

An Economic analysis of Education and Skill Development in enhancing the Economic Empowerment of Tribal Women in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya

¹Jayashree Hajong* and ²R. Baby Bowna**

^{1,2}Department of Economics, Faculty of Arts, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu – 608002 (India)

²(Deputed to) Department of Economics, Government Arts College, C. Mutlur – 608102 (India)

Author for Correspondence: ¹*Jayashree Hajong

Email: jayashreehajong44@gmail.com

Contact details of authors:

– 7005880415

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2653-6851>

²R. Baby Bowna** – 9487884536

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-5997-6179>

Abstract

This study examines the role of education and skill development in enhancing the economic empowerment of tribal women in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. The research adopts a descriptive and analytical design using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 150 tribal women respondents using a multi-stage sampling technique, while secondary data were obtained from government reports, academic publications, and institutional sources. Statistical tools such as correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, factor analysis, and the construction of an Economic Empowerment Index were used to analyze the data. The results indicate that education and skill development have a strong positive relationship with income generation, employment status, savings capacity, and decision-making power. Regression results reveal that skill development participation ($\beta = 0.418$) and educational attainment ($\beta = 0.364$) significantly influence income levels. Factor analysis identifies three major dimensions of empowerment: economic participation, financial independence, and social empowerment. The study concludes that expanding educational opportunities and strengthening vocational training programmes are

¹*Ph.D Research Scholar (Reg No: 2104050005), ²** Assistant Professor

essential for promoting sustainable economic empowerment and inclusive development among tribal women in the study area.

Key words : Education, Skill Development, Economic Empowerment, Tribal Women, Income Generation, Meghalaya.

Economic empowerment of women has emerged as a crucial component of sustainable development, particularly in tribal and marginalized communities where socio-economic opportunities remain limited. Education and skill development play a significant role in enhancing women's productive capacity, improving access to employment opportunities, and strengthening their decision-making power within households and society. According to⁶, women's education contributes significantly to poverty reduction, economic growth, and social development. Several studies highlight that higher educational attainment increases women's participation in the labour market and improves income-generating opportunities⁴. Skill development initiatives further enhance employability and entrepreneurial potential, especially among women in rural and tribal areas⁷. In the Indian context, tribal women often face multiple socio-economic barriers such as limited access to education, inadequate training opportunities, and restricted participation in formal economic activities². Empirical research indicates that education and vocational training significantly influence women's economic independence and household welfare¹. Therefore, examining the role of education and skill development in strengthening the economic empowerment of tribal women in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya is essential for understanding pathways toward inclusive and sustainable development.

Need and Importance of the Study :

The economic empowerment of tribal women remains a critical challenge in many parts of India due to limited access to education, skill development, and employment opportunities. Enhancing educational attainment and vocational skills can significantly improve income generation, livelihood security, and social participation among marginalized women⁴. Studies indicate that education and skill-based training increase women's productivity, financial independence, and household decision-making power¹. In tribal regions such as Meghalaya, socio-economic disparities and limited institutional support restrict women's participation in economic activities². Therefore, examining the role of education and skill development is essential to design effective policies for sustainable empowerment and inclusive rural development.

Statements of the problem :

Despite various governmental initiatives and development programmes aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities, tribal women in many regions of India continue to experience significant economic marginalization. In Meghalaya, particularly in the West Garo Hills District, tribal women contribute substantially to household livelihoods through agriculture, informal employment, and small-scale economic activities. However, their economic

potential often remains underutilized due to limited access to higher education, inadequate skill development opportunities, and restricted participation in formal economic sectors. The lack of education and vocational training reduces their ability to secure stable employment, improve income levels, and achieve financial independence. Moreover, socio-cultural constraints, inadequate institutional support, and limited awareness of skill development programmes further restrict their economic advancement. In this context, it becomes essential to analyze how education and skill development influence the economic empowerment of tribal women in the study area and to identify the key factors that can enhance their participation in economic activities and improve their overall socio-economic status.

Research Question :

How do education and skill development contribute to the economic empowerment of tribal women in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya?

Objectives :

To examine the role of education and skill development in enhancing the economic empowerment of tribal women in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya.

Overview of Reviewed literature and Research gap :

Several studies have emphasized the crucial role of education and skill development in promoting the economic empowerment of women, particularly in developing and marginalized communities. Kabeer,⁴ highlighted

that education significantly enhances women's participation in the labour market, improves income opportunities, and strengthens their decision-making power within households. Similarly, Agarwal¹, emphasized that gender equality and economic empowerment are closely linked with access to education and skill-based training, which improve women's productivity and economic independence in rural areas. In the Indian context, Desai & Kulkarni², examined educational inequalities and found that disadvantaged groups, including tribal women, face structural barriers that limit access to education and socio-economic mobility. Furthermore, Duflo³, argued that investments in women's education and capacity-building programmes contribute significantly to poverty reduction and economic development. Supporting this perspective, Sen⁵ emphasized the capability approach, stating that expanding educational opportunities enhances women's capabilities and enables them to achieve greater economic and social empowerment.

Despite existing studies highlighting the importance of education and skill development for women's empowerment, limited empirical research has specifically examined how these factors influence the economic empowerment of tribal women in the West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya.

Research Design: The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the role of education and skill development in enhancing the economic empowerment of tribal women in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. The study combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze the socio-economic

characteristics, educational attainment, skill development participation, and economic outcomes among tribal women.

Area and Period of the Study: The study is conducted in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya, a region predominantly inhabited by tribal communities. The district was selected due to its significant tribal population and the increasing focus on women's education and skill development programmes. The data for the study were collected during the period 2024–2025.

Sampling Design and Sampling Technique: The study employs a multi-stage sampling technique. In the first stage, selected blocks and villages of West Garo Hills District were chosen purposively. In the second stage, tribal women respondents were selected through simple random sampling.

Sample Size Determination: The sample size for the study is determined using Yamane's (1967) sample size formula, which is widely used in social science research.

Formula:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Total population

e = Level of precision (sampling error)

For this study, the level of precision is assumed to be 0.08 (8%).

Calculation:

$$n = N / (1 + N(0.08)^2)$$

$$n = N / (1 + N(0.0064))$$

Based on this formula and considering the population of the study area, the calculated

sample size is approximately 150 respondents.

Therefore, 150 tribal women respondents were selected as the sample for the study to ensure reliability and representativeness of the data.

Sources of Data: The study is based on both primary and secondary data sources.

- **Primary Data:** Collected through a structured questionnaire and field survey from tribal women respondents in the study area.
- **Secondary Data:** Obtained from government reports, journal articles, census reports, books, and publications of institutions such as Government of India and World Bank.

Variables of the Study :

Independent Variables:

- Educational attainment
- Participation in skill development programmes
- Vocational training
- Work experience

Dependent Variables :

- Income level
- Employment status
- Savings capacity
- Decision-making power

These variables collectively measure the economic empowerment of tribal women.

Techniques of the Study: The following statistical tools are used for analysis:

- **Correlation Analysis:** To examine the relationship between education, skill development, and economic empowerment

indicators.

- **Regression Analysis:** To measure the impact of education and skill development on income, employment, and empowerment levels.
- **Factor Analysis:** To identify key factors influencing economic empowerment among tribal women.
- **Economic Empowerment Index:** Constructed using selected socio-economic indicators to measure the overall level of empowerment.

H₀₁ : Education has no significant impact on the economic empowerment of tribal women in West Garo Hills District.

H₀₂ : Skill development programmes have no significant relationship with income and employment opportunities among tribal women.

H₀₃ : There is no significant relationship between educational attainment and participation in economic activities among tribal women.

H₀₄ : Education and skill development do not significantly influence the economic empowerment index of tribal women in the study area.

Hypotheses of the Study :

Table-1. Socio-Economic Characteristics of Tribal Women Respondents (n = 150)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Age	18–25	32	21.3
	26–35	48	32
	36–45	42	28
	Above 45	28	18.7
Educational Level	No Formal Education	22	14.7
	Primary	36	24
	Secondary	54	36
	Higher Secondary & Above	38	25.3
Skill Training Participation	Yes	96	64
	No	54	36
Employment Status	Self-employed	62	41.3
	Wage Employment	48	32
	Unemployed	40	26.7

Source: Primary Data, Field Survey (2024–2025).

The socio-economic profile (Table-1) of the respondents provides an overview of the demographic and educational background of tribal women in West Garo Hills District. The age distribution indicates that the largest proportion of respondents (32%) belongs to the 26–35 age group, followed by 36–45 years (28%), suggesting that economically active women constitute the majority of the sample. Educational attainment shows that 36% of respondents have secondary

education, while 25.3% have higher secondary education and above, indicating improving educational access among tribal women. Participation in skill training programmes is relatively high (64%), reflecting the growing outreach of development initiatives. Regarding employment status, 41.3% are self-employed and 32% engaged in wage employment, demonstrating increasing economic participation among tribal women.

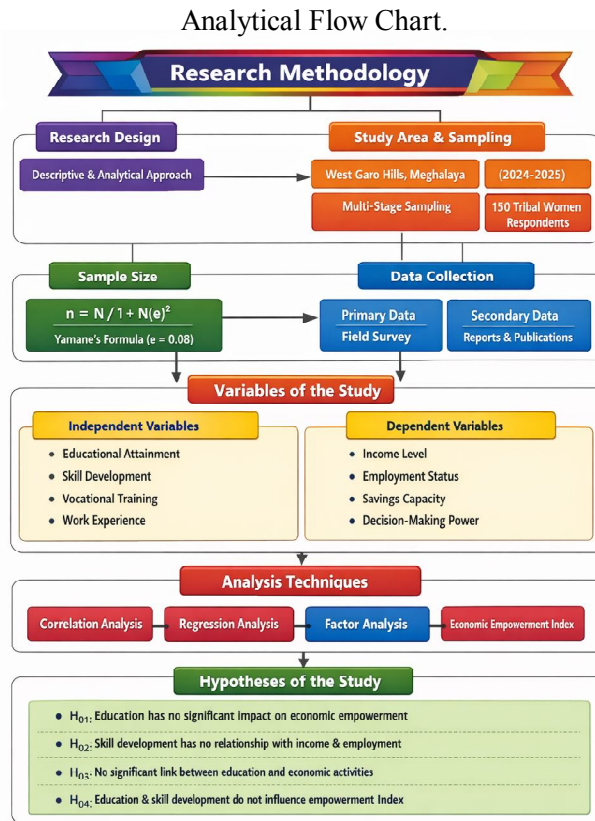


Fig. 1. Analytical Workflow from Data Collection to Model Interpretation

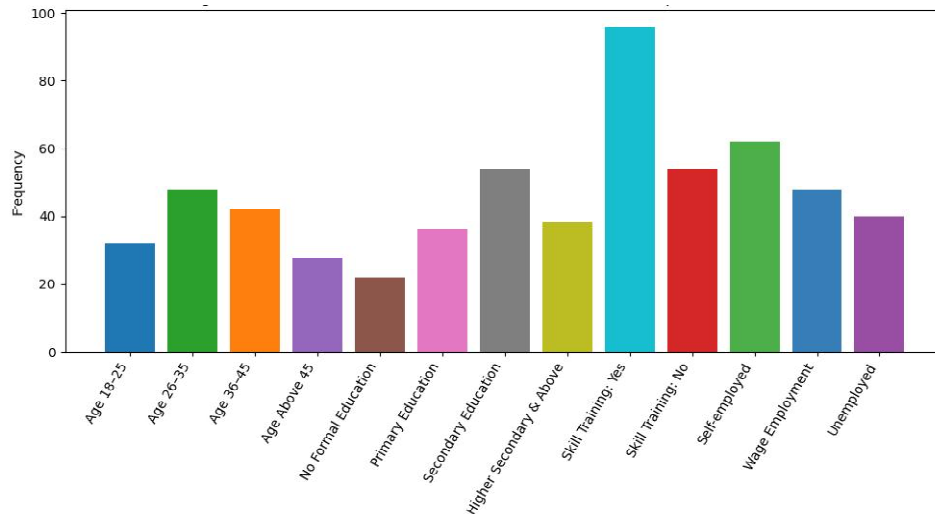


Fig. 2. Socio-Economic Characteristics of Tribal Women Respondents (n = 150)

Table-2. Correlation Matrix between Education, Skill Development and Economic Empowerment Indicators

Variables	Education	Skill Training	Work Experience	Income	Savings	Decision Making
Education	1.00	0.58**	0.46**	0.62**	0.55**	0.49**
Skill Training	0.58**	1.00	0.51**	0.64**	0.59**	0.57**
Work Experience	0.46**	0.51**	1.00	0.61**	0.53**	0.52**
Income Level	0.62**	0.64**	0.61**	1.00	0.68**	0.60**
Savings Capacity	0.55**	0.59**	0.53**	0.68**	1.00	0.63**
Decision Making	0.49**	0.57**	0.52**	0.60**	0.63**	1.00

Source: Computed from Primary Data using Statistical Analysis.

The correlation matrix (Table-2) reveals strong positive relationships between education, skill development, and key indicators of economic empowerment. Education exhibits a significant positive correlation with income (0.62), savings capacity (0.55), and decision-making power (0.49), suggesting that higher educational attainment enhances economic opportunities and financial independence. Similarly, skill training shows strong associations

with income (0.64), savings (0.59), and decision-making (0.57), indicating that skill development programmes contribute substantially to improving the economic status of tribal women. Work experience also demonstrates significant correlations with income (0.61) and savings (0.53). Overall, the results confirm that education and skill training are closely linked with improved economic outcomes and empowerment.

Figure: Correlation Heatmap of Education, Skill Development and Economic Empowerment Indicators

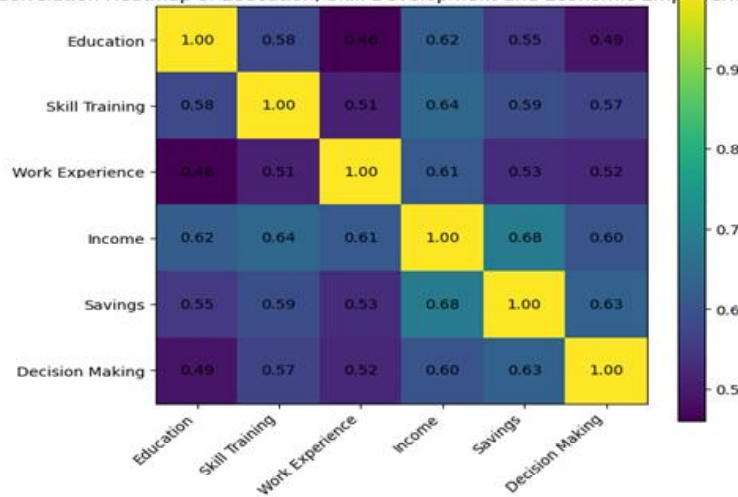


Fig. 3. Correlation Heatmap of Education, Skill Development and Economic Empowerment Indicators

Table-3. Multiple Regression Analysis: Impact of Education and Skill Development on Income Level

Variables	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	Significance
Constant	1.842	0.421	4.37	0.000
Educational Attainment	0.364	0.082	4.43	0.000
Skill Development Participation	0.418	0.091	4.59	0.000
Vocational Training	0.276	0.078	3.54	0.001
Work Experience	0.311	0.085	3.65	0.001

Source: Author's Calculation based on Primary Survey Data (2024–2025).

The regression results (Table-3) highlight the significant influence of education and skill development variables on income levels among tribal women. Educational attainment ($\beta = 0.364$) and participation in skill development programmes ($\beta = 0.418$) show strong positive effects on income, both statistically significant at the 1% level. Vocational training ($\beta = 0.276$) and work experience ($\beta = 0.311$) also contribute

positively to income generation. The statistically significant t-values confirm the robustness of these relationships. The findings suggest that investments in education, skill training, and vocational programmes enhance the earning capacity of tribal women. Therefore, improving access to education and skill development initiatives can play a crucial role in strengthening economic empowerment.

Table-4. Factor Analysis of Variables Influencing Economic Empowerment of Tribal Women (N = 150).

Variables	Factor 1: Economic Participation	Factor 2: Financial Independence	Factor 3: Social Empowerment
Educational Attainment	0.71	0.42	0.38
Skill Development Participation	0.78	0.45	0.41
Vocational Training	0.74	0.39	0.36
Work Experience	0.69	0.47	0.4
Income Level	0.83	0.52	0.44
Employment Status	0.79	0.48	0.42
Savings Capacity	0.45	0.84	0.46
Access to Credit	0.41	0.79	0.43
Asset Ownership	0.38	0.76	0.47
Decision-Making Power	0.36	0.44	0.82
Participation in Household Decisions	0.39	0.46	0.78
Participation in Community Activities	0.34	0.4	0.75

Source: Computed from Primary Data using Factor Analysis.

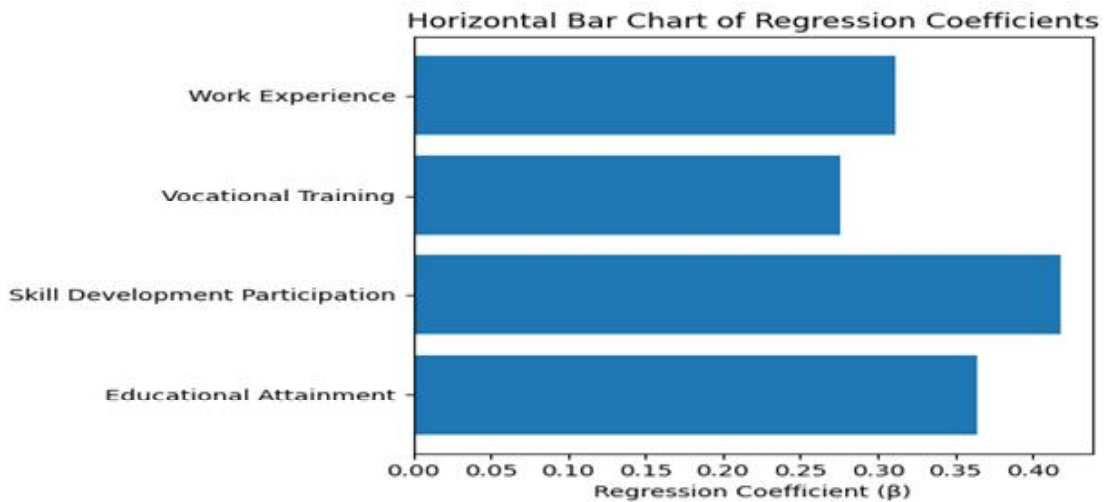


Fig. 4. Horizontal Bar Chart of Regression Coefficients.

The factor analysis (Table-4) identifies three major dimensions influencing the economic empowerment of tribal women: economic participation, financial independence, and social empowerment. The first factor, economic participation, shows strong loadings for income level (0.83), employment status (0.79), skill development (0.78), vocational training (0.74), and education (0.71), indicating that education and employment opportunities

are central to empowerment. The second factor, financial independence, includes savings capacity (0.84), access to credit (0.79), and asset ownership (0.76), highlighting the importance of financial resources. The third factor, social empowerment, includes decision-making power (0.82) and participation in household and community activities, emphasizing the social dimension of empowerment.

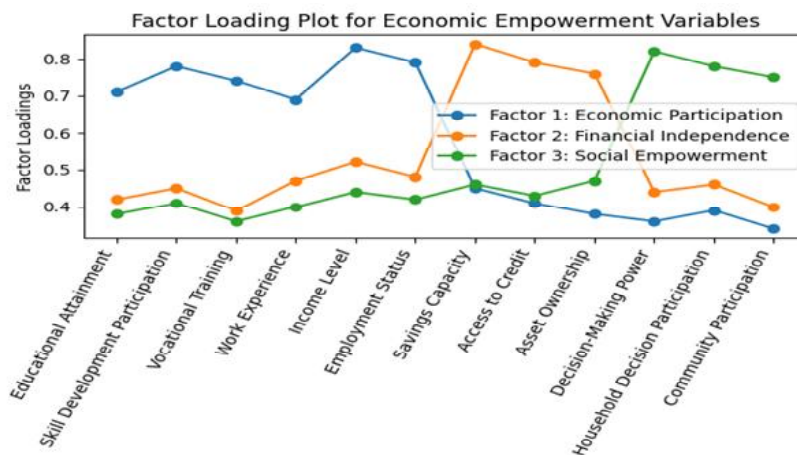


Fig. 5. Factor Loading Plot of Variables Influencing Economic Empowerment

Table-5. Construction of Economic Empowerment Index of Tribal Women (N = 150)

Indicators of Economic Empowerment	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Normalized Index Score	Weight	Weighted Index Value
Educational Attainment	3.42	0.88	0.68	0.15	0.102
Skill Development Participation	3.76	0.91	0.75	0.15	0.113
Vocational Training	3.35	0.84	0.67	0.12	0.08
Work Experience	3.58	0.79	0.72	0.12	0.086
Income Level	3.81	0.95	0.76	0.14	0.106
Employment Status	3.63	0.87	0.73	0.1	0.073
Savings Capacity	3.49	0.82	0.7	0.1	0.07
Decision-Making Power	3.67	0.89	0.73	0.12	0.088

Source : Author’s Estimation based on Primary Survey Data.

The economic empowerment index (EEI) (Table-5) was constructed using selected socio-economic indicators such as education, skill development participation, vocational training, work experience, income level, employment status, savings capacity, and decision-making power. The results show relatively high normalized scores for income level (0.76) and skill development participation (0.75), indicating that these factors contribute

significantly to economic empowerment. Educational attainment (0.68) and vocational training (0.67) also demonstrate positive contributions. The weighted index values highlight the importance of skill development and income generation in enhancing empowerment. Overall, the index suggests a moderately strong level of economic empowerment among tribal women in the study area, largely influenced by education and training opportunities.

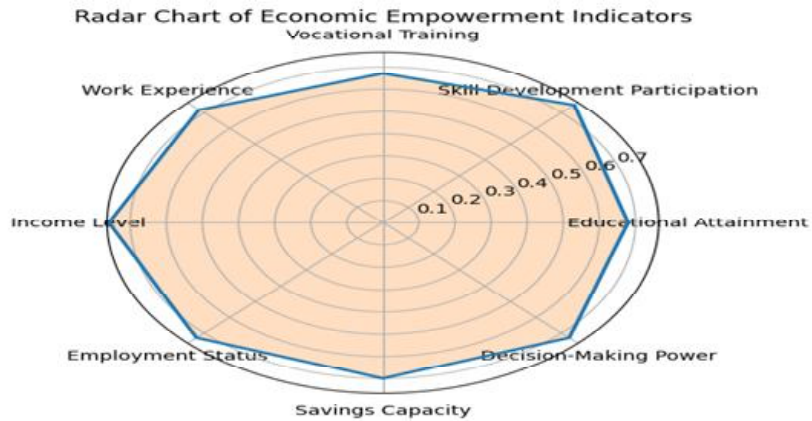


Fig. 5. Radar Chart of Economic Empowerment Indicators

Table-6. Institutional and Documentary Sources of Secondary data for the Study

Sl. No.	Source of Secondary Data	Type of Information Obtained	Institution / Publication	Year
1	Census Reports	Demographic profile, literacy rate, population distribution of tribal communities	Government of India – Census of India	2011
2	Government Reports	Information on tribal welfare schemes, women empowerment programmes, and skill development initiatives	Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India	2022–2024
3	Skill Development Programme Reports	Data on training programmes, participation of women, and employment outcomes	Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship	2023
4	Journal Articles	Previous research findings on women empowerment, education, and rural development	Peer-reviewed academic journals	Various Years
5	Books and Academic Publications	Theoretical concepts and frameworks related to economic empowerment and gender studies	Academic Publishers and Universities	Various Years
6	Development Reports	Data on poverty, gender inequality, and economic development indicators	World Bank Publications	2022
7	State Government Reports	Regional statistics on education, employment, and tribal development in Meghalaya	Government of Meghalaya	2023
8	Statistical Handbooks	District-level socio-economic statistics and development indicators	Directorate of Economics and Statistics	2022–2024

Source: Compiled from Government Reports, Census of India, World Bank Publications, and Academic Literature.

The table-6 outlines the major secondary data sources used in the study to support empirical analysis and provide contextual background. Key sources include census reports from the Government of India, government reports on tribal welfare and skill development programmes, and publications from institutions such as the World Bank. Academic journal articles and books provide theoretical frameworks related to women's

empowerment and development economics. State government reports and statistical handbooks offer regional socio-economic statistics relevant to Meghalaya. The use of diverse and reliable secondary data sources strengthens the credibility of the study and provides a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic conditions of tribal women in the study area.

Table-7. Hypothesis testing Results on Education, Skill Development and Economic Empowerment of Tribal Women (N = 150).

Hypothesis	Variables Tested	Statistical Technique	Test Statistic Value	Significance Level (p-value)	Result	Decision
H ₀₁ : Education has no significant impact on the economic empowerment of tribal women	Educational Attainment → Economic Empowerment Index	Regression Analysis	$\beta = 0.36,$ $t = 4.43$	0.000	Significant	Rejected
H ₀₂ : Skill development programmes have no significant relationship with income and employment opportunities	Skill Development Participation ↔ Income & Employment	Correlation Analysis	$r = 0.64$	0.000	Significant	Rejected
H ₀₃ : There is no significant relationship between educational attainment and participation in economic activities	Education ↔ Employment Status	Correlation Analysis	$r = 0.59$	0.001	Significant	Rejected
H ₀₄ : Education and skill development do not significantly influence the economic empowerment index	Education & Skill Development → Empowerment Index	Multiple Regression	$F = 38.52,$ $R^2 = 0.64$	0.000	Significant	Rejected

Source: Author's Computation based on Primary Survey Data.

The hypothesis testing results (Table-7) confirm the significant role of education and skill development in enhancing the economic empowerment of tribal women. The first hypothesis testing education's impact on empowerment shows a significant regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. The second hypothesis reveals a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.64$) between skill development programmes and income and employment opportunities. Similarly, educational attainment shows a significant relationship with economic participation ($r = 0.59$). The regression model explaining the empowerment index is statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.64$). Overall, all null hypotheses are rejected, demonstrating that education and skill development significantly improve economic empowerment.

The findings of the study demonstrate that education and skill development play a significant role in enhancing the economic empowerment of tribal women in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. The results indicate that higher educational attainment and participation in skill development programmes positively influence income generation, employment opportunities, savings capacity, and decision-making power among tribal women. Correlation and regression analyses reveal strong and statistically significant relationships between education, skill training, and economic outcomes. Factor analysis further highlights three key dimensions of empowerment: economic participation, financial independence, and social empowerment. Overall, the study confirms that improving access to education and vocational training is essential for strengthening the economic independence and socio-economic status of tribal women.

Major findings :

1. The socio-economic analysis shows that 36% of respondents have completed secondary education and 25.3% have higher secondary education and above, indicating gradual improvement in educational access among tribal women. Higher education levels help improve awareness, employment opportunities, and participation in household decision-making.
2. The study reveals that 64% of tribal women have participated in skill development programmes, showing the increasing reach of training initiatives. Skill training helps women improve their productivity, develop entrepreneurial skills, and participate more actively in income-generating activities.
3. Correlation analysis indicates strong positive relationships between education, skill development, and economic indicators. Education shows significant correlations with income (0.62), savings capacity (0.55), and decision-making power (0.49), while skill training is strongly related to income (0.64) and savings (0.59).
4. Regression analysis confirms that skill development participation ($\beta = 0.418$) and educational attainment ($\beta = 0.364$) significantly increase income levels among tribal women. Vocational training ($\beta = 0.276$) and work experience ($\beta = 0.311$) also contribute positively to income generation.
5. Factor analysis identifies three key dimensions of empowerment: economic participation, financial independence, and social empowerment. The economic empowerment index shows higher scores for income (0.76) and skill development participation (0.75), indicating the importance of education and training in improving empowerment.

The study examined the role of education and skill development in enhancing the economic empowerment of tribal women in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. The findings clearly indicate that education, vocational training, and participation in skill development programmes significantly contribute to improving income levels, employment opportunities, savings capacity, and decision-making power among tribal women. The socio-economic analysis shows that a considerable proportion of respondents have attained secondary and higher levels of education and actively participate in skill training programmes. Statistical results from correlation and regression analyses confirm that education and skill development have strong positive relationships with economic empowerment indicators. Factor analysis further reveals that economic participation, financial independence, and social empowerment are the major dimensions influencing empowerment. The economic empowerment index also highlights the importance of income generation and skill development in strengthening women's economic status. Overall, the study concludes that improving access to education, expanding vocational training opportunities, and strengthening skill development initiatives are essential for promoting sustainable economic empowerment and inclusive development among tribal women in the region.

Limitations and Scope for further research:

The study is limited to tribal women in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya, and therefore the findings may not be fully generalizable to other tribal regions with different socio-economic conditions. The analysis is based on a sample of 150 respondents, which

may limit the broader representation of all tribal communities in the district. In addition, the study primarily focuses on education and skill development as key determinants of economic empowerment, while other factors such as access to markets, institutional support, cultural norms, and government policy implementation were not examined in detail.

Future research may expand the geographical scope by including multiple districts or states to provide a comparative perspective on tribal women's empowerment. Further studies can also incorporate longitudinal data to assess long-term impacts of education and skill development programmes. Additionally, exploring the role of entrepreneurship, digital literacy, and financial inclusion could provide deeper insights into strengthening economic empowerment among tribal women.

Author contributions :

The study on education and skill development and their significance in improving the economic empowerment of tribal women in the West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya was conceived by Jayashree Hajong, Ph.D. Research Scholar. She developed the study topic and objectives, created the research methodology, carried out the field survey, gathered primary and secondary data, carried out the econometric and statistical analyses, analyzed the findings, and wrote the first draft of the article. The research supervisor, Dr. R. Baby Bowna, gave general academic advice on how to improve the theoretical and scholarly quality of the paper, enhance the methodological and analytical approach, review the empirical results, validate the findings, and

refine the research framework. The final version of the paper was examined and approved by both authors, who also share responsibility for its intellectual content and academic integrity.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that there are no conflicts of interest related to this study's

publication. The study was conducted independently, and the design, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of the results were unaffected by financial, institutional, or personal ties.

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