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Empowering Youth Through TVET: An Evaluation of Skilling Youth for Income Generation' Training Institutes in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study offers a comprehensive evaluation of the Skilling Youth for Income Generation (SYIG) program, a public initiative for skill development managed by the Punjab Skills Development Fund in Pakistan.

Research Gap: Although investments in technical and vocational education are increasing, there is limited evidence on how institutional structures and the provision of services influence training results.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study presents a thorough institutional analysis of the SYIG program's training institutes, examining their governance structures, funding mechanisms, and stakeholder coordination. It also evaluates the quality, relevance, and accessibility of the training programs to assess their alignment with industry standards, learner needs, and goals for equitable access. The in-depth analysis was conducted through focus group discussions and key informant interviews with training service providers (TSPs), government officials, policy experts, and employers.

The Main Findings: Content analysis reveals that though SYIG has effectively engaged marginalized groups, promoted demand-driven trades, and maintained transparent governance, its overall impact faces limitations due to institutional, financial, and operational challenges.

Theoretical / Practical Implications of the Findings: The To develop into a comprehensive workforce platform, SYIG needs to implement a long-term, politically neutral skills roadmap backed by steady funding, district-level job market assessments, and stronger ties with industry. Important reforms may involve updating training content to emphasize practical and soft skills, improving trainer qualifications, and redesigning the funding system to balance costs with quality. Increasing access for women, rural communities, and people with disabilities, along with better placement services, certification reforms, and employer collaborations, is vital for improving employment outcomes.

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1. Introduction

In Pakistan, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) plays a vital role in developing human capital by bridging the gap between education and employment. In the backdrop of large youth demographic and persistent issues such as unemployment and underemployment, TVET delivers practical, hands-on training that trains individuals with market-relevant skills across numerous trades and sectors.

At the national and provincial levels, TVET has remained a constant priority in policy frameworks since Pakistan's inception. Regardless of several efforts, the country's TVET system continues to face chronic issues. Fragmented governance, poor infrastructure, and gender gaps impede

participation, particularly for females and rural communities (Ansari & Wu, 2013, Ashraf et al., 2024). Obsolete curricula that do not align with what the industry seeks decrease employability, and fragile links between training centres and employers aggravate skills incongruities. Financial concerns also obstruct the growth of digital literacy and entrepreneurship initiatives, restraining the access of youth to opportunities in a growing tech-driven economy (Ali et al., 2024).

The 18th Constitutional Amendment in the year 2010, transferred education domain to provincial governments, which created a space to customise TVET policies according to localized needs of the job market (Nooruddin, 2017). Yet, there is limited research on the operations of TVET institutes, especially the challenges they face, the curricula designs, and the impediments and limits they come across.

Launched in 2021, the ‘Skilling Youth for Income Generation’ (SYIG) programme of the ‘Punjab Skills Development Fund’ (PSDF) was conceptualised to train a future-ready human resource by equipping youth, predominantly women, marginalised clusters, and underserved communities, with job oriented, entrepreneurial, and digital skills. Rooted in six thematic pillars: (i) *Haryali* for agriculture and livestock skills, (ii) *Aghaaz* for entrepreneurship, (iii) *Mahir* for vocational trades, (iv) *Uraan* for women empowerment programmes, (v) *e-Tayyar* for digital skills, and (vi) *Umeed* for marginalised groups, the SYIG trained 73,952 individuals across 36 districts of Punjab through 181 Training Service Providers (TSPs). This study primarily investigates SYIG's institutional delivery mechanism, training quality, and market connections, covering constraints, systemic issues, and achievements.

In Punjab, TVET has a special role under the umbrella of SYIG programme. It trains the youth of the province with skills that are in need within the job market and can generate income opportunities for them. The programme opts structured training model via accredited institutions and trainers, delivering quality training, practical learning experience, and competency-based learning. As economies progressively depend on skilled human resource to keep up competitiveness, TVET becomes vital in bridging the gap between conventional education and job prospects. It prepares individuals with both technical and soft skills, nurturing a workforce that is adaptable, productive, and inclusive (Cong & Wang, 2012; Ogur, 2023).

Building on this indispensable gap in understanding how the institutional arrangement work within Pakistan's TVET sector, this study analyse the SYIG programme implemented by the PSDF from 2021 to 2024. As a broad intervention targeting the diverse demographics across Punjab, SYIG embodies a calculated approach to mitigating the ongoing skills mismatch in Pakistan. The programme places a specific focus on vulnerable groups, such as women, youth in rural area, and marginalised groups, highlighting the fact that only 20% of Punjab's workforce has formal training in the context of skills required for what they do (NAVTTTC, 2022), given the fact that around 60% of Pakistan's labour force resides in the province (World Bank, 2021).

This study emphasises the need to systematically assess, how the design and execution of institutions affect the outcomes of vocational training. While evidence suggests that well-structured skills programmes can boost employability by 30% and increase wages by 20-25% (World Bank, 2021), there is limited understanding of the operational factors driving these successes. To fill this gap, the research investigates SYIG's organisational structure, training approaches, and partnerships aimed at transforming Pakistan's human capital.

The paper investigates the institutional structure of programme not only findings, which provide valuable information to overall discussion on the improvement of TVET structures in Pakistan. It examines some of the themes to include the relevance of the curriculum, as compared to the current workforce dynamics. It also examines the financial flows and implementation plans, which are much less investigated aspects of the skills development programmer in Pakistan. The paper then presents actual suggestions in an attempt to close the supply-demand gap in the skill mismatch in Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

The historical process of skill development demonstrates the importance that contributed to socioeconomic advancement and development and transformed early apprenticeship into a broad and systematic vocational training (Powell & McGrath, 2019). Recent research has established that properly designed investments in human capital results in considerable economic gains. The GDP increases are reported to be observed as a result of minor increases in the skills of the workforce (O'Lawrence, 2017).

In the development of the economy, TVET's role is more than just creating jobs. It nurtures human capital development, boosts innovation, and increases a nation's economic competitiveness (Wahab et al., 2024). For example, in South Africa, vocational education plays a key role in the government's plans to foster economic growth and alleviate poverty (Selane & Odeku, 2024). This highlights TVET's role not only to empower individuals but also to help as a driver of major macroeconomic stability.

TVET's contribution to social inclusion and equity is also important. Marginalised groups such as women, rural youth, and people with disabilities will benefit if TVET provides access to formal job markets that will otherwise not be possible (Leong, 2024). This also helps in reducing the disparities and reinforce the principles of social justice and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The findings align with 'fundamental capital theory' proposed by Becker (1993), in which he argues that education and training have long-term impact in terms of economic returns by augmenting productivity. The German system, which blends education and skills training, is one such example that has delivered well over the course of time (Fürstenau, 2014). Besides, there are more such success stories from East Asia, particularly the case of South Korea, where skilled human capital acted as a bedrock for the outstanding economic trajectory. Likewise, Singapore's Skills Future initiative helps maintain its competitive edge through uninterrupted skills development (Leopold et al., 2025)

Also, TVET's strong convergence with job market requirements makes it ever more relevant. Collaborations between training providers and industry help keep the curricula adaptable to evolving workforce dynamics, thereby enhancing graduates' job prospects (Cong & Wang, 2012). Thus, TVET acts as a flexible bridge between education and employment, directly linking skill development to workforce necessities.

However, meaningful progress has only been achieved in the past twenty years (Ashraf et al., 2024). Recent initiatives, including the National Skills Strategy (NSS) and the Punjab Skills Development Fund (PSDF), intends to match skill development with job market needs in a systematic way, particularly in high-growth sectors (Ali et al., 2024). Initiatives such as the TVET Reform Support Programme and Skilling Pakistan have demonstrated tangible success in updating curricula and increasing access; however, systemic inefficiencies persist (Ansari & Wu, 2013).

The effectiveness of vocational training systems largely relies on the quality and relevance of their educational content. Successful programmes should integrate technical skills with cognitive and interpersonal development to equip workers for changing job market needs. This necessitates regular curriculum updates and strong partnerships with industry, as exemplified by India's National Skill Development Mission, which has seen notable gains in employment and wages through such strategies (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2022).

Maintaining training quality is especially challenging in developing regions, where limited resources often hinder the proper implementation of training. The World Economic Forum report by Leopold et al., (2025) points out that nearly 40% of workers in these countries are deficient in the digital skills required for emerging jobs, a problem worsened by insufficient infrastructure and obsolete teaching methods. This issue is predominantly apparent in Pakistan's TVET sector, where, despite the establishment of the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission in 2005 and initiatives such as the Prime Minister's *Hunarmand* Pakistan Programme, systemic impediments persist (National Vocational and Technical Training Commission, 2019). Rural-urban gaps in training access, gender participation disparities, and a mismatch between curricula

and market demands continue to limit the effectiveness of skills development programmes (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2024).

The learning environment is a critical element impacting the success of vocational training, encompassing both physical infrastructure and psychosocial elements. The Asian Development Bank (2022) highlights that well-equipped workshop facilities and current equipment significantly enhance skill development, while safe and inclusive training spaces are crucial to encouraging participation, particularly among women and marginalised groups. In Pakistan, the Punjab Skills Development Fund has aimed to improve these environmental conditions through initiatives such as the URAAN programme for women trainees, although systemic issues persist. Financial sustainability is also essential, as internationally successful vocational systems demonstrate that diversified funding, from government, employers, and trainees, tends to lead to stronger, more adaptable programmes (European Training Foundation, 2023).

Pakistan's TVET section highlights how many developing countries face challenges in effectively implementing such models, mainly due to budget restrictions and limited private sector capacity (Ali et al., 2024). Limited budgets then result in meagre stipends and makes it difficult to retain quality trainers, thus impacting the programme quality.

In parallel, trainees' retention till the completion of the course is also a challenge, which actually impacts their income level when they go into job market. As per International Labour Organisation (2025), dropout rates exceed 30% in developing countries. Disadvantaged groups, which may include women, trainees from rural areas and affected the most. In case of females, cultural influence also acts as a barrier in this regard.

The cost of conveyance and childcare were identified as major barriers to retaining female trainees, in a World Bank study (2021) that compared training ecosystems across South Asia. The correct intervention can boost the completion rates by up to 40 percent. This is particularly relevant in Pakistan where economic strains and traditional gender roles generate complex obstacles to the continued engagement into skill-training (Ashraf et al., 2024). The involvement of the Punjab Skills Development Fund in the SYIG program highlighted these problems because regardless of the marginalized group being the focus of the targeted initiative, there remains the issue of retention problems. These need tailored interventions that consider sociocultural and economic factors in a broader approach.

The skills development programmes' funding structure is the main aspect influencing their success and long-term feasibility. Research at the global level point out that successful vocational systems usually bank on diversified funding sources, including support from the government, contributions from the employers, and individual investments (European Training Foundation, 2023). Though, as Pakistan's experience shows, developing countries, such as Pakistan itself, every so often face challenges in instituting such balanced funding models due to limited public funds and insufficient private sector involvement. A study by the Asian Development Bank (2022) on TVET systems highlights that low stipend levels, often below subsistence levels, pose a substantial roadblock to participation and completion.

The issue of financial sustainability is not just about supporting trainees; it also shows systemic underinvestment in infrastructure and instructional resources. According to UNESCO-UNEVOC's (2024) global review of vocational education, developing countries typically spend less than 0.5% of their GDP on TVET systems. On the other hand, industrialised nations allocate 1-2%, leading to better skills development outcomes. This funding shortfall results in outdated equipment, a lack of training materials, and difficulty attracting qualified instructors, all of which undermine the quality of programmes and their relevance to the job market.

The accurate measure of vocational training success is its ability to produce positive outcomes for both participants and the broader economy. Long-term studies of practical skills development programmes highlight key impact indicators such as employment rates, wage increases, and career advancement for graduates (Wilton, N., 2012). For example, the German dual system demonstrates how combining workplace learning with training can lead to a 90% employment rate within six

months post-completion, with participants earning an average of 15-20% more than their non-vocational counterparts Deissinger (2015). Similarly, Singapore's SkillsFuture initiative reports an 82% satisfaction rate among participants and clear gains in workforce productivity metrics (SkillsFuture Jubilee Fund, 2025).

These outcomes largely depend on how well training content aligns with job market needs, a challenge that remains prevalent in many developing regions. Research by the World Bank (2021) mentions substantial skill mismatch, where around 60% of the employers struggle to find workforce ready workers. This calls for employers' engagement at critical stages of training programmes, mainly in the designing stage of curricula; this exactly mirrors the landscape of Pakistan's TVET sector, where there is a disconnect between the supply side with that of demand side (Ali *et al.*, 2024); this is where PSDF comes in to identify and reduce the gap.

According to recent research on the topic, it is critical that TVET programs align with industry demands in order to close skill gaps and boost employability. However, even a well-framed program like SYIG is hampered in Pakistan by systemic problems like governance silos, outdated curricula, and weak and uninstitutionalized industry links. By examining the SYIG institutional structure, implementation and execution procedures, supply and demand side dynamics, funding models, stakeholder engagement, and the impact it is having, this study aims to pinpoint the weaknesses. This study would provide information on operational aspects, prospects, obstacles, and future directions for improving the efficacy and efficiency of such programs. The findings will contribute to academic discourse on the subject and would also inform the policy process in context of such interventions.

3. Research Gap and Scope

Although investments in technical and vocational education are increasing, there is limited evidence on how institutional structures and the provision of services influence training results. In Pakistan, the SYIG programmes presents a unique opportunity to assess the impact of supply-side factors, including trainer quality, institutional coordination, funding models, and certification systems, on the success of large-scale skills training programmes. Gaining insight into these factors is crucial for guiding future reforms to develop resilient and adaptable training systems.

There are two basic research questions that this study aims to explore. *First*, how effective was SYIG's institutional framework in delivering demand-driven skill development programmes? Whereas the *second* research question gauges the extent to which SYIG's training provision aligns with job market needs and participant capabilities.

The study aims to conduct a thorough institutional analysis of the SYIG programme's training institutes, examining governance structures, funding mechanisms, and stakeholder coordination. It also evaluates the quality, relevance, and accessibility of the training programmes to assess their alignment with industry standards, learner needs, and goals for equitable access.

4. Methodology

This study qualitatively examines the implementation and delivery of vocational training under the SYIG initiative in Punjab. It is part of a larger tracer study that assesses the programme from various angles, such as training methods, institutional involvement, and post-training outcomes. This particular component focuses on stakeholders' views, including representatives of training institutions and employers, while also considering feedback from trainees to cross-verify and strengthen the findings.

The research design is based on qualitative inquiry, chosen for its capacity to reveal context-specific meanings, detailed insights, and stakeholder viewpoints that quantitative methods might overlook. Qualitative techniques enable a more thorough exploration of how vocational training programmes perform in terms of effectiveness, inclusivity, and operational functionality, according to service providers and system participants.

Using a thematic analysis framework, this research method helped systematically identify common themes, perceptions, and institutional patterns from various stakeholder inputs. Data was mainly gathered through semi-structured and unstructured, open-ended questions that allowed participants to elaborate freely, leading to the discovery of both expected and unexpected themes.

The methodology was designed to address key questions about the relevance, quality, responsiveness, and sustainability of the training model used under SYIG. These insights were organised around training quality, certification, career pathways, and the strategic vision of training institutions. Furthermore, the study included an institutional perspective to examine larger structural factors, regulatory frameworks, and challenges in implementing vocational training in Punjab.

The qualitative data collection employed purposive sampling to ensure representation from various regions, genders, and training trades. Training Service Providers (TSPs) and employers were selected from both high- and low-performing districts. Government officials were identified from institutions that play a significant role in the skills' development ecosystem. The study intended to incorporate perspectives from both private and public stakeholders involved in Punjab's training and skills governance framework.

TABLE 1: SAMPLING

Target Group	No. of Participants	Method
Training Service Providers	08-12	Focus Group Discussions
Training Institution Heads	12	Key Informant Interviews
Government Officials/Experts	05	Key Informant Interviews
Employers	83	Semi-Structured Survey

Data collection involved three primary qualitative methods: (a) *focus group discussions* with training service providers (b) *key informant interviews* with service provider executives and experts, and (c) *interviews* with employers who hired SYIG graduates.

Six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with representatives of TSPs from across Punjab at six accessible venues: Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Lahore, Bahawalpur, Multan, and Layyah. Topics like curriculum relevance, training quality, infrastructure adequacy, operational challenges, and support systems were all thoroughly covered in each session. In order to ensure geographic diversity and representation from both urban and semi-urban training settings, the districts were carefully chosen.

17 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted, including 05 with government representatives and policy experts involved in the regulation and supervision of vocational training and 12 with senior officials from training institutions. Important insights regarding program design, institutional engagement, policy coherence, and implementation challenges were produced by these discussions. Participants were specifically chosen to include those who are directly in charge of directing strategy, controlling delivery, or forming policy.

The survey also looked at SYIG graduates' experiences and labor market demand. 83 employers who have known to have hired SYIG graduates and come from a variety of industries and geographical areas were surveyed regarding the value of training, how well graduates fit in at work, and how satisfied they were with the graduates' job readiness. Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) were used to collect data from 47 employers, while Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) were used to interview the remaining 36 employers in person. A strong picture of how well graduates found work and how institutions were viewed in the labor market was given by this hybrid approach.

Informed consent was obtained before the FGDs and KIIs were recorded, transcribed, and manually coded. The narratives were subjected to a combination of deductive and inductive thematic analysis in order to produce theme clusters. The categories were developed using central areas such as training relevance, institutional coordination, financial sustainability, strategic orientation and graduate employability.

Since it enables a more in-depth analysis of implementation realities, institutional practices, and drivers of strategies, a qualitative approach was chosen in this aspect of the research. Quantitative indicators, such as the level of income or rates of employment, may be useful in measuring the

results, but often are not sufficient to understand how they work. On the contrary, the researchers had the opportunity to analyze institutional logics, the constraints of functioning and the perspective of individuals directly engaged in the delivery of the programs by means of qualitative studies. The open-ended nature of FGDs and KIIs also encouraged respondents to say more, criticize, and recommend things that may not be elicited in structured survey research.

This methodological decision provides a solid background upon which the institutional, operational, and strategic aspects of vocational training in the SYIG program may be studied. Dwelling on the perspectives of implementers and partners, the study presents a complete picture of design, administration and experience of vocational training in the field- a key revelation in designing effective skills frameworks in Punjab.

Thematic analysis was performed in phases: initial preparation and reading of transcripts, first code, developing the theme, and re-examination and revision of the material to find meaningful information in the qualitative data. The manual coding was conducted based on both previously identified themes associated with the aims of the study and categories based on the data itself. The initial codes captured recurring themes such as quality of training, alignment of the curriculum, institutional affiliations and employment outcomes. These codices were grouped into broader categories highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the system as the analysis continued. In one instance, the same problems, such as the compensation of trainers and the lowest-cost bidding policy, were lumped into a broader category of quality control and finances.

Another way insights about the dissimilarity between training content and employer expectations were categorized into was curriculum-market alignment. This approach allowed collecting special information as well as more general tendencies in the institutional level, ensuring that the findings would consider both macro and micro-viewpoints. The cross-validation of the responses was made possible by triangulation of responses of TSPs, government members, employers and trainees.

All qualitative interactions were conducted within ethics research standards. Participation was voluntary in all the FGDs and KIIs, and informed consent was provided by all the participants. The anonymity and confidentiality were ensured to enable respondents to be open and free when responding to the questions, especially on sensitive topics such as quality of training and inefficiency in governance. Researchers were careful to note that no identifiable record of data was recorded or published in reports. The study also maintained neutrality, avoiding bias, particularly when evaluating institutional performance or funding arrangements.

While the qualitative approach provided a detailed and nuanced insight into programme implementation, some limitations are recognised. First, purposive sampling could restrict the broader applicability of the findings outside the studied contexts. Second, despite efforts to achieve balanced regional representation, logistical challenges likely led to the underrepresentation of voices, especially from remote areas.

5. Findings and Discussion

This research was guided by two questions: (i) How effective is SYIG's institutional framework in providing demand-driven skill development programmes? and (ii) To what extent does SYIG's training align with job market needs and participant skills? The findings and discussion section is divided into four sub-sections: (a) institutional analysis of SYIG programme, (b) training quality and effectiveness, (c) job market experience and expectations, and (d) stakeholders' perspective on future directions.

5.1. Institutional Analysis of SYIG Programme

5.1.1 Governance and Delivery Model

The institutional structure of the SYIG programme employs a hybrid governance model, integrating public legitimacy with private-sector efficiency. This setup provides benefits such as flexible implementation, transparent contracting processes, and focused inclusion efforts. However, it continues to face persistent structural, procedural, and political issues that pose challenges to its long-term sustainability.

SYIG operates under the Punjab Skills Development Fund (PSDF), a Section 42 not-for-profit company owned by the Government of Punjab. PSDF primarily serves as a funding and coordination entity, rather than a direct service provider, outsourcing training to over 180 accredited TSPs through a competitive bidding process. This arrangement curbs the fixed costs, allows quick up-scaling, and also targets market receptivity. A combination of public and private board members carry out governance while attempting to align with national and provincial policies. The arrangement emphasizes responsibility. TSPs have a contractual obligation to meet employment targets, and Ernst & Young's third-party monitoring and PwC's technical audits help ensure compliance. However, the operational capability of the various TSPs, whose performance varies greatly, is a major determinant of the quality of delivery.

5.1.2 Policy and Curricular Constraints

A key institutional challenge is the PSDF's restricted control over curriculum development, which largely rests with TEVTA and NAVTTC. Stakeholders across the board, highlighted outdated modules, just-theoretical-focus, and that courses do not meet up with the demands of the modern market dynamics, particularly in fast-evolving sectors like renewable energy, AI, and e-commerce. The inability to quickly update curricula or customise content for regional economies hinders the responsiveness of training programmes. Additionally, trainer qualification standards prioritise formal degrees over demonstrated practical skills, excluding capable practitioners in trades where hands-on expertise is essential. This results in a shortage of qualified trainers, particularly in specialised areas such as working with persons with disabilities.

5.1.3 Procurement and Funding Mechanisms

The PPRA's least-cost bidding system, while compliant with audits, creates unintended incentives. TSPs often lower bids to reduce costs, which may compromise quality, diminish funds for essentials, and lead to lower trainer salaries. The system lacks trade-specific cost considerations, so high-input trades, such as culinary, beauty services, and CNC machining, receive the same per-trainee funding as lower-input trades. Inflation has eroded the real value of funding, and stipends, especially for women, remain too low to cover participation costs. Additionally, delayed payments put extra financial pressure on smaller providers with limited cash flow. Restrictions on co-funding with NGOs or private partners limit the flexibility of resources. Many stakeholders propose establishing public-private partnerships, engaging donors, and leveraging CSR activities to boost budgets and share risks in delivery.

5.1.4 Stakeholder Engagement and Market Linkages

While PSDF involves hundreds of TSPs, engagement remains transactional primarily. TSPs have limited say in trade choices or curriculum development, and employers are not sufficiently involved in training planning or placement processes. This may undermine the training-to-employment pipeline, as many graduates rely on informal job searches rather than structured placement programmes. Officials pointed out the lack of comprehensive market assessments before launching programmes, which sometimes results in trade offerings that do not align with actual demand. They advised involving employers and chambers of commerce early on, formalising job fairs, and creating dynamic trainee databases accessible to hiring companies.

5.1.5 Inclusivity and Access

While SYIG's six-pillar framework explicitly aims to include women, rural youth, and marginalised groups, there are ongoing implementation hurdles. In rural and low-HDI regions, factors such as long travel distances, poor transportation, cultural mobility restrictions, and a lack of residential facilities hinder participation. Strict age limits also exclude younger women who could benefit from early vocational training. Additionally, stipends are insufficient to cover daily costs, especially for women and persons with disabilities, who also lack disability-specific support. TSPs have responded by innovating locally, providing cluster training for women within the same household, offering flexible scheduling, and directly involving families. Nonetheless, these initiatives remain fragmented and underfunded.

5.1.6 Political and Programmatic Continuity

Political instability and funding uncertainties hinder institutional planning. SYIG, initially aimed at training 180,000 youth, was reduced to 68,000 participants because of budget cuts and policy changes. This shift turned what was meant to be a mid-term tracer study into an end-line assessment. Such interruptions disrupt TSP operations, waste mobilisation efforts, and undermine credibility with providers and beneficiaries.

5.1.7 Post-Training Support and Certification Credibility

Post-training support structures are inadequate. Although TSPs are contractually obliged to meet minimum placement targets, PSDF does not have a centralised job platform, alumni network, or organised employer collaborations to assist graduates. Entrepreneurship aid, especially in accessing finance or mentorship, is inconsistent, causing many self-employment ambitions to remain unfulfilled. Certification managed by the Punjab Technical Board faces credibility challenges. Its assessment methods are outdated, sometimes conflicted, and not aligned with international standards, which restricts graduates' ability to work globally.

5.2. Training Quality and Effectiveness

The effectiveness of SYIG training programmes depends on various factors, including trainer expertise, curriculum relevance, institutional procedures, and trainees' real-world experiences. Across different regions, TSPs cited recruiting and retaining qualified trainers as a significant ongoing challenge. This shortage is especially severe in specialised fields, such as working with people with disabilities, where trainers need both technical skills and inclusive teaching methods—rarely found together. Lahore based TSPs highlighted the issue of getting the trainers that are skilled in sign language to communicate with the trainees as per the industry-standard technical instruction. Even when the matching resource is identified, the salary expectation exceeds the financial space of TSPs.

The problem of trainer retention is also worsened by structural and operational restrictions. Most trainers work on short-duration, project-specific contracts that are not tied to external funding, and as a result, they have little job security and room to pursue a career. Female trainers are more likely to stay in their posts in rural districts that have few vocational training institutions like Layyah and Bahawalpur. In contrast, retention in urban centres is diminished by competition with more remunerating opportunities in industry. There are improvised solutions that have been adopted by some TSPs to enable quick replacements like panel-based hiring, dual-shift schedules to enable trainers to earn a full-time salary, and leave-without-pay type of arrangements in the event that funding falls short. But this improvisation cannot be compared to systematic solutions.

As can be seen, the competence of the trainer has a close positive relationship with the quality of the course delivery, but this matter always passes past the governance radar. Admittedly, formal qualification is established as a criterion of eligibility, yet more capable trainers may be available with years of experience in hands-on practice but without formal qualification. These can be game-changers, particularly in the trades where hands-on experience carries more weight, but due to eligibility criteria, such potential trainers get excluded. Plus, no consistent mechanism exists to evaluate the trainers' performance. TSPs have suggested technical grading framework to mitigate this issue.

Curriculum development faces a major challenge as TSPs in several districts reported that modules from TEVTA and NAVTTC are outdated, exceedingly theoretical, and detached from both local economies and global industry trends. For example, in Multan, the absence of industrial visits and practical exposure missed the opportunity to complement classroom learning with real-world applications. Correspondingly, in Bahawalpur, outdated syllabi that are too long needlessly overburden trainers and students, without equipping them with the appropriate skills necessary for job market. Moreover, reducing training durations, such as shortening a three-month course to two months without adjusting funding or content, further diminishes learning quality, leading to rushed instruction and superficial skill acquisition.

Trainees' experiences reveal a number of systemic problems, such as inadequate pay that does not even cover transportation expenses, long training periods that wear people out and reduce their ability to absorb information, rigid attendance regulations that do not account for real absences, and cultural barriers that prevent women from participating. For example, Layyah found that the main cause of female trainee dropouts was early marriage. This suggests that age restrictions should be loosened and that awareness campaigns could be conducted with targeted families in a culturally sensitive way. In urban areas, however, women are excluded from the process due to inadequate hostel accommodations and safety concerns with public transit.

A comprehensive reform roadmap is necessary to address these issues. Stakeholder-driven curriculum updates, the creation of regional trade training programs, course length appropriation, trainer capacity building, and the implementation of flexible and context-specific monitoring systems are a few examples of this. These steps would increase training courses' quality and relevance while also increasing trainer and trainee retention rates.

5.2.1 The Financial Equation

Financial arrangements under SYIG have a substantial impact on programme quality, inclusivity, and long-term sustainability. All regions' TSPs nearly unanimously expressed concern that stipend levels are inadequate, particularly given rising inflation and transportation costs. TSPs in Lahore and Multan mentioned that stipends did not change for past many years, regardless of considerable rise in fuel and living expenses. This deficit most severely affects low-income and rural trainees, for whom transportation costs can consume or exceed the entire stipend. Some women trainees reported getting as little as PKR 1,500 monthly, which does not even cover the basic participation expenses.

With this background, TSPs proposed several reform interventions. Some suggested increasing stipends to at least PKR 5,000, with adjustments based on inflation. Some suggested giving trainees unconditional raises right away, while others wanted performance-based methods, like tying a part of the stipend to finishing the course or getting a job after training. In Bahawalpur, this last idea was talked about as a way to get people to come and get jobs. However, critics said that this conditional approach could put trainees who are already in a weak position at a disadvantage because they might have trouble getting a job quickly due to structural problems. In addition, everyone agreed that disability-specific allowances are necessary to help trainees with disabilities pay for things like mobility aids or accessibility measures that cost more.

Funding models for programs, in addition to stipends, also faced criticism. TSPs thought that the PPRA's requirement for least-cost bidding was a structural flaw that led to bids that were too low. This type of bidding leads to a race to the bottom, which hurts the quality of training by forcing TSPs to cut costs on important things like consumables, equipment, and trainer salaries. For instance, TSPs in Multan and Lahore said that the per-trainee funding was not enough to provide industry-standard training in vocational fields that require many materials, like beauty services that need high-quality cosmetics and culinary programs that need fresh material.

TSPs made many suggestions for how to fix things, such as setting minimum bid thresholds for each type of trade, doing thorough cost assessments before bidding, and changing allocations based on the most recent inflation rates. For example, in Layyah, representatives from TSPs suggested that a ranking system based on the quality of infrastructure and past performance should be set up to help with funding and fair and efficient resource allocation. Bahawalpur stakeholders stressed how important it is to pay for housing and safe transportation for trainees. This is key to getting people from remote or underserved areas to participate.

Another theme that was recurrent is the need to diversify funding paradigms. The existing legislation limits the idea of risk or finance pooling as it does not allow PSDF to work together on joint funding opportunities with a private sponsor or non-governmental organization. To increase the PSDF fund, a number of TSP members in Lahore, Multan, and Bahawalpur proposed test running the model of the public-private partnership, CSR contracts, and focused donor model. However, others observed that in order to establish such arrangements, it may be necessary to

amend the policy first. Co-operation with industry, perhaps via sector-specific chambers of commerce, was also viewed as a means of bringing skills training into line with market requirements and sharing costs.

At some point, the fiscal responsibility through sustaining programme success requires SYIG financial configuration necessitate re-calibration of its financial configuration needs. Some of the most important measures might be increasing the stipends, adding special allowances, changing procurement to produce quality rather than low-cost goods, and offering flexible co-financing alternatives. These changes are significant to prevent the emergence of financial constraints as a bottleneck towards skill building, or even the sustainability of TSP activities in the long run.

5.2.2 Training Providers & Programme Sustainability

Sustaining SYIG delivery relies on retaining skilled trainers, engaging trainees, and strengthening institutional links. Trainee retention strategies include providing logistical support and involving the family directly. Some TSPs cover transport, provide hostel facilities, or modify schedules to accommodate domestic commitments. In Layyah, staff visit families door-to-door to prevent dropouts. In industrial zones, offering lunch or small stipends has helped maintain participation, though such measures depend on available resources.

Stakeholder engagement in programme design and market linkage remains limited. TSPs are seldom involved in developing curricula or selecting trades, despite being most closely connected to local job market conditions. Respondents suggested implementing more participatory approaches, such as joint TSP–employer advisory boards, employment bureaus for graduate placement, and centralised portals for trainee profiles, to align training efforts with market demand better.

Policy adjustments can enhance sustainability by shifting from punitive compliance to supportive oversight, reducing penalties for unavoidable dropouts, and simplifying documentation requirements to alleviate operational burdens. Incorporating soft skills into curricula, performing local market surveys prior to trade selection, and ensuring timely fund disbursements were consistently identified as priorities. Without these systemic reforms, both provider capacity and programme results may stay fragile.

5.2.3 Employment & Career Pathways

The transition from SYIG training to sustainable employment remains inconsistent. Although there are success stories, such as graduates becoming trainers, many trainees experience underemployment or work in fields that differ from their training. A key challenge is the brief three-month course period, which stakeholders believe does not allow enough time to develop skills effectively. There is a standard call across regions for longer programmes of six months, layered re-skilling options, and combined entrepreneurship training.

Job market connections remain weak and mostly rely on sporadic efforts. While some TSPs organise small job fairs, establish local MOUs with employers, or facilitate internships, these activities lack scale and coordinated planning. Placement targets from PSDF aim to produce outcomes but often overlook freelancing, informal work, or self-employment, causing funding conflicts. Employers are rarely involved in curriculum development or trade choice, which can result in skills that do not align with current market needs.

Post-training support remains fragmented. Graduates typically depend on informal WhatsApp groups or personal contacts to discover opportunities. There is limited structured follow-up, no centralised job portal, and limited access to financing for entrepreneurial projects. Some respondents recommended integrating on-the-job training into courses, providing incentives for employers to hire graduates, and establishing alumni networks to enhance peer support.

Future employability hinges on incorporating industry input into training programmes, validating non-traditional work formats, and establishing placement services as standard practice. Without these steps, SYIG risks being a supply-driven initiative that trains individuals but fails to help them convert skills into steady livelihoods.

5.2.4 Certification & Recognition

SYIG certification encounters a dual credibility issue: it has limited international recognition and is losing trust among employers, even within local markets. Across Punjab, PTB certificates are normally accepted for entry-level jobs, but have little value for specialised or advanced professional roles. The rigour of existing assessments, repeated exam questions, and conventional theoretical approach towards training are the factors that doesn't create a link between certificates trainees get and their actual competence.

Globally, short course lengths and mismatched curricula impede mutual recognition. Employers abroad, especially in the Gulf and European regions, require longer, hands-on training and certifications that meet sector-specific standards. In fields like CNC machining, welding, or healthcare, the disparity between local training and international benchmarks is notable. Although some TSPs have attempted to form partnerships with foreign accreditation organisations, challenges such as logistical issues and limited institutional support hinder progress.

Proposed reforms involve lengthening course durations, adding modular or stackable certifications, and assigning dedicated PTB examiners to maintain impartiality. Partnering with international organisations for co-certification, implementing sector-specific competency assessments, and aligning with international occupational standards could enhance recognition both locally and abroad. Without these measures, certificates may become mere administrative formalities instead of credible indicators of skill proficiency.

5.3. Job Market Experience and Expectations

The employer survey highlights a continued gap between SYIG's training results and the industry's hiring methods. Among the 83 employers surveyed, most recruitment relies on informal references, while structured interviews or formal recruitment channels are less common. This dependence on personal networks puts first-time job seekers, especially SYIG graduates without strong social connections, at a disadvantage and restricts the programme's access to broader job markets.

Employer preferences tend to favour experience, with nearly half demanding previous full-time employment. The rest are more open if candidates have completed internships or short-term training. These findings support the idea of integrating structured workplace exposure into training programmes. Additionally, trust in certification remains questionable, as 56 employers prefer references from employers over official certifications from public boards like TEVTA or PBTE, indicating low confidence in institutional quality checks.

Soft skills have become a top priority. Teamwork and communication are valued much more than English language skills or computer literacy, indicating that interpersonal and behavioural abilities play a more significant role in hiring decisions than technical expertise. However, only a small number of employers hired directly from PSDF's TSPs, and those who do usually employ just one or two graduates at a time, highlighting weak connections between institutions.

In-house training is infrequent, occurring at only 36% of employers, and tends to follow informal "*ustad-shagird*" (Mentor-Mentee) models without standardisation. Although 45% of employers are open to collaborating with PSDF to formalise training, many are discouraged by perceived bureaucracy and unclear benefits. To address this, employers suggest streamlining engagement processes, co-developing training standards, and demonstrating tangible business benefits, such as increased productivity or lower turnover.

Overall, the survey highlights that technical skills alone are not enough. Without reputable certification, practical experience within the industry, development of soft skills, and stronger connections to the industry, SYIG graduates may remain on the margins of formal hiring processes.

5.4. Stakeholders' Perspective on Future Directions

Stakeholder opinions on PSDF's future are varied. Some acknowledge a steady focus on key sectors, such as digital skills and renewable energy. Others view sudden programme closures, such as the early end of SYIG, as signs of short-term thinking influenced by political or funding instability. This lack of continuity hampers planning, disrupts TSP activities, and damages trust among beneficiaries.

Recommendations emphasise the importance of establishing a multi-year skills development plan that remains stable, regardless of political changes, and is supported by a cross-party agreement and guaranteed funding. Key strategic focus areas include updating curricula, selecting trades based on regional market surveys, and incorporating high-demand sectors such as nursing, AI applications, and renewable energy.

Low-cost, high-impact strategies were also identified: updating modules for inclusivity (such as specialised training for sign language instructors), ending low-cost bidding to safeguard quality, increasing funding for consumables, reducing daily training hours to improve retention, and eliminating non-compliant "ghost" TSPs. Expanding employer partnerships via Chambers of Commerce and industry associations was seen as essential for formalising job pipelines. The primary challenge is transitioning from isolated projects to a resilient and adaptable skills ecosystem. By grounding reforms in equity, market responsiveness, and institutional continuity, PSDF can evolve from merely a funder to a key systemic contributor to workforce transformation.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The SYIG programme highlights both the potential and the vulnerabilities of large-scale public-private skills development efforts in Punjab. Although it has effectively reached marginalised groups, implemented transparent governance, and introduced demand-driven trades in specific sectors, its overall influence remains limited by systemic institutional, financial, and operational obstacles. Overcoming these issues demands a coordinated reform strategy that combines urgent corrective actions with long-term strategic planning.

To ensure long-term job market integration, SYIG needs to shift its focus from solely training to becoming a comprehensive workforce development platform. This involves integrating programme planning into a multi-year, politically insulated skills roadmap, backed by cross-party consensus and secure funding. The selection of trades should be based on detailed, district-level job market assessments that align with local economic needs and global demand trends.

Modernising training content is vital and requires collaboration with industry, TSPs, and sector experts, allowing for regional customisation. There should be a stronger focus on practical, competency-based training, longer course durations for technical trades, and the inclusion of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Trainer qualification policies need to evolve to value both hands-on experience and academic credentials, supported by structured professional development, to ensure high-quality instruction.

Moreover, reforming the funding architecture is also essential to strike a balance between cost efficiency and quality. Measures should include abolishing the least-cost bidding system, setting trade-specific minimum cost thresholds, indexing stipends to inflation, and introducing allowances for persons with disabilities. Expanding permissible co-funding models through CSR, donor partnerships, and industry cost-sharing would diversify resources and reduce vulnerability to public budget cycles. Accommodation and transport subsidies should be prioritised for rural and female trainees to improve retention and equity.

The results of employment are determined by systematic employer involvement during, before, and after training. PSDF is recommended to create a centralised job-matching system, a dynamic graduate database available to recruiting companies, and institutionalise partnerships with chambers of commerce and industry associations. Program design should incorporate placement services, internships and on-job training and informal and freelance work must be realized in performance measurements.

Then there is reforming the certification regime that is not only highly significant in boosting the trust of the local employer but also facilitates transnational mobility. The assessment procedure should be revised. This would involve the introduction of tests which measure practical knowledge and not theoretical knowledge. The mechanism of the objective examination, according to the international occupational standards must be followed as well. In addition to this, portability and career mobility can be further enhanced by international collaboration, co-certifications and modular credentialing.

Needless to say, policy intent itself would not ensure inclusivity in the process of skilling the youth. The programme would involve making training centres more accessible to those disadvantaged layers of the population. It cannot be done without making the age criteria somewhat elastic and tailoring course to organizational requirements. Another element that should be included in the larger programme framework is cultural and gender sensitivities. The trainees with special needs should be targeted, as well as the skills packages and the employer-imposed course designs. This will open talents and opportunities to unemployed youths of the country.

The PSDF must not be a one sided affair but a wholesome and well-coordinated exercise that may bear tangible result with a positive influence on skill development of the youth in Punjab and may also help the trainees get hooked into income generating opportunities besides. Otherwise, the programme would not be sustainable and projected results might not be achieved.

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