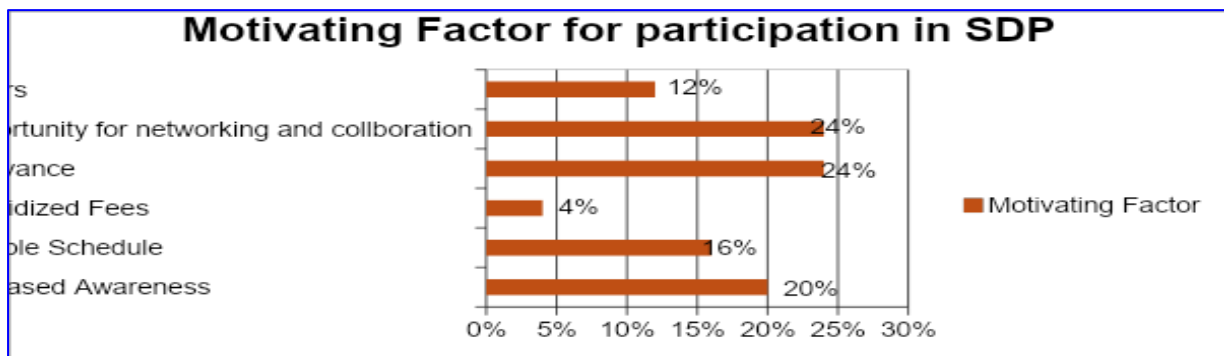

Source: Data compiled by researcher

It was observed that primary factor hindering participation, cited by 48% of respondents, is time constraints. Other factors include financial limitations (16%), lack of interest (12%), miscellaneous reasons (12%), and insufficient information (4%).

Motivating factor for participation in Skill Development Program/Courses:

Chart no. 5 represents the motivating factor for participation in Skill Development Program/Courses:
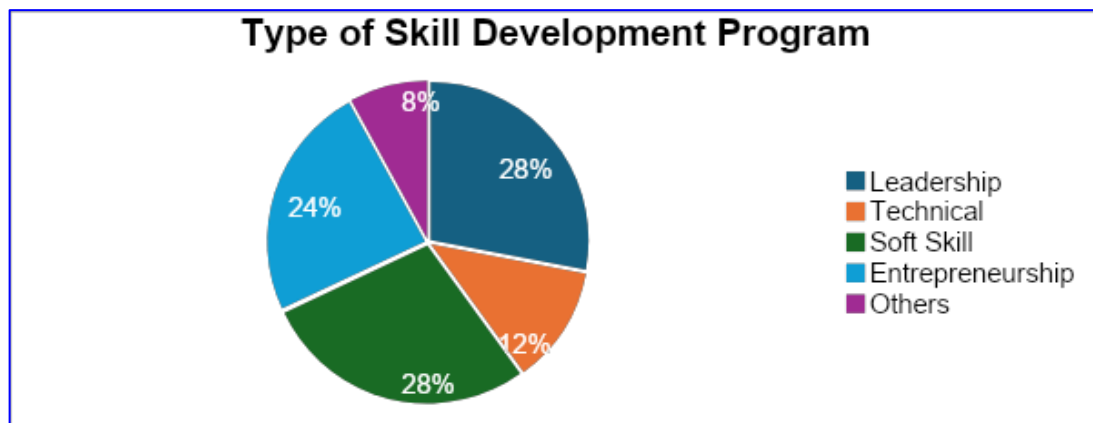

Source: Data compiled by researcher

The most common motivating factor (24%) is the opportunity for networking and collaboration; this is followed by increased awareness (20%) and flexible schedule (16%).
Type of Skill Development Program interested:

Chart no. 6 represents the type of Skill Development Program in which the respondents are interested:

Source: Data compiled by researcher

28% of respondents are interested in technical skill development programs, indicating a significant interest in acquiring technical expertise. 28% are interested in leadership skills programs, suggesting a parallel desire for leadership development. However, interest in soft skills and entrepreneurship programs is comparatively lower, with 12% each. Additionally, 20% express interest in other types of skill development programs.

TESTING OF HYPOTHESIS

Firstly, among the respondents who participated in skill and ability enhancement courses, there is an equal split between those who feel the courses had a fair impact on their academic performance and those who believe they have excelled in their academic achievements. This suggests that participation in these programs is positively associated with academic achievement among female students.

Secondly, the observation that the majority of respondents possess moderate leadership skills, with a smaller group exhibiting high leadership skills, implies that participation in skill development programs may contribute to the development of leadership abilities among female students.

Combining these observations, we can infer that participation in skill development programs positively influences both academic performance and leadership skills among female students in higher education institutions. This supports the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between participation in skill development programs and women's empowerment outcomes in higher education institutions.

FINDINGS

The study demonstrates that engagement in skill development programs has a beneficial impact on women's empowerment in higher education. This suggests a positive link between participation in these initiatives and academic achievement among female students. Additionally, the research identifies time constraints as the primary reason for non-participation in institutional programs. Furthermore, heightened awareness and opportunities for networking and collaboration emerge as significant motivators for participation. Notably, respondents express a strong interest in leadership and soft skill programs, recognizing their potential to bolster self-confidence and promote women's empowerment.

SUGGESTION

Higher education institutions can increase female participation in skill development courses through several strategies. These include

Launching targeted awareness campaigns to highlight benefits, offering scholarships or subsidies, providing flexible scheduling, and creating supportive learning environments.

Collaboration with industry partners ensures course relevance, while faculty training enhances engagement. Continuous evaluation and feedback mechanisms tailor offerings to female students' needs.

Promoting successful female role models and demonstrating institutional commitment to gender equality further motivate participation.

These strategies will collectively encourage female students to engage in skill development courses, fostering their academic success and empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Participation in skill development courses offers a transformative pathway for women's empowerment in higher education. By fostering confidence, enhancing academic achievements, and nurturing leadership skills, these courses pave the way for greater gender equality and opportunity. As women gain proficiency and assertiveness through skill acquisition, they are better equipped to overcome barriers and excel in their academic pursuits. Moreover, the cultivation of leadership abilities equips them to become agents of change in their communities and workplaces. Ultimately, the holistic development facilitated by skill development courses empowers women to realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society, driving forward the agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research in this area could be to investigate the role of support networks, such as family, peers, and mentors, in facilitating women's participation in skill development courses and their subsequent

https://www.gapbodhitaru.org/

empowerment. The research can also be conducted to have comparative studies across different educational institutions or regions to identify best practices for promoting women's empowerment through skill development initiatives. Also research can be done to explore the barriers that prevent women from participating in skill development courses and identify strategies to overcome them.

REFERENCE

[1] Gurin, P., Nagda, B. A., & Lopez, G. E. (2004). The benefits of diversity in education for democratic citizenship. Journal of Social Issues, 60(1), 17-34.

[2] Sanjay Kumar Kushwaha and Dr. Mohan Kumar Lal (2018), "Impact of Education and Skill Development on Women Empowerment" Parisheelan Vol.-XIV, No.- 4,pp- 287-296

[3] Ebrahimi, R., Choobchian, S., Farhadian, H. Et al. Investigating the effect of vocational education and training on rural women's empowerment. Humanit Soc Sci Commun 9, 167 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01187-4

https://www.gapbodhitaru.org/