



THE ROLE OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT TRAINING ON EMPLOYABILITY: A STUDY OF THE SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT INVESTMENT PROGRAM (SEIP) PROJECT IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The current skills supply systems hardly address employability in Bangladesh because of the mismatch between skills supply and skills demand. The skilled workforce produced here is not focused and aligned with industry demand. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of skills development training in facilitating gainful employment. Specifically, it examines the outcomes of the Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP) Project initiated by the Finance Ministry of Bangladesh. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study analyzes the impact of skills development training on employability. Findings indicate that such training significantly contributes to employment generation, enhances employer satisfaction, boosts confidence, promotes decent work, and fosters economic growth, all crucial components of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG-8). Recommendations are provided to strengthen demand-driven skills development training, aiming to mitigate skills mismatches and promote sustainable employability.

Keywords: Skills development training, skills mismatch, employability, Workforce

INTRODUCTION

The employment landscape in Bangladesh faces significant challenges due to a fundamental disconnect between the skills offered by the current systems and those demanded by the industries. This mismatch, as highlighted by Siddiky and Uh (2020) and Mazzoleni and Nelson (2007), undermines the nation's capacity to address employability effectively. Consequently, sectors are compelled to recruit foreign professionals at premium salaries, leading to a drain on foreign currency reserves (Islam 2011). Furthermore, the disparity in earnings between unskilled migrants and their counterparts from India and foreign professionals exacerbates socio-economic inequalities (Uddin 2024). Despite Bangladesh's increasing labor force, as evidenced by the Labour Force Survey 2023, with 73.69 million workers, including 2.1 million new entrants annually, a concerning proportion of 12.9 million young individuals are classified as inactive, perpetuating a cycle of underemployment and economic vulnerability (Khan 2023). This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of skills development training in mitigating the challenges of employability in Bangladesh. Specifically, it delves into the outcomes of the Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP) Project initiated by the Finance Ministry, analyzing its alignment with sustainable employment objectives. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the

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research assesses the impact of skills development training on employment generation, employer preferences, and the confidence of graduates. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policies and practices aimed at bridging the gap between skills supply and demand, thereby fostering sustainable employability. By examining the role of skills training in creating job opportunities and enhancing workforce readiness, this research contributes to the broader discourse on skill development and economic growth

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The current skills supply systems in Bangladesh do not address employability due to the existing mismatches between skills supply and skills demand (MR Siddiky, SB Uh 2020). The production of skilled workforces is not focused on industry demand (R Mazzoleni, RR Nelson 2007). This deficiency compels various sectors to seek foreign professionals at higher salaries, resulting in a substantial outflow of foreign currency, which impedes the nation's foreign reserves. Additionally, unskilled migrants from Bangladesh engaged in low-skilled jobs earn monthly incomes ranging from \$200 to \$400, which pale in comparison to their counterparts from India and foreign professionals working in Bangladesh, who earn significantly higher amounts. The Labour Force Survey 2023 shows that the labor force of Bangladesh has increased to 73.69 million, of which 48.25 million are male and 25.44 million are female. Approximately 2.1 million new entrants are joining the workforce every year. Moreover, among 31.6 million young people, 12.9 million are classified as inactive, meaning they are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET). The negative consequences of a high NEET population can be perpetuated across generations. When young people are not equipped with the necessary skills and education, they may struggle to find decent employment, leading to a cycle of poverty and limited opportunities for their children as well. The socio-economic consequences of the unaddressed NEET crisis can be long-lasting and detrimental. This study demonstrates the demand for skills development training that equips the unskilled youth workforce by engaging them in different skills development training aimed at the competitive job market to gain employment. Furthermore, it highlights the gaps between skills supply and skills demand, and it underscores the importance of skills training in achieving employability.

For that, the study was concerned with the following specific research questions:

- i. How important is SEIP and other skills training for creating jobs?
- ii. Does skills training make people more employable?
- iii. Do employers prefer hiring trainees with specific skills?
- iv. Does gaining confidence through training help people find jobs?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this research is to examine the impact of skills development training on the attainment of gainful employment. To fulfill the broad objective of the study, the specific objectives are as follows:

- i. To determine the role of SEIP and other's skills development training on employment generation
- ii. To find the impact of the skills development on employability.
- iii. To find the impact of the employer preferences on employability.
- iv. To find the impact of the graduates' confidence on employability

LITERATURE REVIEW

The time-oriented demand for skills development training and competencies has been pertinent in the demand-driven job market around the globe (Saini 2015). The imparting of employable skills focused on the competitive job market is missing in the education system in Bangladesh (Dewan and Sarkar 2017). Students' apprehensions have been recorded from a case study and found below ten percent of them felt skills along with a regular curriculum might be useful in finding a good job and performing tasks at the workplace (Dewan and Sarkar 2017). 47 percent of the school administrators acknowledged that industry involvement in drafting the training curricula would be a good idea (Dewan and Sarkar 2017). Good examples have been found in support of training and retraining as well. Many G20 countries have incorporated training in their responses to the employment encounters arising from the global financial crisis of 2008 (Juan Somavia 2011). Dewan and Sarkar cited 33% of manager's satisfactory comments of having experienced workforces. They have relatively better performances compared to the fresh ones. In support of skills development, schools should impart strong foundational and transferable skills that governments and the private sector can then help build providing pathways for young people (Dewan and Sarkar 2017). For reaping the advantages of demographic dividend skills development training is a must. (Shekh Farid 2019) strongly refer to 'it must undertake significant quality education reforms to strengthen the education to-skills training continuum'

The dependent variable of the study has been backed by recognized and established sources as well. Employers need to compete to attract the most talented individuals with leadership potential. Educators need to integrate employability skills into courses and work more closely with employers (Syed Mehdi Momin 2019). Ahmadullah M. and Rezaul K., (2015) strongly and depict the role of skills training for employment. A skill development project, financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), has the objective of reinforcing the efforts toward poverty reduction and economic growth by increasing wage and self-employment of graduates of skills training programs (S Lee 2020). The project has four targets to accomplish: (i) enhanced relevance of and access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs; (ii) improved capacity for good quality TVET; (iii) effective delivery of relevant skills training; and (iv) efficient project management The project has a special thrust on empowering women through skills training, among others (RI Rahman, OH Chowdhury, N Chowdhury 2000).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed methods approach to acquire a better perception and deeper understanding of the role of skills development training on employability. Interview, observation, and document analysis have specifically been used to address the demand of the skills development training in the TVET ecosystem. Primary and an assessment of secondary data have been used to reach the objectives of the research study. The secondary data has been derived from SEIP project from its robust Trainee Management System (TMS, other TVET projects, governmental and non-governmental policy papers, and other relevant literature skills development sectors. The qualitative data is collected through Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) based on the theoretical framework to better understand sustainable employability through skills development training centers in Bangladesh. Both quantitative and qualitative data have been analyzed in this study as tools. Survey method, semi-structured and structured questionnaires have been incorporated to fetch numeric and narrative data. 5 Likert scale has been deployed to develop the questionnaire that has been filled out by the participants involved with skills development training. The data were analyzed by Excel and SPSS 20.0. The Pearson and multiple regression analysis were applied to find the association between independent and dependent variables. This study would be explorative and rely on inductive logic to conclude by threading new knowledge into hypotheses. Participants' attitudes and perceptions

are carefully monitored via qualitative research to study the critical idea of the skills development training on employability. Six major skills development TVET projects that work throughout the country have been identified for the study. Among them, the ADB-funded SEIP project and World Bank-funded STEP project have been nominated. 360 skilled graduates from 64 districts including the representation of rural, urban, plain land, hilly regions, disadvantaged groups, ethnic minorities, and Persons with disabilities (PwD) have been interviewed face to face using formative questionnaires.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Skilled workforces employed by the industries (Analysis-1)

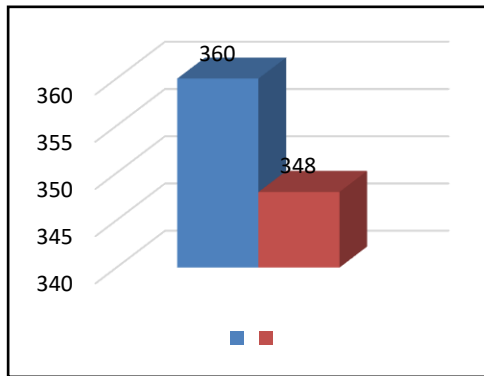


Figure 1: Employment Status

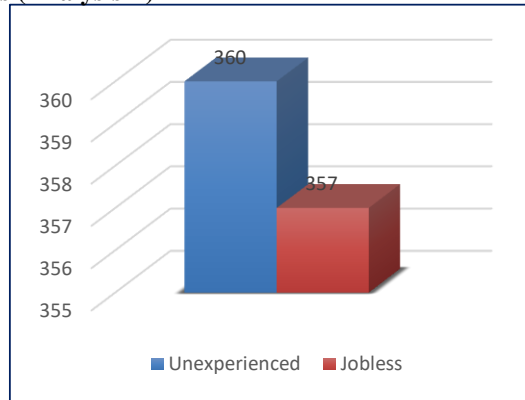


Figure 2: Unemployment Status

A survey was conducted among 360 graduates from various skills development projects gauge the impact of such training on their employability. A significant majority, 96.66% (Figure-1), indicated that the skills they gained through these projects were instrumental in securing employment in today's competitive job market. Interestingly, all 360 graduates noted that they had friends who lacked jobs due to a lack of skills development training. Figure-2 provides 99.16% of unemployed individuals who were without jobs because they lacked skills development training.

Employers expectations for employing skills workforces (Analysis-2).

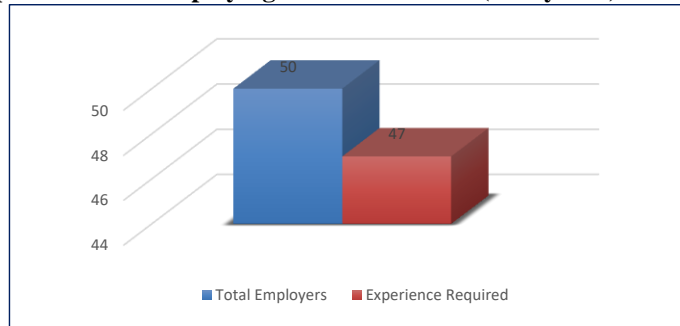


Figure 3: Employers' Comment

Employers in various industries prefer hiring skilled workers over those without skills. They value experience and expertise in their workforce. This preference poses a challenge for fresh graduates or unskilled individuals seeking employment, as employers prioritize skilled candidates. A survey (Figure 3) revealed that 94% of industry employers specifically seek skilled graduates for their workforce, believing it to be beneficial for their businesses.

Progressive Trend of Employment

Skilled graduates of the SEIP project quickly secure employment upon completing the skill development training, with a majority finding opportunities in various industries. The project has set a mandate of achieving a 60% job placement within three months after training completion. On average, it has been observed from SEIP TMS that 75% of trained graduates secure employment with industry employers.

In terms of diversity, female representation in job placements exceeds 31%, including transgender individuals, ethnic minorities, Persons with Disabilities (PwD), Orphans, and Abandoned Youth (OAY). In Tranche-3, the job placement rate was slightly lower at 67% compared to 79% in Tranche-1 and 78.9% in Tranche-2. This variance is attributed to the fact that enrollment progress in Tranche-3 was still underway during the study. However, the target enrollment in Tranche-3 is expected to surpass both Tranche-1 and Tranche-2.

Given the project's focus on demand-driven and market-oriented skills development, there is an optimistic assumption of achieving over 90% job placement for skilled graduates in Tranche- 3. Notably, the job placement rate for skilled graduates consistently outperforms that of non-skilled individuals. The accompanying graph illustrates the number of job placements in different Tranches of the Project, showcasing the positive impact of the SEIP project in facilitating employment for skilled graduates (Figure 4).

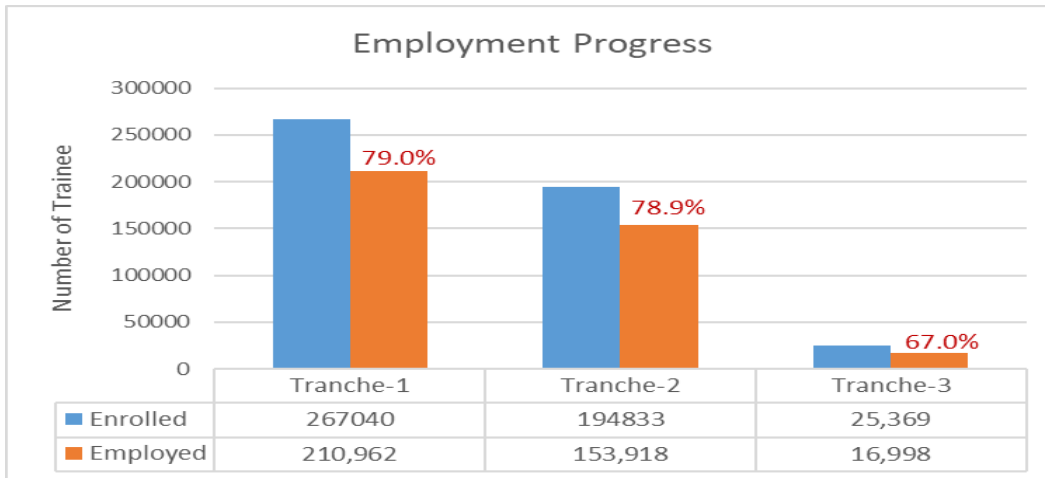


Figure 4: Employment Progress

The Employment Rate Increased Being Skilled

Untrained youths often experience unemployment until they undergo training at various skill development centers. Seeking employment, they approach different industries and institutions in search of opportunities. However, their lack of skills often leads to rejection by industries and companies. Subsequently, these youths undergo market-responsive skills development training at different Skill Training Providers (STPs). Equipped with the necessary skills, they can easily secure jobs.

Many skill development projects aim to ensure job placement after skills training at the STPs. The Skill for Employment Investment Program (SEIP) specifically addresses the job placement of

trainees who undergo skills development training at its affiliated STPs. The project has estimated a 60% job placement rate for enrolled trainees at the STPs.

Reports from the STPs associated with the SEIP project indicate that many unskilled graduates struggle to secure jobs before undergoing skill development training. However, the situation changes when these individuals equip themselves through skill development training. This training significantly increases the likelihood of employment, with employers expressing a preference for skilled graduates over non-skilled ones.

Figure 5 illustrates progressive statistics of the job placement records of the SEIP project, ensured by partner STPs. According to recent studies (Figure 6), the average total job placement rate exceeds 79% for total certified graduates. This implies that more than 79 out of 100 certified skilled graduates secure employment after undergoing skills development training provided by the SEIP project.

The data further indicates that this success surpasses the initial target of 60% job placement set for the STPs. In other words, 79 certified skilled graduates out of 100 have secured employment after undergoing the skills development training provided by the SEIP project. This statistic suggests a positive outcome and success in terms of job placement for individuals who have participated in the skills development training under the SEIP project.

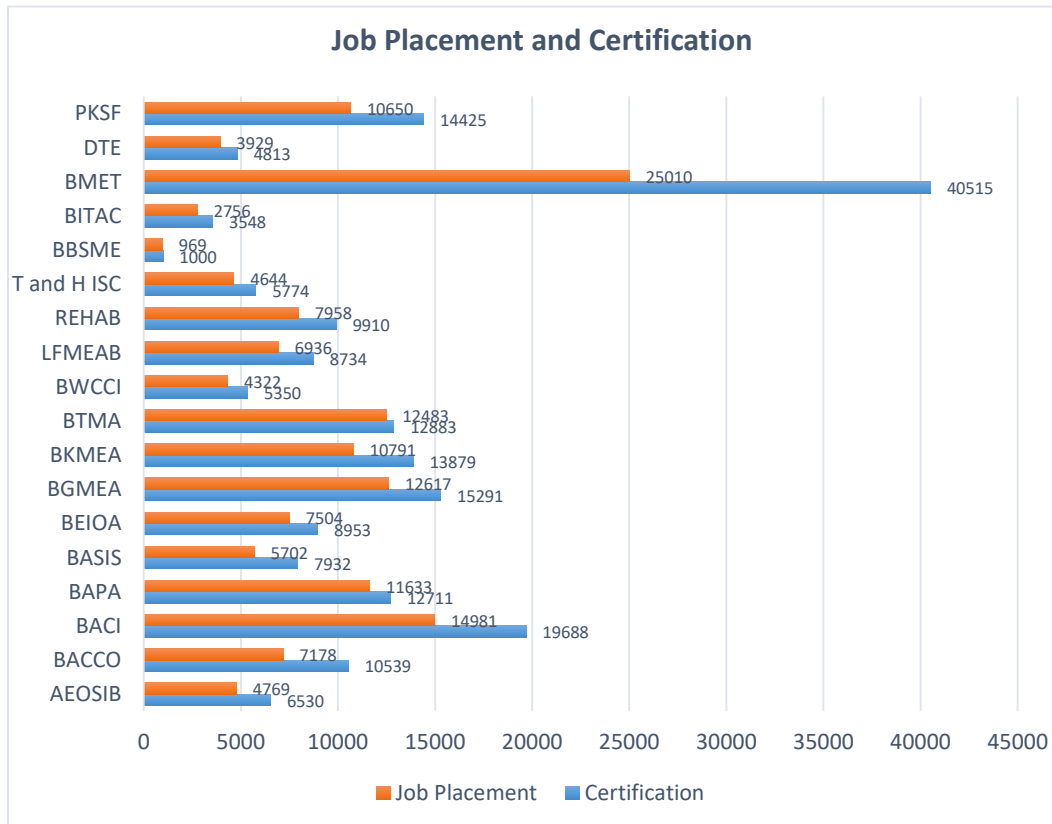


Figure 5: Number of certification and job placement after certified.

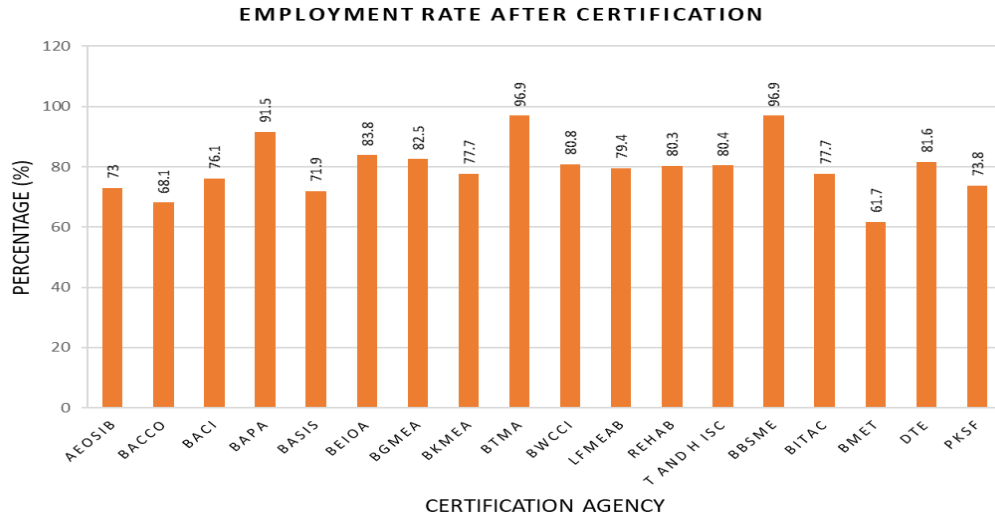


Figure 6: Employment rate of the trainees after certification.

Similarities of Different Projects for Increased Employability

The main objectives of different projects for enhancing the employability skills of unemployed youths are similar. The design and development of several skills' development projects have been analyzed and found similarities in their key components (Table 1). The projects developed the key aspects based on the National Skill Development Policy (NSDP). It has been observed that the major skill development projects in Bangladesh set key objectives that overlap with one another. Besides, some of the projects have almost the same agenda which is aligned with others. In addition, the objectives defined by the skill development project so far have been aimed at the unemployed youth workforces and equip them to cope with the rising technology shifts. However, the similarities in the main activities of different projects imply an idea of increasing employability through skills development training.

Table 1: Similarities of Different Projects for Increased Employability

#	Components	SEIP	STEP	B-SEP	B-Skillful	Sudukkho
1.	Market Responsive Inclusive Skills Training Delivered	✓	✓	✓		
2.	Strengthening of Quality Assurance System	✓				✓
3.	Strengthening of Institutions for Skills Development System	✓	✓	✓		✓
4.	Effective Program Management Ensured	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5.	Equitable access to skills	✓		✓		
6.	Specialized Business Development Service targeting production methods and working conditions in SMEs	✓			✓	

Data Reliability and Validity (Primary Data)

Cronbach’s alpha is an accepted test for internal reliability of latent variables (Bagozzi, 1980; Bell et al., 2022). It is proposed to be higher than 0.70 (Sarstedt et al., 2023; Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010). Even though the values were <0.7 (Amirrudin et al., 2021), 0.7 should not be the only standard used to assess reliability, whereby the shorter scale, with the lower alpha value, actually demonstrates higher interrelatedness among items. Furthermore, (Amirrudin et al., 2021; Hinton et al., 2014) value of 0.90 and above shows excellent reliability, 0.7 to 0.90 conveys high reliability, 0.50 to 0.70 shows moderate reliability, and value of 0.5 and below shows low reliability. Table 2 shows that the reliability of all constructs is excellent since the value of Cronbach’s alpha is greater than 0.9. So, the data for all variables are reliable.

Table 2: Cronbach’s alpha of constructions, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin, and Bartlett’s test for data reliability and validity.

Variables	Cronbach’s alpha test	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test	Bartlett’s Test		
	A	KMO	Chi-Square	Df	Sig.
Skills Development	.991	.922	4790.2	15	.000
Employability	.980	.822	3202.4	10	.000
Confidence	.958	.726	1381.1	3	.000
Employer Preferences	.984	.866	2584.7	6	.000

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test evaluates the validity of the data. Validity evaluates the accuracy level of an instrument while its reliability of an instrument evaluates the quality and consistency of the instrument (Napitupulu et al., 2017). The lower the proportion, the more suited data is to factor analysis. According to the KMO reruns, figures between 0.8 and 1 indicate the sampling is adequate. The sample is sufficient if KMO value is more than 0.5 Bartlett’s test is significant, and the P-value is less than 0.05. KMO Values close to 0 mean that there are large partial correlations compared to the sum of correlations (Yusoff, 2010). Table 2 shows that the KMO for all variables is greater than 0.5, and therefore the sampling is adequate. Additionally, as the p-values are less than 0.05 for all variables, Bartlett’s test is significant, and the data are valid.

Overall Description of the Variables

In this study, within the 360 participants, we found the highest positive responses (4.52±0.66) from the participants on the statement of employer preference. The averages 4.51±0.62, 4.49±0.66, and 4.48±0.69 were found for the statements of confidence, employability, and skills development (Figure 7) which means that the participants are positive and agree with these statements. However, since the highest positive value is considered on the 5 Likert scale, and based on these results very few of the participants are unsatisfied and disagree with some of the statements, the training authority should investigate the reason for their dissatisfaction or negative response and thereby they can resolve it. The details of descriptive data are in the supplementary file (Appendix).

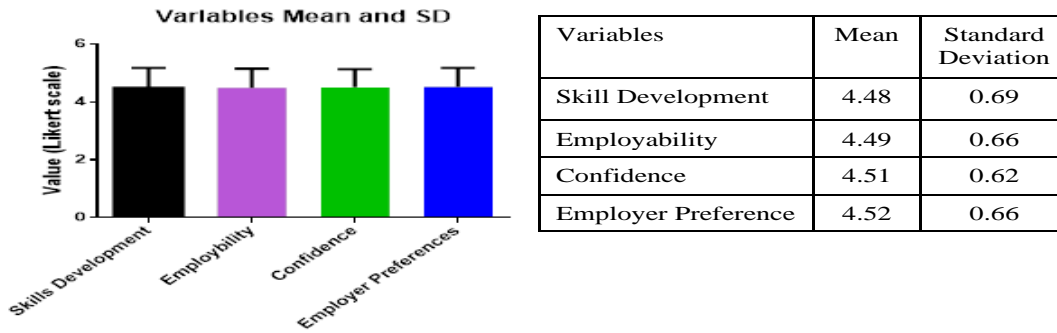


Figure 7: Overall descriptive statistics of the variables.

Correlation Analysis

The correlation coefficient of the population normally ranges between -1 and +1 and if it is closer to -1, there is a stronger linear negative relationship. If it is closer to +1, there is a stronger positive relationship. If it is close to 0, the weaker the relationship. Based on (Check & Schutt, 2011) criterion values of more than 0.3 are considered to be sizable. According to Table 3, all variables (skills development, employability, confidence, and employer preferences) show a positive linear significant relationship with each other (p value=0.000).

Table 3: Pearson Correlation among the variables

	Skills Development	Employer Preferences	Confidence	Employability
Skills Development				
Pearson Correlation		.980**	.974**	.984**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
Employability				
Pearson Correlation			.973**	.992**
Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000
Confidence				
Pearson Correlation				.978**
Sig. (2-tailed)				.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Multiple Regression Analysis

This part of the analysis includes a regression model of the 3 extracted independent variables against the employability as dependent variables in a multiple regression model. From 1st table of Table 4 (Model Summary), it has been seen that the R-value is 0.986. Therefore, the R-value (.986) for the overall dimensions of the independent variable namely skills development, employer preferences, and confidence have a strong effect on employability. From the table, it can also be observed that the coefficient of determination i.e. the R-square (R²) value is 0.972, which represents that 97.2% variation of the dependent variable (employability) is due to the independent variables (skills development, employer preferences, and confidence), which in fact, is a strong explanatory power of regression.

From the 2nd table of Table 4, it is identified that the value of F-stat is 4084.254 and is significant as the level of significance is less than 5% (p< 0.05). This indicates that the overall model was a

reasonable fit and there was a statistically significant association between independent and dependent variables.

Table 4: Multiple regression output of the independent variables with the dependent variable.

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.986 ^a	.972	.972	.10482
a. Predictors: (Constant), Confidence, Skills development, Employer preferences				

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	134.630	3	44.877	4084.254	.000 ^b
	Residual	3.912	356	.011		
	Total	138.541	359			

a. Dependent Variable: Employability

b. Predictors: (Constant), Confidence, Skills development, Employer preferences

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.200	.044		4.579	.000
Skills development	.145	.047	.163	3.082	.002
Employer preferences	.162	.054	.173	3.006	.003
Confidence	.654	.045	.656	14.647	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employability

In the 3rd table of Table 4, Unstandardized coefficients indicate how much the dependent variable varies with an independent variable when all other independent variables are held constant. The beta coefficients indicated how and to what extent several dimensions such as skills development, employer preferences, and confidence influence employability.

It has been found that confidence (beta =.656, t=14.647, p<0.01), has the highest influence or significant impact on employability. Additionally, employer preferences (beta=.173, t=3.006, p<0.01), and skills development (beta =.163, t=3.082, p<0.01) also have an influence or significant impact on employability. So, all the research hypotheses are accepted where the maximum level of employability can be achieved by increasing the skills development, employer preferences, and confidence level of the trainee.

CONCLUSION

An unskilled workforce is a burden in any country on the globe. This unskilled workforce can be turned into a skilled workforce, which extends the opportunity several times to get a job. This study shows the predominant role of skills development training over employability. The hypothesis and objectives along with the findings of the study show the prime need for skills development training towards gaining employment. If we can ensure skills development training among the youth workforce, they will turn into assets and the opportunity to reap the advantages of the demographic dividend would be possible. This study will lead the path of further researchers to determine the role of occupation-wise skills development training towards employability and economic development of the country.

RECOMMENDATION

It is high time we realized the demand for skills development training in employability in the context of Bangladesh. The broader objectives of the study prove that the employability rate in the job market can be higher if unskilled youths get market-oriented TVET skill development training. Skills enhancement training works as a key element of getting the job. Besides, the industries or employers are much more interested in employing skilled workforces in their periphery. As skilled workforces ensure more productivity in the workplace, their demand is higher in the job market than the unskilled ones. In addition, the demographic dividend is one of the best opportunities in Bangladesh. The country can deploy the youths in different market-responsive skills development training to build their skills. If the capacities of the youths are built, they could easily manage jobs in the national and international markets. Thus, the advantages of the demographic dividend could best be explored to establish the country as a developed nation in the globe. Hence, more skills training would be the best way to ensure employment for the unskilled workforce to solve the unemployment problem. Further, the output of the study shows that industries, institutions, and organizations prefer to employ skilled workforces to get the best productivity. Several skills development projects align with the government's skill development agenda work in the sector to ensure the skills and up-skilling capacity of the workforce. The National Skill Development Authority (NSDA) is working as an apex body to ensure skills training in the country so that the economic condition of the country and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) gets higher. Based on the evidence of the study, National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) level certification could be introduced strongly to the employers so that they can easily identify skilled workforces. However, the establishment of a skills ministry is a time-oriented demand to strengthen STPs to cope with advanced practices around the world. So, the policy should be taken immediately for the formation of a skills ministry to address the issues of employability in the skills development eco-system.

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