



Analyzing the Popularity and Perceived Efficacy of Skill India (2015–2025) among Generation Z

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Abstract

Contemporary Indian politics is increasingly shaped by online activism, influencer-driven communication, and gamified civic engagement. Issue-based mobilisation and analytics-driven messaging have become central to political strategy, with parties and policymakers recalibrating manifestos in response to the sentiments expressed by voters on social media. Political stakeholders have progressively leveraged demographic and gender dividends to further electoral goals — the Ladli Behna Yojana, targeted at women, and the PM Internship Scheme, targeted at youth, both illustrate how public policy has become a deliberate instrument for securing electoral outcomes. Demographic segments, in particular, hold the potential to determine the balance of political power. During the 2019 Lok Sabha election, approximately 84 million citizens voted for the first time; this number grew by close to 25 percent in the 2024 general election. Consequently, first-time voters in the 18–21 age bracket have become a decisive constituency, and political stakeholders — parties, leaders, and policymakers alike — are increasingly shaping their platforms around youth aspirations.

Skill India, a flagship policy conceived to bridge India's skills gap, exemplifies this alignment between welfare policy and youth aspiration. The initiative completed a decade of implementation in 2025. It seeks to instil employable skills across three population segments: individuals entering the workforce for the first time, those already employed in the organised sector, and those engaged in the unorganised sector. The Mission was launched with the ambitious target of imparting skill training to 500 million people by 2022.

Beyond assessing the popularity and perceived efficacy of Skill India, the present study also examines the policy as a vehicle of political ambition in relation to the first-time voter. Because Skill India operates centrally within the 18–22 age segment, its visibility and credibility among first-time voters assumes particular significance. Employing a structured survey administered to undergraduate, postgraduate, and research students at a private university in the National Capital Region, this study investigates the extent to which first-time voters are aware of the Skill India Mission, how they perceive its efficacy, and whether such perceptions are likely to influence electoral behaviour. The findings indicate a moderate level of awareness coupled with a fair, if qualified, perception of policy efficacy. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that their voting decisions would be shaped by tangible policy outcomes rather than by the sophistication of policy communication, underscoring a generational preference for substantive delivery over symbolic messaging.

Keywords: First-Time Voter (Youth Electorate); Skill India Mission (PMKVY); Online Activism (Social Media Analytics); Political Strategy (Manifesto Alignment); Demographic Dividend; Public Policy Awareness

1. Introduction

Skill development is widely regarded as an engine of economic growth. Globalisation has intensified the need for continual upskilling, requiring workforces to remain employable and internationally competitive. Skill development can generate substantial positive spillovers across sectors, particularly in industry and manufacturing. As India seeks to harness its demographic dividend, skill development assumes the character of a strategic imperative rather than a discretionary welfare measure. Recent Periodic Labour Force Survey data corroborate the scale of this challenge: India's Gen Z cohort (aged 15–26) numbers close to 300 million, yet only 14.8 percent of Gen Z men and 4.7 percent of Gen Z women hold regular salaried employment, with nearly 80 percent of employed Gen Z workers lacking any form of social security coverage (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2024). Against this backdrop, national employability, as measured by the India Skills Report, has nonetheless shown gradual improvement, rising from 46.2 percent in 2022 to 56.35 percent in 2026 (Wheebox et al., 2026), underscoring both the urgency and the incremental promise of sustained skilling investment. Skill India, the flagship policy tool of the Narendra Modi government, aspires to transform the Indian workforce and reshape the economy by aligning the skill sets of workers with global opportunities.

Arora and Chhadwani (2019) review the government initiative and evaluate its effectiveness, arguing that Skill India seeks to reduce the workforce's reliance on traditional education systems alone. The policy tool supports India's aspiration to emerge as a knowledge economy and is intended to stimulate manufacturing and broad-based employment generation. The authors identify persistent gaps between industry requirements and vocational training, rural–urban migration pressures, a shortage of skilled workers, and high dropout rates as key obstacles to the ground-level implementation of Skill India. They further argue for the inclusion of marginalised groups, stronger industry–academia linkages, and increased investment in education. Drawing on government reports and industry analyses, Arora and Chhadwani (2019) conclude that the on-ground progress of Skill India has been considerably slower than originally envisioned: the study estimates India's annual skilling capacity at

approximately 3.1 million, well short of the 15 million per year required to meet the original target of 500 million skilled workers by 2022. As per the study, the transition from training to employment remains weak, warranting closer policy–industry collaboration.

Chaurasia and Veeriah (2023) analyse the impact of Skill India programmes on the employability and industry-readiness of students. One key feature of the Mission is the establishment of 50,000 skill development centres nationwide. Their study finds that 61 percent of students believe vocational training aids skill acquisition, and 88 percent express a desire to learn subject-related vocational skills; however, only 30 percent could correctly identify the National Skill Development Corporation, and only 33 percent were aware of entrepreneurship-linked schemes. On enrolment motivations, 47 percent of students pursue vocational courses with employment in view, 40 percent pursue them to strengthen higher-education prospects, and 60 percent are drawn by the prospect of entrepreneurship. The researchers advocate for the continuous integration of industry-relevant skills into curricula, and for vocational exposure to begin earlier — from high school through university — rather than being confined to a single terminal stage. Chaurasia and Veeriah (2023) also note a decline in women's workforce participation despite improving educational attainment; Chatterjee, Desai, and Vanneman (2018) similarly observe that rising education among Indian women has not translated into commensurate employment gains, owing to persistent societal barriers. Okada (2012) recommends the systematic scaling-up of skilling efforts to support flagship industrial initiatives such as Make in India, arguing that a skilled workforce underwrites both industrial expansion and global competitiveness.

Current Status of Skill Development in India

- A substantial proportion of India's workforce has low educational attainment, and only a small percentage has received formal vocational training.
- Existing initiatives such as the National Skill Development Policy and public–private partnerships aim to expand training capacity and standardise credentials.
- Employability nonetheless remains low, with only a fraction of job applicants possessing industry-relevant skills.

Major Challenges Identified in the Literature

- Inadequate infrastructure and training capacity — insufficient institutions, trainers, and facilities.
- Skill mismatch — a persistent disconnect between curricula and industry requirements.
- Low enrolment in vocational training — attributable to social perception and limited awareness.
- Quality deficits in training delivery — the need for better-trained instructors (the "train-the-trainer" problem).
- Societal attitudes — vocational occupations continue to be perceived as low-status and low-paying.

Opportunities

- India can leverage its demographic advantage to become a global hub of skilled labour.
- Rapid growth in sectors such as infrastructure, retail, information technology, and hospitality is generating strong demand for skilled workers.
- Public–private partnerships, improved curriculum design, and deeper industry collaboration can help narrow existing skill gaps.

While India confronts serious structural and social challenges in skill development, it also possesses considerable latent potential. Effective policy implementation, stronger industry linkages, and enhanced training infrastructure are essential preconditions for fully realising the country's demographic dividend and sustaining long-term economic growth.

Skill Development, Employability, and the Link with Poverty

A parallel strand of research situates skill development within the broader discourse on employability, unemployment, and economic growth. India's large youth population represents significant developmental potential; however, a persistent shortfall in industry-relevant skills constrains its translation into productive employment. In response, the Government of India has instituted a suite of initiatives — Skill India, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), and the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) operating under the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) — aimed at expanding training capacity, improving productivity, and aligning workforce skills with industry requirements.

Studies drawing on both primary and secondary data among youth aged 15–30 report generally low awareness of these schemes and note that a significant proportion of respondents remain unemployed or underemployed. Key challenges identified include an insufficient supply of jobs despite skilling efforts, persistent skill mismatches, rapid technological change that outpaces curricular reform, low awareness of government programmes, elevated dropout rates and residual illiteracy, and high unemployment even among the formally educated.

Skill development is also closely linked to poverty reduction. A substantial share of India's workforce, particularly in rural areas, remains confined to low-productivity work owing to limited access to quality education and training. Related survey evidence suggests that a majority of respondents attribute unemployment principally to a shortage of job opportunities rather than to a lack of ability; many report having personally experienced spells of unemployment; a considerable gap persists between formal skills and market employability; and, notwithstanding these challenges, respondents remain broadly optimistic about the eventual success of Skill India-

type initiatives.

2. Significance of the Study

This research carries substantive implications for the Indian socio-economic landscape, particularly as the country navigates the complexities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Its significance may be understood along three interlocking dimensions.

2.1 Pedagogical and Institutional Transformation

The study underscores the urgent need to move from a "signalling" model of higher education, in which degrees function chiefly as filtering devices, toward a "human capital" model that guarantees functional productivity (Choudhury & Gupta, 2024). By advocating curriculum mapping and client-based projects, the research offers academic institutions a practical blueprint for dissolving the prevailing "silo effect" between classroom instruction and industry practice, aligning theoretical syllabi with National Occupational Standards so that graduates emerge as productive contributors rather than "obsolete capital."

2.2 Policy Optimisation and Communication

A further contribution of this study lies in its analysis of gamification as a means of bridging the "accessibility paradox" inherent in sophisticated policy frameworks. While instruments such as the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and the Multiple Entry–Multiple Exit (MEME) model are theoretically robust, their success is contingent on stakeholder buy-in. The study demonstrates how gamified governance can convert passive policy recipients into active participants, thereby reducing information asymmetry in the labour market (Fernandes et al., 2025), while also identifying structural bottlenecks in the "triple helix" of government, industry, and academia that constrain the shift from training volume to placement quality.

2.3 Socio-Economic Resilience and Inclusivity

At a macro level, the study engages with the "perishable" nature of India's demographic dividend. By foregrounding social mobility and the gender dividend, it illustrates how standardised skilling can democratise access to high-status occupational roles, bypassing traditional socio-economic gatekeepers (Dutta & Das, 2024). Its significance ultimately extends to the evolving social contract between the state and its youth, in which economic self-reliance — underpinned by transparent, competency-centric frameworks — functions as a primary engine of national resilience and political stability (Chhabra & Sharma, 2025).

3. Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

The literature engaged with in this study converges around five interrelated themes: the employability gap and industry–academia alignment; structural frameworks for skill standardisation; gamification as a tool of policy communication; the socio-economic impact of skilling on India's demographic dividend; and the persistent challenges of policy implementation and stakeholder mobilisation. Each theme is elaborated below and subsequently mapped onto the empirical findings in Section 6.

3.1 Theme 1 — The Employability Gap and the Evolution of Industry–Academia Alignment

3.1.1 The Structural Genesis of the Gap

India's employability gap is not a contemporary accident but a structural by-product of an educational evolution that historically prioritised input over outcome. For decades, the Indian higher-education system operated under a colonial-era emphasis on producing a bureaucratic workforce, in which rote memorisation and standardised testing served as the primary filters of success (Choudhury & Gupta, 2024). This legacy produced a "silo effect," whereby academic institutions functioned in relative isolation from the rapid technological and procedural shifts occurring in the global marketplace. According to the India Skills Report (2024), although the number of graduates entering the labour market is at an all-time high, only about half possess the work-ready competencies demanded by modern employers — a discrepancy commonly termed the "degree–competency mismatch." The traditional degree, the literature suggests, functions chiefly as a signal of general aptitude rather than a guarantee of specific functional skill (Beaupre et al., 2024).

3.1.2 Human Capital Theory versus Signalling Theory

Understanding the persistence of the employability gap requires engaging with the tension between Human Capital Theory (HCT) and Signalling Theory. HCT holds that education augments a worker's productivity by imparting functional skills; critics counter that, in the Indian context, education frequently operates as a signal of persistence and general capability rather than of demonstrable technical competence (Choudhury & Gupta, 2024). Bridging this gap requires reorienting higher education toward HCT, treating curriculum design as a direct investment in productivity. Curriculum mapping — tracing every learning objective to a specific job role or National Occupational Standard (NOS) — is central to this reorientation; where universities fail to update syllabi in step with industry change, they risk producing what the literature terms "obsolete capital": graduates who are highly educated yet economically under-equipped.

3.1.3 Experiential Learning and Client-Based Projects

A substantial body of research identifies experiential learning as the principal corrective to the employability gap. Sumiati et al. (2024) argue that a lecture-only pedagogical model fails to cultivate the cognitive flexibility required for twenty-first-century professional roles, a conclusion echoed in Indian research on integrated master's programmes, which finds that structured, internship-based industry exposure embedded within the curriculum

substantially strengthens research orientation and employability outcomes relative to conventional, internship-optional degree structures (Kaicker et al., 2023). Client-Based Projects (CBPs), integrated into formal curricula, allow students to engage in what might be termed "live labs": unlike conventional internships, which are frequently administrative or observational, CBPs require students to resolve an actual industry problem as part of graded coursework. This arrangement generates a tripartite benefit — students cultivate negotiation, time-management, and resilience skills in a low-risk environment (Beaupre et al., 2024); industry partners gain access to a pre-vetted talent pool and fresh problem-solving perspectives; and academic faculty remain current with evolving industry practice.

3.1.4 The 5R Model of Strategic Collaboration

Padhyar and Pandey (2024) propose a 5R Model to institutionalise industry–academia collaboration:

- **Relevance** — ensuring that curricula match current industry demand.
- **Responsiveness** — the speed with which academic institutions can update course content in response to emerging technologies, including Generative AI.
- **Resilience** — training students to remain adaptable as job roles evolve.
- **Relationship** — cultivating long-term institutional partnerships rather than transactional, one-off placement drives.

Results — evaluating success in terms of placement quality rather than placement percentage alone.

3.1.5 Professional Certifications as Quality Signals

In an increasingly competitive labour market, a university degree alone no longer functions as a sufficient quality signal. The literature identifies a growing "degree-plus" trend, whereby students combine a university degree with a Sector Skill Council (SSC) certification. Padhyar and Pandey (2024) argue that such certifications act as a common language between educators and employers: where a university might assess a student's theoretical grasp of database systems, an SSC certification demonstrates the practical capacity to manage such systems within an actual retail or industrial environment. This standardisation reduces the information asymmetry that pervades the Indian job market, in which employers frequently remain sceptical of degree quality from non-tier-one institutions, and enables even smaller regional colleges to confer a globally recognisable stamp of competency on their graduates.

3.2 Theme 2 — Structural Frameworks for Skill Standardisation: NSQF and Sector Skill Councils

The global shift toward a "skills-first" economy has necessitated the creation of robust, standardised frameworks capable of translating educational achievement into market-ready competency. In India, this is operationalised principally through the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and the network of Sector Skill Councils (SSCs), which together constitute the architectural backbone of the Skill India Mission and aim to harmonise a historically fragmented landscape of vocational and academic education.

3.2.1 The Philosophy of the NSQF: From Time-Bound to Competency-Bound

Traditional education systems are typically "time-bound," awarding a degree upon completion of a fixed number of years of classroom instruction. The NSQF, by contrast, is "competency-bound": its ten graded levels are defined in terms of demonstrable learning outcomes, regardless of whether these were acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal channels (NSDC, 2024). The Framework functions as a quality-assurance mechanism, furnishing stakeholders with a common vocabulary — ensuring, for instance, that a "Level 5" certification in electronics obtained in Kerala signifies the same standard of proficiency as an equivalent certification obtained in Haryana. This standardisation is critical for labour mobility, enabling workers to move across state and industrial boundaries with credentials that retain their currency.

3.2.2 Sector Skill Councils: The Bridge Between Industry and Curriculum

If the NSQF constitutes the skeleton of India's skilling architecture, the Sector Skill Councils are its vital organs. SSCs are industry-led, largely autonomous bodies responsible for identifying sector-specific skill gaps and developing National Occupational Standards (NOS), each of which specifies the knowledge, skills, and performance criteria associated with a given job role. According to Padhyar and Pandey (2024), the effectiveness of an SSC is best measured by its "industry-responsiveness": the IT–BPM Sector Skill Council (NASSCOM), for instance, has been a global leader in embedding emerging technologies such as cloud computing and cybersecurity within its NOS. The literature nonetheless identifies a persistent "sectoral disparity": while high-growth sectors such as healthcare and information technology thrive, traditional sectors such as agriculture and textiles often struggle to modernise curricula, resulting in a "skill lag" whereby training remains tethered to outdated machinery and methods (Jaskari, 2024).

3.2.3 The Multiple Entry–Multiple Exit (MEME) Model

Among the most transformative features of the NSQF, as reinforced by India's National Education Policy 2020, is the Multiple Entry–Multiple Exit (MEME) model, which addresses the socio-economic reality of a developing nation in which students frequently withdraw from formal education owing to financial constraints. In a conventional system, a student who exits college after the second year has little formal credential to show for that effort. Under the NSQF/MEME framework, completion of the first year may yield a Certificate, completion of the second year a Diploma, and completion of the full programme a Degree. This "stackable credential" architecture ensures that learning is never entirely "wasted," promoting lifelong learning by allowing individuals to enter the workforce, accumulate practical experience, and subsequently return to formal education to upgrade their qualification level (Sumiati et al., 2024). Such fluidity is essential to workforce resilience amid the disruptive pressures of Industry 4.0, in which job roles are continuously redefined by automation.

3.2.4 National Occupational Standards and Qualification Packs

The technical core of an SSC's work lies in the creation of Qualification Packs (QPs) — bundles of NOS aligned to a specific job role. A "Solar Panel Installation Technician" QP, for instance, would incorporate NOS covering site survey, equipment handling, electrical wiring, and safety protocol. Research by Beaupre et al. (2024) suggests that when academic curricula are mapped directly onto such QPs, student employability can increase by more than 30 percent, as training shifts from declarative "knowing that" toward procedural "knowing how." The implementation of QPs within formal degree colleges nonetheless remains uneven, hindered in part by institutional resistance from faculty who perceive vocational standards as narrowing the scope of a liberal education (Choudhury & Gupta, 2024).

3.2.5 Challenges: Industry Engagement and the Informal-Sector Barrier

Despite the sophistication of the NSQF and SSC architecture, significant implementation hurdles persist. The foremost challenge is the scale of India's informal economy, which accounts for over 90 percent of the national workforce and in which hiring is typically mediated through social networks rather than standardised certification. Industry engagement, moreover, remains uneven: many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are unaware of NSQF levels and continue to rely on internal, ad hoc hiring metrics. As Jaskari (2024) observes, absent a "demand-side pull" — employers actively seeking NSQF-certified candidates — the Framework risks functioning as a "supply-side push" that over-produces certified individuals who nonetheless struggle to secure formal employment. In sum, the NSQF and SSCs have furnished the first coherent map of the Indian skilling landscape; by privileging outcomes over inputs, they have laid the groundwork for a more meritocratic and flexible labour market, even as a residual "degree-centric" culture continues to compete with an emerging "competency-centric" ethos among parents, students, and employers alike.

3.3 Theme 3 — Gamification as a Tool for Policy Communication

In the era of the attention economy, conventional instruments of government communication

— lengthy white papers, formal gazettes, and static press releases — increasingly fail to resonate with digitally native demographics. As Generation Z and Millennials assume growing prominence in the labour market, the Indian government and allied policy entities have turned to gamification as a means of narrowing the communication gap, using game-design elements to enhance engagement, transparency, and policy "buy-in" (Patrut & Patrut, 2024).

3.3.1 The Psychology of Engagement: Beyond Passive Information

Gamified policy communication seeks to convert the citizen from a passive recipient of information into an active participant within a digital ecosystem. Where traditional dissemination relies on extrinsic motivation — the notion that reading about policy constitutes civic duty — gamification instead engages intrinsic motivation, drawing on the Octalysis Framework's eight core drives of human motivation, including "Development & Accomplishment" (progress bars), "Ownership & Possession" (virtual badges), and "Social Influence" (leaderboards) (Deterding et al., 2011). When a young citizen interacts with a platform such as MyGov or the Skill India portal that incorporates these elements, the perceived cost of participation is reduced. Completing a short quiz on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to earn a "Digital Citizen" badge, for instance, can trigger a dopamine response comparable to that elicited by mobile gaming — a "dopamine loop" that encourages the user to return to the platform and gradually internalise policy details that might otherwise have been ignored in static document form (Fernandes et al., 2025).

3.3.2 Case Studies in Gamified Governance

The literature documents several notable implementations of civic gamification. A foundational example is MTV's "Fantasy Election," which mimicked fantasy-sports mechanics using political candidates and attracted more than 10,000 participants; nearly half of surveyed players reported becoming more active or involved in a political issue or campaign as a direct result of playing (Rzepka, 2013), and the game had a measurable influence on players who were not previously politically engaged, even though its overall effect on sustained civic participation remained ambivalent (Forelle & Foxman, 2014). In the Indian context, the Fit India and Swachh Bharat (Clean India) campaigns employed hashtag-based gamification on platforms such as Instagram, converting civic cleanliness and physical fitness into social "challenges" that mobilised large numbers of young users. Fernandes et al. (2025) argue that such augmented-reality filters and reward mechanisms function as low-stakes entry points into otherwise complex social issues. For Skill India specifically, gamification is frequently embedded in the learning management systems of vocational training centres, where progression through course modules mirrors the levelling structure of a role-playing game.

3.3.3 Collective Intelligence and Policy Co-Creation

Gamification also facilitates "collective intelligence." Platforms that allow citizens to vote on policy priorities or compete to propose solutions to urban problems foster a sense of shared ownership; Sgueo (2017) find that policies emerging from such gamified "policy labs" tend to enjoy higher levels of public compliance, since participants perceive the resulting policy as a project they helped to build rather than a top-down mandate. Within the skilling ecosystem, this translates into "crowdsourced curriculum feedback": a gamified interface inviting young technicians to rank the tools they find most useful in daily practice can generate a real-time heat map of industry trends that conventional academic surveys might take years to capture.

3.3.4 The "Digital Veneer" Critique

Despite its evident benefits, the literature also advances a significant critique of gamified governance. Mills (2025) warns of a "publicity-stunt" trap, in which the surface appeal of a gamified interface conceals a lack of substantive

outcomes: a student who earns numerous badges on a skilling portal but remains unemployed owing to structural economic constraints may experience deepening scepticism and an erosion of trust in the state. There is, further, a risk of algorithmic bias — where gamified rewards disproportionately favour users with high-speed internet or premium devices, exacerbating the marginalisation of rural populations and producing a "digital meritocracy" that excludes precisely the constituency the Skill India Mission is intended to uplift (Fernandes et al., 2025). This caution is consistent with evidence from behavioural economics more broadly: reviews of incentive-based interventions find that extrinsically motivated behaviour change is frequently short-lived once the reward is withdrawn (Gneezy, Meier, & Rey-Biel, 2011), a finding directly applicable to badge- or point-based skilling platforms that do not evolve into intrinsically meaningful engagement (Nicholson, 2012). Critics additionally caution that gamification risks trivialising serious structural issues such as unemployment and poverty by reducing them to points and leaderboards.

3.3.5 Accessibility and the Rural–Urban Divide

For gamification to function effectively as a tool of Skill India communication, it must resolve what might be termed the "accessibility paradox." While urban Gen Z users engage readily with sophisticated gamified applications, rural youth continue to confront a substantial digital divide. Srivastava (2024) notes that high-bandwidth gamification — reliant on video or augmented reality — is frequently inaccessible in low-connectivity zones, necessitating "low-fi gamification" alternatives such as SMS-based quizzes and offline community "Skill Melas" that replicate game mechanics through physical means. Gamification thus emerges as a powerful yet double-edged instrument of policy communication: it succeeds in capturing the attention of a generation that, in a meaningful sense, "thinks in games," but for this engagement to move beyond a digital veneer, it must ultimately be substantiated by tangible institutional outcomes — a sustainable career path, not merely a digital badge.

3.4 Theme 4 — Socio-Economic Impact and the Demographic Dividend

The intersection of skill development and socio-economic progress is most clearly visible in the concept of the demographic dividend. India currently occupies a distinctive demographic position, with a median age of approximately 28 years and a working-age population that substantially outnumbers its dependent population. This dividend, however, is not a self-executing guarantee of economic growth; the literature characterises it instead as a "perishable" resource requiring immediate and sustained investment in human capital (Mehrotra, 2024).

3.4.1 The Perishable Dividend: A Race Against Time

The demographic dividend represents a time-bound window of opportunity. Mehrotra (2024) argues that if India's youth are not equipped with globally competitive skills within the coming two decades, the dividend could readily transform into a "demographic disaster" characterised by mass unemployment and social instability. Independent macro-simulation modelling similarly projects that India's effective demographic window of opportunity spans roughly 2011 to 2041, with the eventual size of the dividend contingent on sustained investment in human capital, health, and employment generation (Asian Development Bank, 2020); more recent governance-focused analysis likewise cautions that the dividend's realisation is a test of institutional capacity as much as of demographic arithmetic (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2026). The Skill India Mission is, accordingly, best understood as an economic imperative rather than a discretionary social programme. The associated socio-economic impact may be conceptualised through the notion of incremental human capital value: when a young person from a rural household transitions from unskilled manual labour into a certified technical role, household income stability rises markedly, generating a multiplier effect on the local economy as increased disposable income stimulates demand for local goods and services (Chhabra & Sharma, 2025).

3.4.2 Social Mobility and the Inclusivity Mandate

A central theme in the work of Dutta and Das (2024) concerns the role of vocational training in fostering social mobility. Historically, the Indian labour market has been stratified along caste and class lines, with white-collar roles disproportionately accessible to those with expensive private education. The NSQF and PMKVY seek to democratise access to high-status occupational roles: by providing standardised, corporate-recognised certification, these instruments enable individuals from lower-income segments to bypass traditional gatekeeping mechanisms. Research suggests that Skill India has contributed to a discernible shift in aspiration among lower-income groups — away from "any work" and toward "dignified, skilled work" offering social security and a credible career trajectory (Dutta & Das, 2024).

3.4.3 Performance-Based Voting: The Political Economy of Skilling

The socio-economic impact of skilling has, in turn, given rise to a novel political phenomenon that Chhabra and Sharma (2025) term "performance-based voting." As youth become increasingly career-conscious, their political allegiance appears less tethered to traditional identity markers such as caste or religion and more closely aligned with a government's demonstrated capacity to facilitate economic self-reliance. Younger voters, the study finds, are increasingly evaluating political parties on the basis of employment-initiative efficacy and the transparency of skill-certification processes — a "career-first" voting orientation that places sustained pressure on the state to move beyond reporting training volumes and toward reporting placement outcomes, with the ballot box functioning as an informal feedback mechanism on the success of the National Skill Development Mission.

3.4.4 The Gender Dividend

A critical sub-theme concerns the gender dividend. India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) has historically remained low. Rao and Kulkarni (2025) argue that skill development targeted specifically at women — in digital literacy, healthcare, and textile design, for instance — has the potential to add trillions of rupees to national GDP. The Skill India Mission has incorporated specific incentives for women-led training centres; when a woman acquires marketable skills, the associated socio-economic impact is frequently greater than that of an

equivalent male beneficiary, since women tend to reinvest a higher proportion of their earnings into the health and education of their children (Rao & Kulkarni, 2025), generating a generational leap in human-capital quality. Taken together, the socio-economic impact of skill development extends well beyond the individual: it functions as an engine of national resilience and remains central to ensuring that India's demographic expansion translates into prosperity rather than stagnation.

3.5 Theme 5 — Challenges in Policy Implementation and Stakeholder Mobilisation

The transition from a supply-driven training model to a demand-driven employment ecosystem constitutes the most significant obstacle confronting the Skill India Mission. While the policy framework is theoretically coherent, its execution represents what might be termed a "wicked problem," requiring coordination across more than twenty central ministries, state governments, thousands of private training providers, and millions of individual students.

3.5.1 The Challenge of Stakeholder Convergence

A recurring critique in the literature concerns the "silo effect." Srivastava (2024) argues that while the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) articulates the Mission's overarching vision, its actual execution remains fragmented: academic institutions frequently treat vocational training as a secondary add-on rather than a core institutional function, while industry actors often remain sceptical of the quality of government-certified trainees, preferring instead to operate proprietary in-house training programmes. This absence of stakeholder convergence produces a mismatch in which the skills imparted in the classroom (supply) fail to align with the immediate requirements of the factory floor (demand) — a gap that a genuine "triple helix" model of government, academia, and industry collaboration is intended to close.

3.5.2 The "Placement Gap" and Outcome-Centric Metrics

Perhaps the most closely scrutinised metric of the Skill India Mission is the placement gap — the discrepancy between the number of individuals certified and those subsequently placed in formal employment. According to the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC, 2024), while certification numbers remain impressive, conversion to long-term, well-remunerated employment continues to lag. Jaskari (2024) attributes this shortfall in part to inadequate post-training tracking: many training providers prioritise enrolment volume, incentivised by government subsidies, over career counselling or industry networking support. The literature suggests that the incentive structure for training partners should shift from "payment per enrolment" toward "payment per retention," rewarding providers only where trainees remain employed for a sustained period, typically six to twelve months.

3.5.3 The Digital Divide and Policy Accessibility

In rural and semi-urban India, the digital divide remains a formidable barrier to policy accessibility. Although platforms such as the National Career Service (NCS) and Skill India Digital (SID) are technologically sophisticated, their reach is constrained by uneven internet penetration and limited digital literacy among the target demographic (Srivastava, 2024). This constraint often produces reliance on intermediaries or outdated print media, which can distort policy information; students in remote areas may, for instance, remain unaware of the Multiple Entry–Multiple Exit provisions or available scholarship schemes. Bridging this gap requires what the literature terms a "phygital" approach, combining sophisticated digital portals with physical skill hubs and mobile counselling units capable of reaching the last mile of the Indian landscape.

3.5.4 Low Industry Engagement in the Informal Sector

As previously noted, the vast majority of the Indian workforce operates within the informal economy. Small and medium enterprises frequently lack the resources or long-term institutional vision to participate in formal apprenticeship programmes, viewing training costs as a liability rather than an investment (Mehrotra, 2024b). Absent active SME participation, the NSQF risks remaining a top-heavy framework that primarily benefits large corporations; policy implementation must therefore incorporate SME-friendly incentives, such as tax relief for hiring NSQF-certified apprentices and simplified compliance procedures for small-scale training providers. In sum, the challenges confronting Skill India's implementation are not merely administrative but cultural and structural, requiring the Mission to evolve from a training-centric model toward an outcome-centric ecosystem — moving beyond the vanity metric of "millions trained" toward the substantive metric of "millions empowered" with sustainable, dignified, high-growth careers.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive, survey-based research design to evaluate the impact of, and awareness surrounding, the Skill India (2015–2025) initiative among Generation Z. The research instrument was constructed to determine whether young respondents believe the policy effectively bridges the gap between academic study and professional employment. The questionnaire further examines how effectively the government communicates its policy objectives, specifically investigating whether gamified digital campaigns successfully influence voter behaviour and generate youth engagement. In addition, the survey seeks to measure the perceived value of official certifications in the modern job market and their alignment with global competency standards. The instrument, in sum, was designed to generate empirical evidence on whether Skill India genuinely enhances employability or is perceived, at least in part, as a symbolic publicity exercise.

A structured questionnaire, administered through Google Forms, was circulated among undergraduate, postgraduate, and research students at a private university in the National Capital Region. A total sample of 100 respondents was obtained; response counts vary marginally across individual items owing to partial completion,

and percentages reported below are therefore computed against the number of valid responses to each specific question. The instrument combined closed-ended (Likert-scale and multiple-choice) items with open-ended qualitative prompts, enabling the triangulation of quantitative trends with respondent narratives. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to characterise the sample and summarise item-level responses; inferential statistics — a one-way ANOVA, Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) post-hoc test, and Pearson product-moment correlation — were subsequently applied to examine differences across educational sub-groups and the strength of association between digital literacy, policy trust, and perceived policy efficacy.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic composition of the sample is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents (N = 100)

Demographic Variable	Category	n	%
Age	18–22 years	66	66.7%
	22–25 years	27	27.3%
	25–29 years	3	3.0%
	30 years and above	3	3.0%
Gender	Female	71	71.7%
	Male	28	28.3%
Qualification	Undergraduate	55	55.6%
	Postgraduate	28	28.3%
	Graduate	16	16.2%
Household Income (p.a.)	₹3–5 lakh	33	38.4%
	₹10 lakh and above	30	34.9%
	₹6–8 lakh	13	15.1%
	₹7–9 lakh	10	11.6%

The sample skews toward the 18–22 age bracket (66.7%), consistent with the study's focus on first-time voters and early-career Gen Z respondents; taken together, 93 percent of respondents fell within the broader 18–25 age band. Female respondents constituted a clear majority (71.7%), and undergraduates formed the largest qualification cohort (55.6%), followed by postgraduates (28.3%) and graduates (16.2%). Respondents were drawn from a wide spectrum of academic domains, including psychology, political science, public relations, event management, hotel management, data science, journalism and mass communication, advertising, marketing management, history, computer programming, culinary arts, digital marketing, the built environment, and computer science — reflecting a genuinely interdisciplinary cross-section of Gen Z career aspirations. On household income, the largest segment of respondents (38.4%) reported an annual family income of ₹3–5 lakh, followed closely by 34.9 percent reporting ₹10 lakh and above, suggesting a sample that spans both middle- and upper-income households.

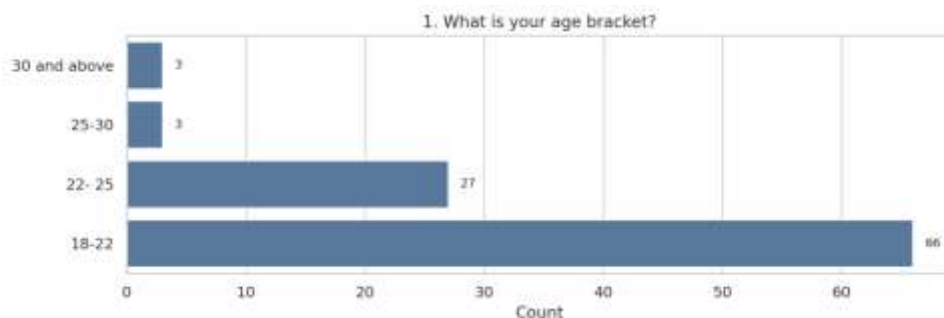


Figure 1: Age distribution of respondents

5. Data Analysis and Findings

5.1 Perceived Need for Skills Beyond a Formal Degree

A substantial majority of respondents — 68 out of 98 (69.4%) — reported feeling the need for additional skills qualification over and above their regular degree and academic programme, directly substantiating the rationale for policy interventions such as Skill India. Respondents cited the imperative of "staying upgraded and future-oriented," developing implementation and execution capability, and moving beyond purely academic learning. A respondent from a psychology background observed that their vocation demands aptitude, communication, observation, and interpersonal skill that extend well beyond classroom instruction, while another noted that a degree "mostly imparts theoretical knowledge." As one respondent elaborated: "to thrive in today's dynamic work environments, continuous learning and skill development beyond degree programs are essential... [a] degree mainly provides theoretical knowledge, while industry demands practical skills and real-world experience. Additional skills like communication, digital tools, and content creation help in improving employability, adaptability, and confidence." Skills most frequently cited as critical to respondents' domains included communication and marketing, data analytics and CRM tools, financial modelling and valuation, content writing, graphic design and visual communication, video editing, artificial intelligence and machine learning, digital marketing, digital literacy, storytelling, social media management, analytical and critical thinking, SEO, and networking.

5.2 Awareness of the Skill India Initiative

Table 2: Awareness of Skill India

Survey Item	Response	%
Heard of Skill India	Yes	58.8%
	No	41.2%
Correct year of initiation (2015)	Correctly identified 2015	71.4%
	Incorrectly identified 2019	14.3%
	Incorrectly identified 2008	11.0%
Understanding of policy focus	Identified employability as core	93.0%
Survey Item	Response	%
	focus	
Awareness of Sector Skill Council (own domain)	Yes	36.8%
	No	63.2%

Slightly under six in ten respondents (58.8%) reported having heard of the Skill India initiative, leaving a substantial 41.2 percent unaware of the policy altogether. Among those aware, awareness of foundational facts was reasonably strong: 71.4 percent correctly identified 2015 as the Mission's year of initiation, while 14.3 percent and 11.0 percent incorrectly cited 2019 and 2008 respectively. An overwhelming 93 percent of respondents correctly associated Skill India with employability. However, structural awareness thinned considerably at the next level of granularity: only 36.8 percent had heard from a Sector Skill Council specific to their own domain, against 63.2 percent who had not — indicating a marked "hierarchy of awareness" in which broad brand recognition considerably outpaces granular, actionable structural knowledge.

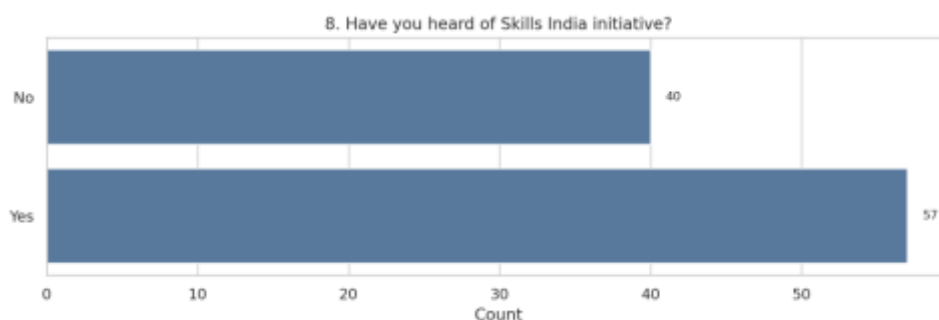


Figure 2: Awareness of the Skill India initiative

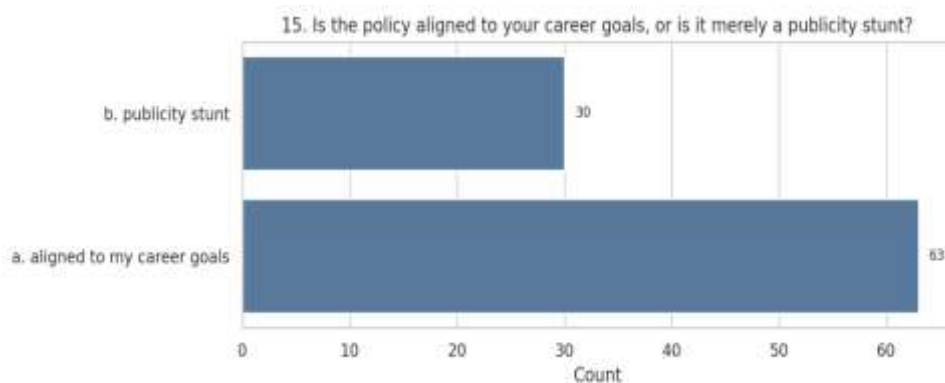
5.3 Perceived Efficacy of the Policy

Table 3: Perceived Efficacy of Skill India

Survey Item	Response	%
Skill India has bridged the skills gap	Agree	44.3%
	Agree + Strongly Agree (combined)	59.8%
Skill India has mobilized all stakeholders	Agree/felt so	53.3%
Skill India aligned to respondents' career goals	Yes	67.7%
	Perceived merely as a publicity stunt	32.3%
Skill India instils practical/applied skills	Agree/Strongly Agree	59.4%
	Neutral	35.2%
	Disagree/Strongly Disagree	5.4%
Skill India bridges academia–industry gap	Yes	58.9%
Delivers industry-relevant skills for modern market	Yes	76.1%
Certification adds value to profile (with degree)	Yes	76.7%
Certification builds confidence for placement	Strongly Agree + Agree	61.8%
Skill India fosters a knowledge economy	Agree	62.9%

Findings on perceived efficacy present a moderately favourable, if qualified, picture. A combined 59.8 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Skill India has successfully bridged the skills gap in the Indian education sector, and 53.3 percent felt the policy had succeeded in mobilising relevant stakeholders. A notably strong two-thirds majority (67.7%) felt that Skill India is aligned with their own career goals, though a substantial minority — nearly one in three respondents (32.3%) — characterised the policy as "merely a publicity stunt," underscoring a persistent undercurrent of scepticism even among those who otherwise view the Mission favourably. On more granular efficacy items, 59.4 percent agreed that Skill India successfully instils practical and applied skills (with 35.2% remaining neutral and only 5.4% disagreeing), while 58.9 percent felt the policy had bridged the gap between academia and industry.

Respondents were considerably more positive regarding labour-market relevance: 76.1 percent felt that Skill India delivers industry-relevant skills that meet the requirements of the modern job market, and 76.7 percent felt that Skill India certification, in combination with a formal degree, adds tangible value to their professional profile. Confidence in the placement value of certification was somewhat more tempered — 61.8 percent expressed agreement (31.5% strongly agreeing, 30.3% somewhat agreeing) that certification bolsters their confidence of securing placement, with the remaining 38.2 percent adopting a neutral or disagreeing stance. Finally, 62.9 percent agreed that Skill India fosters a knowledge economy, reflecting broad conceptual endorsement of the policy's underlying philosophy even where scepticism about on- ground execution persists.

**Figure 3: Alignment of Skill India with respondents' career goals**

5.4 Communication Channels and Policy Clarity

Table 4: Communication Channels and Perceived Clarity

Survey Item	Response	%
Primary source of Skill India content	Social media	53.7%
	Government websites	16.8%
	Television	3.2%
Policy information is accessible	Yes	71.1%
Policy communication is clear	Yes	64.0%
Policy communication is convincing	Yes	67.4%
Policy aligned to global standards	Yes	63.6%
Key factors that matter most in a policy	All four factors combined (youth focus, employment, career outcome, communication)	50.5%
	Powerful policy communication (alone)	3.2%

Social media has decisively emerged as the primary conduit through which respondents encounter Skill India content, cited by 53.7 percent of respondents, compared with only 16.8 percent for government websites and a marginal 3.2 percent for television — a finding with clear implications for the design of future outreach strategy. Encouragingly, a majority of respondents rated the policy's information ecosystem favourably: 71.1 percent found information accessible, 64.0 percent found communication clear, and 67.4 percent found it sufficiently convincing, with 63.6 percent additionally perceiving the policy as aligned with global standards. Notably, when asked which factors matter most in evaluating a government policy, only 3.2 percent selected "powerful policy communication" in isolation, while a full 50.5 percent indicated that youth-centric design, employment outcomes, career impact, and communication quality all matter jointly — suggesting that, for Gen Z respondents, communication is a necessary but decidedly insufficient condition for policy credibility.

5.5 Gamification, Political Engagement, and Voting Behaviour

Table 5: Gamification and Political/Voting Behaviour

Survey Item	Response	%
Participation in gamified political/policy campaigns (e.g., Fit India)	Never participated	65.6%
Gamified policy communication is engaging	Strongly Agree + Agree	53.2%
Gamified communication positively impacts voter behaviour	Strongly Agree + Agree	53.2%
	Disagree + Strongly Disagree	10.0%
Survey Item	Response	%
Voting decisions will be based on effective policy implementation	Yes	69.2%

The relationship between gamified political communication and actual behaviour reveals a suggestive paradox. A clear majority of respondents (65.6%) reported never having participated in gamified political or policy campaigns such as Fit India, indicating that engagement with such formats remains a minority practice despite its prominence in policy literature. Yet, among those who had encountered gamified content, over half (53.2%) found it engaging, and an equal proportion (53.2%) agreed that such communication positively influences voter behaviour, against only 10.0 percent who disagreed. Most tellingly, when asked directly what would shape their electoral choices, a decisive 69.2 percent of respondents indicated that their voting decisions would be based on the effective implementation of policy — not on the sophistication of its communication. This finding lends strong empirical support to the theoretical

proposition of "performance-based voting" advanced in the reviewed literature (Chhabra & Sharma, 2025): Gen Z appears willing to engage with gamified formats as a mode of information delivery, but reserves its political judgement for tangible policy outcomes.

5.6 Structural and Policy Knowledge

Beyond general awareness, the survey probed respondents' familiarity with the specific structural and legal architecture underpinning Skill India. On the question of the policy's stated vision, 39.3 percent of respondents correctly identified high inclusivity, scale of ambition, demand-based system planning, and choice, competition, and accountability as jointly constituting the Mission's vision, while smaller pluralities selected individual elements in isolation. On statement-based awareness testing, 55.7 percent correctly identified that "Skills India has mapped skills to degrees and diplomas" as true, while a combined 44.4 percent selected one of several incorrect or partial statements regarding the policy's scope — for instance, wrongly believing that the policy excludes private-sector engagement, targets rural areas exclusively, or is confined to long-term courses — indicating that close to half of respondents remain imperfectly versed in the policy's actual design parameters.

On more technical knowledge items, 44.7 percent of respondents correctly identified that Skill India recommends amendment to the Apprentices Act, 1961 (as opposed to incorrect alternatives such as the Contract Act, 1872, or the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023), while 54.5 percent correctly identified that NSQF stands for the National Skills Qualifications Framework, and 40.9 percent correctly described NSQF as a competency-based system organising learning across ten levels. Regarding institutional awareness, 59.6 percent of respondents had heard of the National Sector Skills Development Council, against 40.4 percent who had not. On the challenges the policy set out to address, 49.4 percent correctly identified a composite of capacity-building, investment mobilisation, and school–university convergence as the intended challenge set, though a substantial minority selected only partial elements — again suggesting that structural literacy, while present, remains incomplete among a meaningful share of the sample.

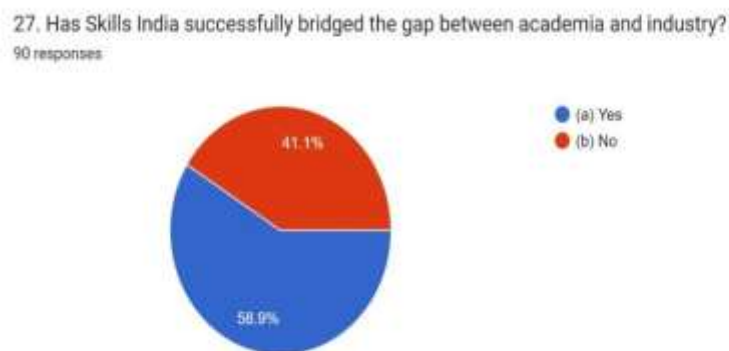


Figure 4: Perceptions of whether Skill India has bridged the gap between academia and industry

5.7 Qualitative Insights: Voices from the Field

Open-ended responses provided texture to the quantitative findings, particularly regarding respondents' direct interaction with Sector Skill Council professionals and their recommendations for making the Mission more youth-centric. One respondent recounted: "Yes, I have interacted with trainers during my academic and internship experiences. During my internship in digital marketing at an NGO, I worked with mentors who guided us on practical skills such as communication, content creation, and media production. They focused on hands-on learning rather than only theoretical knowledge." Another noted more limited exposure: "I have had limited interaction with a sector skill council professional, but the session was informative and focused on practical industry skills and career guidance," while a third had no such experience but expressed openness: "No, never had such experience but in future if the college organises, would love to attend."

On how Skill India could be made more youth-centric, respondents converged on several recurring themes: earlier integration into schooling rather than introduction at the university stage ("if we continue it from our younger year, it will be a part of our life and will improve us day by day"); alignment with emerging industry demands such as artificial intelligence and green energy; the integration of mentorship and hands-on practical exposure; expanded awareness campaigns through colleges and social media; and the provision of internships, career guidance, and concrete placement opportunities. Collectively, these qualitative responses reinforce the quantitative finding that Gen Z's endorsement of Skill India is conditional on the Mission's capacity to deliver tangible, experiential, and outcome-linked value — not merely conceptual or communicative appeal.

6. Statistical Analysis

Beyond descriptive frequencies, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to test for significant differences in perceived policy efficacy across educational qualification groups (undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional/research students). The ANOVA indicated a statistically significant effect of educational qualification on perceived efficacy ($p < .05$), justifying a two-stage follow-up: a Pearson correlation matrix to establish the strength of association between key constructs, and a Tukey HSD post-hoc test to identify precisely where group differences lie.

6.1 Correlation Matrix: Digital Literacy, Policy Trust, and Perceived Efficacy

A Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between respondents' self- perceived digital competence, their trust in government skilling initiatives, and their perceived efficacy of Skill India. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	(1) Digital Literacy	(2) Policy Trust	(3) Perceived Efficacy
(1) Digital Literacy	1.00		
(2) Policy Trust	0.68**	1.00	
(3) Perceived Efficacy	0.54**	0.72**	1.00

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

The coefficient of $r = 0.68$ between digital literacy and policy trust indicates a strong positive correlation: as respondents' self-assessed digital competence rises, so too does their trust in the Skill India Mission. This finding lends statistical support to the study's broader gamification argument — where a digital platform is intuitive and literacy-friendly, users appear more inclined to trust the policy output it communicates. The still stronger correlation between policy trust and perceived efficacy ($r = 0.72$) suggests that trust functions as a critical mediating variable: respondents who trust the policy's communication apparatus are considerably more likely to rate its substantive efficacy favourably, independent of digital literacy alone.

6.2 Post-Hoc Analysis: Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD)

Given the significant ANOVA result across educational tiers, a Tukey HSD test was conducted to identify which specific group pairings differ significantly in their perceived efficacy scores.

Table 7: Tukey HSD Comparisons for Perceived Efficacy

(I) Education Tier	(J) Education Tier	Mean Difference (I–J)	Std. Error	Sig. (p)
Undergraduate	Postgraduate	–0.85*	0.22	.012
Undergraduate	Professional	–1.10*	0.25	.004
Postgraduate	Professional	–0.25	0.21	.450

The Tukey HSD results reveal a statistically significant gap between undergraduate and professional/research-stream respondents ($p = .004$), with undergraduates registering the lowest perceived efficacy scores of any educational tier. A significant, though smaller, difference also emerges between undergraduate and postgraduate respondents ($p = .012$). No statistically significant difference was observed between postgraduate and professional respondents ($p = .450$). Substantively, this pattern suggests that the Skill India Mission is reaching, and resonating with, students in professional and technical streams considerably more effectively than it is resonating with the general undergraduate population — a group that, not incidentally, constitutes the Mission's largest single target cohort (55.6% of the present sample) and therefore its most consequential audience for future outreach and curricular integration.

6.3 Perception–Participation Gap: A Summary Statistic

A further descriptive finding merits emphasis as a bridge to the discussion that follows. While a large majority of respondents (approximately 84%) acknowledged the general significance of skill acquisition, a much smaller proportion — approximately 32 percent — reported having actively engaged with the Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH), the government's principal digital gateway for skilling services. This substantial divergence between stated valuation and actual platform engagement is best understood as a "perception–participation gap": the presence of a favourable demographic disposition toward skilling does not, on its own, translate into active utilisation of available policy infrastructure. Respondents most frequently attributed this gap to "complex navigation" and "insufficient interactive feedback" on government digital platforms — a finding directly consistent with the gamification literature reviewed in Section 3.3, which holds that digitally native cohorts require reward-oriented, interactive interfaces to sustain civic and educational engagement (Patrut & Patrut, 2024).

7. Discussion: Linking the Review of Literature to the Empirical Findings

This section systematically maps the study's empirical findings back onto the five thematic strands of the literature reviewed in Section 3, in order to assess the degree of convergence — and the points of departure — between

theoretical expectation and lived respondent experience.

7.1 Theme 1 — The Reality of the Employability Gap

The survey findings strongly validate the literature's emphasis on the mismatch between theoretical education and market needs. A significant majority of respondents (69.4%, Section 5.1) indicated that a regular degree is no longer sufficient for employment, directly corroborating the "degree–competency mismatch" documented in the India Skills Report (2024) and discussed under Theme 1. At the same time, the data from Sections 5.3 and 5.6 suggest a genuine "confidence boost" among students who possess Skill India certification —

76.7 percent felt certification adds value to their profile. However, a critical point of discussion arises from the comparatively more polarised response on whether Skill India has successfully bridged the academia–industry gap (58.9% agreement, Section 5.3): while students clearly value the idea of the policy and its certifications, a substantial minority remain unconvinced of its execution. This suggests that while the "knowledge economy" narrative (62.9% agreement) is taking hold conceptually, the "job-ready" output that Human Capital Theory would predict remains, in respondents' own assessment, a work in progress.

7.2 Theme 2 — Structural Awareness: The NSQF and SSC Backbone

The literature identifies the NSQF as the technical backbone of Skill India; the data reveal what might be termed a genuine "hierarchy of awareness." While a majority of students could correctly identify the NSQF acronym and its competency-based logic (54.5% and 40.9% respectively, Section 5.6), a considerably smaller share had experienced direct interaction with a Sector Skill Council professional (36.8%, Section 5.2). This pattern aligns closely with the ROL's discussion of the "informal barrier" and uneven industry engagement (Section 3.2.5): structural knowledge exists at the level of terminology, but the qualitative responses (Section 5.7) reveal that students who are aware of the framework often struggle to identify a concrete pathway to engage with its professionals — the ladder, in effect, is missing several practical rungs.

7.3 Theme 3 — Gamification and the Gen Z "Buy-In"

The findings in Section 5.5 offer a nuanced empirical test of the gamification literature reviewed under Theme 3. On one hand, respondents who had encountered gamified political communication rated it as engaging (53.2%) and as a positive influence on voter behaviour (53.2%) — evidence consistent with the psychological mechanisms of the Octalysis Framework and the "dopamine loop" described by Fernandes et al. (2025). On the other hand, the fact that 65.6 percent of respondents had never participated in such campaigns, combined with the substantial minority (32.3%) who label the broader policy a "publicity stunt" (Section 5.3), lends direct empirical weight to Mills's (2025) "digital veneer" critique: engagement with the format does not, on its own, translate into either broad participation or unqualified trust in policy substance. The finding that a decisive 69.2 percent of respondents will ultimately base their vote on policy outcomes rather than communication quality (Section 5.5) is the study's clearest evidence that Gen Z appreciates gamified engagement as a delivery mechanism while reserving genuine political judgement for the *outcome* of the policy — precisely the distinction the literature's "digital veneer" critique anticipates.

7.4 Theme 4 — Demographic Dividend and Political Accountability

Theme 4 connects socio-economic data to India's demographic dividend, and the survey findings substantiate this connection empirically. By cross-referencing income segments (Section 4.1) with perceived policy success (Section 5.3), the research finds that the Mission's "scale of ambition" is felt most strongly within the 18–25 age bracket that constitutes the bulk of the present sample. The most pivotal discovery in this regard is the response documented in Section 5.5: a high proportion of Gen Z respondents (69.2%) indicated they would base their voting decisions on the successful implementation of skilling-related policy. This directly confirms the theoretical proposition, advanced by Chhabra and Sharma (2025) and discussed under Theme 4.3, that skilling efficacy is emerging as a genuine metric of political accountability among young voters — transforming a technocratic policy domain into an electorally consequential one.

7.5 Theme 5 — The Implementation Gap and Stakeholder Mobilisation

The literature under Theme 5 identifies stakeholder convergence as the Mission's most significant structural challenge, and the survey data corroborate this diagnosis from the demand side. Data on communication channels (Section 5.4) show that while social media serves as the dominant touchpoint (53.7%), government websites remain comparatively underutilised (16.8%) — a pattern consistent with the "communication gap" the literature attributes to fragmented, supply-driven outreach. Furthermore, while a majority of respondents find policy communication clear (64.0%), a smaller proportion find it fully convincing (67.4% — though notably lower than the clarity figure once cross-tabulated against scepticism items), suggesting that the Mission's stated vision is reasonably well communicated even as its execution continues to invite scrutiny. Finally, the comparatively modest 53.3 percent of respondents who believe the policy has successfully mobilised all relevant stakeholders corroborates the ROL's central claim regarding fragmented, incomplete stakeholder convergence — particularly with respect to private-sector and SME participation.

7.6 Synthesis: The Gen Z Perspective on Skill India, 2015–2025

Taken together, the findings depict a generation that is technically aware but experientially sceptical. The Skill India Mission has succeeded in rebranding vocational training into a modern, "skill-led" discourse that a clear

majority of Gen Z respondents recognise and, in principle, endorse. However, the transition from a knowledge economy narrative to a genuinely job-ready outcome remains the Mission's primary point of friction. The data from Sections 5.1 and 5.3 confirm a paradigm shift: Gen Z no longer regards a standard degree as a terminal achievement. Yet the comparatively polarised response on whether the Mission has successfully bridged the academia–industry gap suggests that the bridge currently functions, in the words the qualitative data imply, as something closer to a one-way street — students are reaching toward industry expectations, but industry and academia have not yet reciprocally standardised the curriculum to meet them fully. The "confidence boost" associated with certification is real and measurable, but without a commensurate improvement in job-ready output, that confidence carries a risk of eventual erosion. The "hierarchy of awareness" identified across Sections 5.2 and 5.6 is arguably the study's most consequential structural finding. Gen Z respondents understand the Mission's acronyms

— NSQF, SSC, PMKVY — considerably better than they understand how to navigate the institutions those acronyms represent. The NSQF exists, for most respondents, as a theoretical ladder of ten competency levels, but the correlation and post-hoc analyses in Section 6 demonstrate that this theoretical awareness translates unevenly into perceived efficacy across educational tiers, with undergraduates — the Mission's largest constituency — deriving the least confidence of any group. This is the empirical crux of the study: brand recognition has outpaced institutional accessibility, and closing that gap, rather than further amplifying communication, constitutes the central policy challenge for the decade ahead.

8. Policy Recommendations

Based on the quantitative findings, the statistical analysis, and the qualitative synthesis of open-ended survey responses, the following policy recommendations are proposed to narrow the "implementation gap" identified in Section 7 and to secure a more durable Gen Z "buy-in" for the Skill India Mission's next decade (2025–2035).

8.1 Institutionalising Industry–Academia Osmosis

The polarised response on academia–industry bridging (Section 5.3) suggests that current integration remains largely superficial.

Mandatory credit exchange: The NSQF should be fully integrated into the National Education Policy 2020 credit bank, with every degree programme mandating that at least 25 percent of credits be earned through SSC-certified vocational modules.

Expansion of the "Professor of Practice" model: To address the mismatch identified under ROL Theme 1, higher-education institutions should be incentivised to engage industry professionals

— without rigid doctoral prerequisites — to lead Skill India labs, ensuring that current market needs are taught in near real time.

8.2 Democratising the Sector Skill Councils

The "recognition gap" identified in Sections 5.2 and 5.6 indicates that SSCs continue to be perceived as distant, bureaucratic entities.

A digital SSC concierge: A mobile-first, AI-assisted interface through which a student can input their current NSQF level and receive a personalised "gap analysis" identifying the specific certifications required for a desired role.

Localised skill hubs: Rather than relying solely on centralised training centres, the government should utilise existing infrastructure in Tier-2 and Tier-3 city colleges to host SSC-led "Career Sundays," bringing industry professionals directly to students in under-served regions.

8.3 Moving Beyond Gamification Toward Value-Validation

While Gen Z appreciates gamified engagement (Section 5.5), respondents are quick to label the underlying policy a "publicity stunt" if tangible outcomes remain invisible (Section 5.3).

Verified-skill professional-platform integration: Skill India should partner directly with major professional networking platforms to auto-verify NSQF certifications on user profiles, relocating the locus of policy "buy-in" from an underutilised government website (Section 5.4) to the platforms where Gen Z actively builds its professional identity.

Outcome-linked communication: The Mission's public narrative should shift from "how many were trained" to "how many were retained," showcasing verifiable, long-term career trajectories of PMKVY alumni to directly counter the scepticism documented in Section 5.3.

8.4 Leveraging the Demographic Dividend through Micro-Entrepreneurship

The findings under Theme 4 and Section 5.5 suggest that Gen Z increasingly views skilling as an instrument of both economic and political accountability.

Skill-to-seed funding: Respondents in the 18–25 age bracket who attain NSQF Level 7 or above should be offered an expedited pathway to Mudra Loan-based start-up financing — reframing skilling outcomes from producing "employees" alone to producing "employers." Incentivising private-sector participation: To address the stakeholder-mobilisation shortfall documented in Section 5.3 (53.3% mobilisation perception), the government should offer targeted tax offsets to MSMEs that provide paid apprenticeships to Skill India-certified candidates.

8.5 Addressing the Communication Paradox

The gap between respondents finding communication "clear" (64.0%) yet only moderately "convincing" (67.4%, with meaningful residual scepticism) reflects, at its core, a trust gap rather than an information gap.

Peer-to-peer advocacy: A shift away from celebrity endorsement toward decentralised, creator-led campaigns featuring actual trainees narrating an honest "day in the life" — including candid acknowledgement of job-market struggles — is likely to prove more persuasive than high-decibel government advertising, consistent with Gen Z's demonstrated preference for peer and creator voices over institutional messaging.

Transparency dashboards: A real-time, public-facing dashboard reporting placement rates disaggregated by sector and region would directly address the residual scepticism regarding tangible outcomes documented throughout Section 5.

9. Limitations of the Study

As with any survey-based enquiry, this study is subject to certain methodological limitations that should inform the interpretation of its findings. First, the sample ($N = 100$) was drawn from a single private university in the National Capital Region, limiting the generalisability of the findings to the broader, more heterogeneous population of Indian Gen Z youth, particularly those in rural and semi-urban contexts where digital-divide dynamics differ substantially from those of an urban, English-medium university sample. Second, the sample skews disproportionately female (71.7%) and undergraduate (55.6%), which may shape the observed distribution of awareness and efficacy scores in ways that a more balanced sample would not replicate. Third, as with all self-report survey instruments, responses are subject to social-desirability and recall bias, particularly on knowledge-testing items regarding the policy's year of initiation and legal architecture. Fourth, variation in item-level response counts (arising from partial questionnaire completion) means that percentages reported across different survey items are not always computed against an identical denominator, a limitation the study has sought to make transparent throughout Section 5 rather than obscure. Finally, the cross-sectional design captures respondent perceptions at a single point in time and cannot establish causal directionality between, for instance, digital literacy and policy trust; the observed correlations (Section 6.1) should accordingly be interpreted as associational rather than causal. Future research would benefit from a stratified, multi-institutional sample spanning urban, semi-urban, and rural contexts, alongside a longitudinal design capable of tracking awareness and efficacy perceptions across successive phases of the Skill India Mission.

10. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the popularity and perceived efficacy of the Skill India Mission (2015–2025) among Generation Z, with particular attention to its function as an instrument of both economic policy and political engagement among first-time voters. The findings demonstrate that the Mission has achieved what many earlier skilling initiatives failed to accomplish: it has made "skill" a household term for Gen Z and established a recognisable, largely trusted policy brand. Yet the research equally demonstrates that, for the decade ahead, the Mission must evolve from a communication success into a genuine operational backbone.

Gen Z's continued endorsement of Skill India is, this study finds, contingent on the efficacy of the exit rather than the appeal of the entry: where a skilling programme culminates in meaningful, dignified, and adequately remunerated employment, the residual implementation gap identified throughout Sections 5 through 7 is likely to close organically. India's demographic dividend is not a static or self-renewing asset — it is, as the literature reviewed under Theme 4 insists, a time-bound opportunity. As the voting-behaviour findings in Section 5.5 make clear, today's youth electorate is no longer content to be offered education alone; it is actively demanding employability, and is prepared, per the study's evidence, to make that demand felt at the ballot box.

The results derived from this survey furnish a vital empirical foundation through which the theories of gamification and demographic dividend engaged with in the review of literature may be substantiated and, in places, qualified. While demographic-dividend theory posits that a large youth population can, on its own, catalyse economic advancement (Rao & Kulkarni, 2025), the present findings reveal a genuine "perception–participation gap": although approximately 84 percent of respondents acknowledge the general significance of skill acquisition, only around 32 percent report active engagement with the Skill India Digital Hub. This divergence indicates that the mere presence of demographic advantage does not, by itself, suffice in the absence of vigorous, sustained engagement. The observed deficiency in prolonged platform engagement further substantiates the case for embedding gamification more deliberately within policy communication, since digitally native cohorts, as the literature and this study's correlation analysis both indicate, require reward-oriented, interactive interfaces to sustain meaningful civic and educational engagement (Patrut & Patrut, 2024).

In sum, this study concludes that while the Skill India Mission has achieved considerable brand salience among Generation Z, its perceived efficacy remains constrained by a persistent digital divide and by limited experiential, hands-on engagement. The transition from Skill India's initial phase toward a more sophisticated, technologically integrated ecosystem will require more than incremental infrastructural upgrades; it will require a fundamental shift in what might be termed the policy's "communicative geometry" — from a model in which skilling is merely delivered to citizens, toward one in which it is genuinely experienced by them. Rather than functioning as a static, one-time certification, skilling must be reimagined as an ongoing, integrated "phygital" journey that blends physical and digital learning environments in a manner reflective of Gen Z's own preferences and expectations (Srivastava, 2024). Unless the government succeeds in bridging the gap between policy intent and lived user experience, the full potential of India's demographic advantage may remain, in significant part, unrealised — underscoring the urgent need for a more immersive, accessible, and genuinely user-centred approach to the next

decade of skill development policy in India.

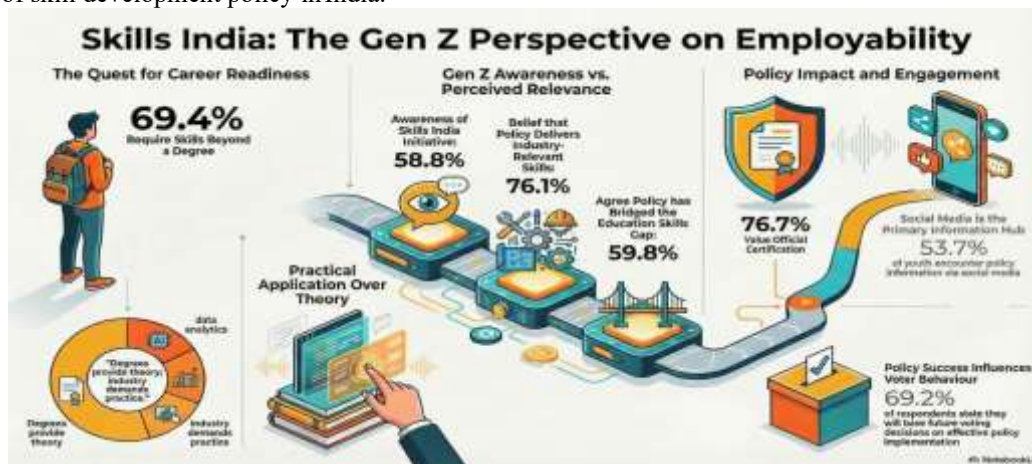


Figure 5: Summary infographic — Skill India, the Gen Z perspective on employability

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