

**IMPACT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF A FLAGSHIP TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM BY TECH MAHINDRA FOUNDATION AND SIES INSTITUTE OF COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION**

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**Abstract:**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is one of the important responsibilities of any business establishment to go beyond statutory compliances and focus on contributing to a better society through its multi-various activities. Gender equality and empowering women and girls is one of the crucial steps towards achieving Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Women empowerment can thus be achieved through education and providing suitable employment opportunities. Achievement of this goal will lead to the development of a progressive nation which would further lead to global peace and evolution of a sustainable world. Two areas that are specified in the Companies Act, 2013 which provides the guidelines to CSR activities in India are that of Education and Skill development. The present paper examines how these two components of Education and Skill Development have contributed towards providing professional training to take up careers related to Early Childhood Education and Development. This professional program categorised as Skills for Market Training (SMART) offered under the CSR of Tech Mahindra Foundation in partnership with SIES Institute of Comprehensive Education is a flagship program aimed at empowering girls and women between the age groups of 18-35 years from the lower economic group to take employment in early childhood settings. The paper outlines the pedagogical practices adopted by the Institute to train 82 students who were enrolled for this program along with multiple narratives of impact on their employment and empowerment. The paper also analyses the need for CSR intervention in Women’s education and empowerment along with an overview of the efficacy of training and development of the related skill sets.

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Early Childhood Education, Sustainable Development Goals, Education, Skill Development, Women Empowerment

**I. INTRODUCTION**

“We make a living by what we get but we make a life by what we give” said Winston Churchill. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities carried out by business establishments with an aim to contribute towards the betterment of the society fulfil this profound quote. The Companies Act, 2013 also made it mandatory for any company worth 500 crores or with a turnover of one crore or which sees a net profit of 5 crores to invest two percent of their net profit towards CSR activities (Swarnalatha & Anuradha, 2017). The present paper examines how two components of CSR – education and skill development are entwined to provide gainful employment to 82 young girls and women between the age group of 18-35 years in the metropolis of Mumbai through a flagship teacher training program titled Diploma in Early Childhood Development (DECD) collaborated by Tech Mahindra Foundation and SIES Institute of Comprehensive Education. This professional program is categorized as Skills for Market Training (SMART) offered under the CSR of Tech Mahindra Foundation. SMART programs are devised to offer vocational training for the students that helps them secure employment in the service industry.

**Meaning and Evolution of CSR activities in India.**

CSR initiatives are geared towards integrating social and environmental concerns in their business interactions with their stake holders. It is one of the pivotal responsibilities of any business establishment to go beyond

statutory compliances and focus on contributing to a better society. Nationally and internationally, CSR activities have gained momentum (Deshmukh, 2017).

CSR in India has gone through an evolution. Pre-independent India saw this as philanthropic activities often marked with religious sentiments by a few renowned people. CSR concepts grew in ideology with integration of Gandhian values and later with the influx of global players and partnerships with them motivated key Indian business establishments to engage in CSR activities in a professional manner. Post 2000, the Governmental initiatives made India as the first country to mandate and quantify CSR expenditure (<https://www.fiinnovation.co.in/corporate-social-esponsibility/>). The amendment of Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013 notified various important changes out of which *promoting education and employment enhancing vocation skills especially among children and women coupled with livelihood enhancement projects was largely emphasized. The other amendment focused on promoting gender equality, empowering women, and measures for reducing inequalities faced by socially and economically backward groups* (www.mca.gov.in).

**CSR and women empowerment:** Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) emphasizes clearly on gender equality and empowering women and girls. Integrating SDG goal 5 into CSR activities is one of the important steps taken by few corporate business houses. Women empowerment is an arduous task. Tech Mahindra through its CSR arm, the Tech Mahindra Foundation (TMF) considers educated, skilled and able women to be the true strength of a country (www.techmahindra.org). To achieve this goal, various SMART programs are carried out by the Foundation. The partnership program with SIES Institute of Comprehensive Education (SIES ICE) is a flagship program to empower girls and women to take up employment in the education sector.

## **II. THE FLAGSHIP WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM – A SMART PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN TECH MAHINDRA FOUNDATION AND SIES INSTITUTE OF COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION**

**Genesis of the program and its objectives:** With its growth and development over 39 years in the field of teaching, counselling and special education, a dynamically new chapter in the history of SIES ICE was written with the inauguration of the extension for the CSR activities that the institute strongly believed in. **SIES- ICE TMF Diploma in Early Childhood Development (DECD)** course is a fructification of the desire to reach out to the community directly. The TMF SMART SIES-ICE Centre started on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2017. The team constituted a **Project Director, Project In-charge, three trainers and a resource mobilizer/placement in-charge**. Resource mobilization activities comprised of advertisements in regional newspapers, visits to schools, NGOs, educational institutions, orphanages and destitute homes and phone conversations with various educational organizations were carried out. Around 82 students were enrolled for the DECD program in the academic years 2017-18 and 2018-19. The following case is the representation of the achievements of the 82 students.

**The primary goals of this desired project were as follows:**

1. To develop a successful community service network for those in the lower economic strata.
2. To provide needy individuals and groups with free, or low-cost access to useful information, assistance and professional expertise.

The project was designed as a broad-based, rather than niche-focused, community rehabilitation. SIES-TMF SMART membership reflected a wide spectrum of candidates who came together to jointly plan and carry out public programs and services, especially in the educational field. A second key aspect of this project was that, from its inception, SIES-TMF members worked diligently to include disadvantaged or neglected members of society in consortium program development activities. The official MOU was signed by the SIES management and the Tech Mahindra Foundation on **15<sup>th</sup> March 2017** for the academic years 2017-20. The eligibility criteria comprised of the following requirements from the student's end: a) Successful completion of Class XII, b)

Women in the age group of 18-35 years and c) Annual family income below 2.5 lakhs.

**Objective of the Program:** To offer professional training to empower youth/ women from the lower economic group willing to work with young children.

**Specific Objectives:**

1. To provide training for the development of skill sets related to early childhood teaching.
2. To provide an understanding of the developmental milestones of children and plan related activities to enhance the same.
3. To develop a strong passion to work with children and the community.
4. To offer opportunities for financial independence
5. To foster women empowerment and uplift their self-esteem and self-confidence leading to holistic personality development.

**Pedagogical practices adopted by the Institute towards Education and Skill Development – the key components of this training:** Focus on complete skill set development coupled with sound theoretical knowledge, exposure to industrial visits, workshops, seminars, interaction with industry personnel was carried out. All the trainees were exposed to counselling sessions to help them handle counselling issues related to self, family, community, and their prospective work places. It was envisaged that at the end of the one-year training, the students will be complete teachers, humane and sensitive individuals holistically developed professionals ready to take the challenges of the professional teaching world. Many creative assignments related to the topics in the curriculum as well as visits and workshops were designed for informed learning among the students.

**Internship in preschools:** Students undertook an 80-day internship at various schools across the length and breadth of Mumbai and Navi Mumbai to understand not only the teaching strategies that need to be adopted in a preschool class and conduct of lessons, but also to understand the functioning of the schools. They actively participated in all the activities of the placement schools. Innovative and creative teaching aids were prepared by them. Intensive **case studies** were carried out at the preschool level during internship. Observations of teachers and children in the classroom helped the trainees understand the curricular transactions in a holistic manner. The intensive training, theory examinations and practical assessment, projects and presentations and industrial visits helped the students to complete the course successfully. After a year of hard work that emphasized skill set development activities, the students set out on their professional path in schools as preschool teachers. Figure 1 and 2 depict the details of Student Employment and their salary structure.

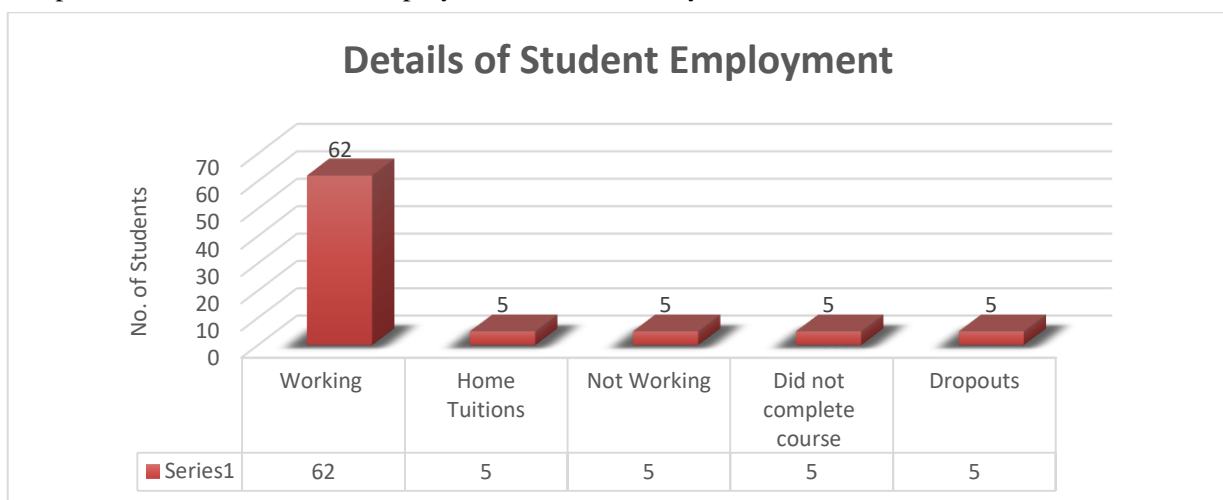
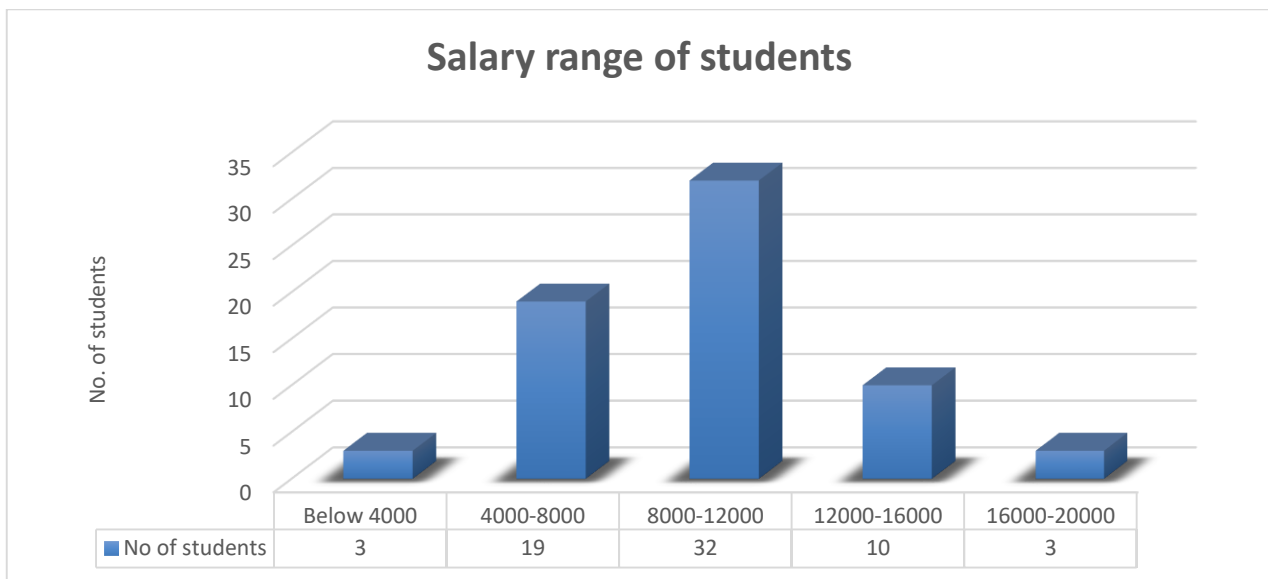


Fig.1. Details of DECD Student Employment after Course Completion



*Fig. 2. Salary Range of DECD Students on Employment*

**Impact of Training:** On course completion and gainful employment, the students were asked for a feedback regarding the training and its impact on their employment. A 15-item questionnaire was circulated amongst the DECD students using Google forms. 53 students responded to this survey. Some of the responses about training have been tabulated in Table 1 and 2.

**TABLE 1. RESPONSES OF THE STUDENTS REGARDING TRAINING**

Item No.	Details of Statement	Yes	No
1.	Happiness with course content	100%	0
4.	Adequate theory knowledge obtained	98%	2%
5.	Exposure to new knowledge and practices	100%	0
15.	Recommendations to prospective students	100%	0

The feedback clearly depicted that the students were contented with the course that has helped in knowledge acquisition and understanding practices to be adopted in the early years. All of them assured that they would recommend the course to prospective students.

**TABLE 2. FEEDBACK RELATED TO SPECIFIC TRAINING COMPONENTS**

Item	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)
Teachers were encouraging	98	2	0
Convergence of teaching to workplace activities	42	54	4
Tremendous improvement in teaching skill sets as a result of training	66	34	0
Gaining recognition and appreciation at workplace due to training received	52	48	0
Training being a good example of women empowerment	64	34	2
Training featured excellent activities and workshops	82	18	0

From the above table it can be inferred that the students were extremely happy with the training component and its impact on their employment. Results denote that not a single student was dissatisfied with the training. With regard to *preparation for employment*, 90% felt that they were well prepared for a job and a mere 10% felt they were moderately prepared.

*Industrial visits and field trips* play an important role in the training component. Students found field trips to be very useful (78%), helped in understanding teaching-learning (62%), understanding innovations (58%), and 30% felt that it enlarged their horizons. None felt they were not beneficial at all.

Regarding *self-development*, 64% of the students opined that the course helped them develop in confidence, subject knowledge, motivation, creative thinking and handling challenges. 56% felt confidence only improved tremendously. 40% felt they were able to handle challenges and their creative thinking skills have emerged better. 30% felt more motivated and 28% felt they attained more subject knowledge. 36% stated that they understood themselves better after the training.

## CONCLUSION

82 young girls and women from the lower social strata got the best opportunity to get trained in Early Childhood settings and obtain employment thanks to the CSR initiative of Tech Mahindra Foundation. Initiatives such as "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" by the MHRD clearly emphasize that education and participation of the girl child in academic activities are pivotal in the growth of a nation ( [www.wcd.nic.in/bbbp-schemes](http://www.wcd.nic.in/bbbp-schemes)) Such initiatives endorse the SDG-5 very clearly. It is often noticed that poverty, unemployment and discrimination based on gender, race and social barriers act as impediment towards women empowerment. Higher Education is often not affordable to many of them (Deshmukh, 2017). Women do face discrimination and indifferent behaviour in the society. Women are not aware of their legal rights too. It thus becomes crucial for any organisation to focus on the problem areas and offer assistance (Babu and Sahay, 2018). Social growth and sustainable development is often considered as the duty of the governmental authorities. But one should realise that it is also the onus of CSR initiatives. This Case Study is an example of women empowerment through the efforts of a corporate business house - The Tech Mahindra Foundation which is tirelessly working towards educating young girls and women thereby offering them financial independence, self-confidence and knowledge to bring the future citizens of our country in the best possible manner. CSR initiatives like SMART programs of Tech Mahindra Foundation helps in creating the best human capital and act as useful tools towards building better societies and our nation.

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