

Impact Analysis of Skill Development on the Performance of Small Tea Growers of Assam

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Abstract

The subsistence of the skill gap in today's workforce turns out to be distress for the modern business world. Tea Industry is one of the oldest labor-intensive industries in the world and a significant contributor to GDP for India. India's tea industry primarily depends on the tea production of Assam, an Indian state, known as the tea capital of India. Thousands of small tea growers of Assam are struggling for better quality and higher productivity due to the existence of unskilled or semi-skilled laborers. The present study reviewed the skill development among the tea workers of Assam, especially small tea growers. An investigation has been made among the small tea growers of the Cachar district of Assam to examine if there is any effect of skill training on the performance of the tea growers. A regression model has been used to establish the relationship between the variables and it is revealed that skill training can enhance the performance of the tea growers by improving the efficiency and productivity of the workers. Additionally, the present study also identified the barriers in the way of skill development for the tea growers in the remote part of the state. This study gives an insight into how the skill development of the tea growers would be helpful for the economy by enhancing their performance by catalyzing efficiency and productivity.

Keywords: Skill Development, Skill Gap, tea workers, Assam, small tea growers

Introduction:

Competition has become stiffer in today's globalized economy and that created a dire need for the organization of having skillful employees that enable them to involve in innovation in every context of business (Bhiwa, 2018). The emergence of advanced technology created a need for in-depth knowledge and skills for every aspect of the business. Today's organizations are facing serious challenges in getting skillful employees. There is a significant skill gap that exists in today's highly qualified workforce (Manjunath et al., 2019).

According to skill India report (2019)¹ published by Confederation of Indian Industry, India has currently 4.69% of the formally skilled workforce compared to 24% skilled workforce in China, 52% in the USA, 68% in Great Britain, 75% in Germany, 80% in Japan and 96% in South Korea. Thus created a catastrophe in the way of economic development of the nation. It is the crucial need of the country to emphasize the skill development of the youth to generate employment opportunities and build up the national economy (Deka & Batra 2016; Sanghi & Srija 2015).

India is the third-largest exporter of Tea in the world after Sri Lanka and China (Wagh, 2014; Roy, 2013). India contributes about 20.9% of the total tea exports in the world (Das & Sankaran 2018). Assam, an Indian state which is also known as the Tea capital of India is the largest producer and exporter of Tea in the country because of its geographical location and suitable climatic condition which is best suited for tea plantation (Laskar & Thappa, 2015). Tea is one of the major contributors to the GDP of the country. Alongside the major tea estates in the state, there are thousands of small tea growers who are the suppliers of the green tea leaves. These small tea growers have sufficient land for tea plantation but the productivity is generally low because of the lack of adequate knowledge and skills for tea plantation (Laskar & Thappa 2015). The present study has been undertaken among some selected small tea growers in the Cachar district of Assam to understand the need for skill development among the small tea workers to improve their efficiency and productivity and also identify the challenges of the skill development in the tea industry of Assam.

Assam is known as the tea capital of India. Assam is the largest producer of tea in the country. The tea industry of Assam is about 180 years old. The state contributes about 52% of the total tea production in the country and it is about 1/6th of the tea produced in the world (Wagh, 2014). Assam is primarily having an agrarian economy and the agricultural sector is employing more than 50 percent of its rural population. This sector contributes about 25 percent to the State GDP (Wagh, 2014; Laskar & Thappa. 2015). Tea is considered as one of the most important agricultural product in the state and is popular in the world for its aromatic quality. About 17% of the workers of Assam are

engaged in the tea industry. Small Tea Growers contributes about 25% of the tea production of the state (Laskar & Thappa, 2015). As per the Tea Board report of India (2019), there are 850 large tea gardens and 68,465 small tea gardens in Assam that covers a thousand acres of land². The tea industry in Assam also gives average daily employment to more than six lakh persons in the state, which is around 50 percent of the total average daily number of labor employed by the tea industry in the country (Roy, 2013; Wagh 2014; Laskar & Thappa, 2015). Despite having high potential and significant importance of the tea industry in the state, there are only a few professional tea training centers in the state. Therefore, a major chunk of the people involved in tea plantation uses traditional methods of the plantation of tea without any adequate knowledge and specific skills. It resulted in low production with poor quality even after the best effort made by them (Marjit et al., 2019; Roy, 2013; Laskar & Thappa, 2015). Hence it created a need to understand the role of skill development in the Tea industry. The present study has attempted to understand how skill development among the small tea growers will enhance their performance.

The present study contributes to the existing literature in the following way: (i) It is perhaps the first study that was conducted in the state of Assam to understand the need for skill development for the tea growers. (ii) Most of the studies related to tea production focused primarily on the major tea players but they ignored the contribution of small tea growers. The present study is contributing to the development of small tea growers by investigating the role of the skill development program. (iii) It is one of the few studies that focused on the effect of skill development on the performance of the workforce. (iv) The present study is also identifying the various challenges of skill development among the tea growers in the remote areas of the state.

Rest of the paper has been arranged in the following way: (i) Review of the literature (ii) Need & challenges in the skill development for small tea growers (iv) Theoretical perspective of skill development & hypothesis formulation (v) Measurement & scaling (vi) Methodology (vii) Data analysis & interpretation (viii) Discussion & Conclusion (viii) Managerial implication & future scope.

Review of literature:

Okada (2012) investigated the skill development of the Indian young generation and examine the challenges in skill development in India. Studies revealed that large numbers of Indian youths are lacking vocational education and training. Today's youth though found to be professionally educated but they are lacking of professional skills. Skill development programs should be an essential part of the education system in India. Kapur (2014) reviewed the different skill development program initiated and implemented in India. The author identified a gap in the development and implementation of skill development programs in India. The author argued that skill development is rapidly growing in most of the developing and developed countries in today's world but it is sluggish in India. Palit (2009) investigated the development of skills enhancement programs in India in addition to the challenges and the strategies adopted. India has been recently recognized as the youngest country in the world due to its highest percentage of the young population and it helped India to gain a competitive advantage over other countries due to its largest percentage of the working population, low dependency rate, and surplus workforce. The author, therefore, suggested that India needs to make its workforce adequately skillful to utilize the benefits of the demographic dividend. Kanchan and Varshney (2015) stated that that skills and knowledge are the key factors that catalyze the growth of the macro-economic environment and stabilize the socio-economic growth. The study identified that around the majority of the Indian workforce lacking marketable skills and thus it created a skill gap. Bridging this gap could be done by imparting skill-developing programs. Saini (2015) investigated the problems and issues in implementing the skill development initiative in India. Lack of vocational training, poor literacy rate, infrastructural issues, socio-cultural issues are the prime factors that create obstacles in the development of skills among the Indian youth. Sanghi and Srija (2015) argued that skill development can be used as a poverty eradication tool by improving the efficiency, productivity, employability, and sustainability of the workforce. Therefore, it would enhance employment opportunity, growth, and development in the organization as well as the

individual level. Manjunath et al., (2019) examined skill gap analysis to improve the performance of the workforce. The study considered different skills set like communication skills, technical skills, problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills, and decision-making skills. The result showed a significant positive relationship between skills and employees' performance and it indicated that imparting the required skills set will enhance the performance of the workforce. Laskar and Thappa (2015) studied the present scenario of the tea industry of Assam. The study revealed that due to the decrease in the selling and increases in the unit cost of production and poor productivity, the tea industry in Assam is losing its profit. An increase in the cost of production is due to the increase in the utility, material, and the cost of labor. Roy (2013) had analyzed the Indian tea industry and revealed that despite acting as a significant contributor in the Indian economy, Lack of skilled manpower remained a major challenge for the Indian tea industry. The tea industry is a labor-intensive industry and it depends mostly on the efficiency level of the tea workers but there exists a major skill gap among the tea workers and thus affecting the productivity of the tea sector. Wagh (2014) had studied the tea industry of India. The author highlighted that the Indian tea industry has a significant contribution to the global tea sector and as well as in the Indian export sector. The industry tea industry is facing some issues such as lack of skilled manpower, lack of advanced technology, the poor literacy rate among the tea garden labor, infrastructural issues, lack of adequate capital structure. Das and Sankaran (2018) measured the performance of the tea industry in India for the last six decades using time series data analysis. The study revealed that area allotted for the cultivation of tea and the volume of tea production has been increasing since past decades and reflected a satisfactory performance in terms of productivity but it showed a fluctuating growth in terms of employment generation.

A considerable amount of research works has been done in the field of skill development at both the national and international levels. On reviewing and analyzing the different research work done by the various eminent researchers on the national and international level in the field of skill development in manufacturing and service

sector, it has been found that there is rarely any study available to the researcher on the role of skill development in the Tea industry. Hence this gap has been identified and an attempt has been made to understand the importance of skill development in the tea workers.

Need and challenges of skill development among the tea growers

Tea has a significant contribution to the GDP of India. Commercial production of tea in Assam was originated by the East India Company during the British regime in India. They started the tea industry in Assam with their professional knowledge and skills which is highly required for the tea plantation and manufacturing of tea (Das & Sankaran, 2018). India's independence led to an abrupt change in the tea industry as the British left the country they sold their tea estate to the native Indian businessman. Some of the tea estates in Assam came under the control of Indians as they had purchased majority stakes or directly purchased the entire tea estates (Wagh 2014). Most of the new buyers were unaware of the tea plantation and they considered it as their profit-making center. Lack of knowledge about the tea industry and a strong desire to earn profit in the short-run; they had ignored the basic requirements of labor essential for plantation (Roy, 2013; Laskar & Thappa, 2015). They appointed unskilled laborers with low salaries and ignored the improvements in tea gardens. Consequently, the quality of tea was adversely affected (Das & Sankaran, 2018). There are only a few educational institutes in the state which provide professional degree/diploma or training courses on tea management. (Laskar & Thappa, 2015). The tea industry is a labor-intensive industry that requires a large number of skilled manpower. Hence it is essential to have scientific knowledge and skills for the plantation and manufacturing of tea that will not only improve the quality of the tea but also increase productivity as well (Das & Sankaran, 2018). Skill development programs among the tea growers will impart skills on various aspects of growing tea, including the preparation of nurseries, choosing saplings, the use of fertilizers, and maximizing the yield (Das & Sankaran, 2018; Hazarika, 2016).

Large tea estate managed to get experienced and skilled manpower to run the garden but this is not happening with

thousands of small tea growers. The tea industry in Assam is facing some challenges for skill development among the small tea workers. Some of these challenges are as follows:-

- **Lack of awareness-** Lack of awareness about the various skill development programs among tea growers is one of the major challenges. There are thousands of small tea growers in the state engaging a large number of laborers in the plantation of tea. Sometimes, Govt. runs skill development programs for the tea growers but these people remained unaware of the fact (Marjit et al. 2019)
- **Poor infrastructure-** Poor infrastructure is another challenge in providing skill training to the tea workers. Cachar district is situated in the southern part of Assam and is poorly connected with the rest of the state. Poor transportation, remoteness, poor connectivity, poor infrastructure, etc. are some of the major issues with that locality (Hazarika, 2016). Major parts of the tea produced in the Cachar district are sold in the local market and this has become one of the reasons for not getting proper attention from the central or state government.
- **Improper implementation-** Few organizations in the state conduct a skill development program for tea workers. National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) was set by the government to impart skill training to the workforce. Though NSDC conducted few skill development programs among the tea growers of Tripura and in some parts of Assam (Marjit et al. 2019). No such program has been carried out in Cachar District or any other districts of Barak valley of Assam.
- **Lack of access to basic education-** Low literacy rate is found to be prevalent among the tea garden labors due to lack of access to basic education facilities. Lack of basic education created obstacles in the way of skill development among the tea garden workers (Hazarika, 2016).
- **Unorganized sector-** Many small tea growers are not registered with the Tea board association of the state because of the unavailability of the proper land documents. As a result, the Tea board association of the state is unaware of the existence of such tea growers (Roy, 2013).

The theoretical perspective of Skill development and hypothesis formulation

Skill is referred to as a set of expertise that enables an individual to accomplish work efficiently and effectively (Deka & Batra, 2016). Skill is different from knowledge, Knowledge is primarily theoretical context whereas skill is mostly emphasizing on practical orientation (Kapoor, 2014). Skills can be both technical and non-technical. Technical skills are the technical expertise require to accomplish a work such as the operation of machines & tools, plantation of the crop, marketing, and selling skills, purchase management skills, etc., whereas non-technical skills are the interpersonal skills such as communication skills, leadership skills, decision-making skills, team-management skills, etc. (Kanchan & Varshney, 2015). Both technical and non-technical skills are essential for the growth of the organization. Imparting skill development training to the workforce will enhance the productivity of the employees by increasing technical skills, marketing skills, communication skills, etc., (Kaptan, 2014; Bhiwa, 2018). Imparting job skills training to the workforce increases their performance (Wade and Parent, 2002). It is evident that both technical skills and organization skills are required for the enhancement of performance of the employees but it depends on the nature of their job profile (Misra, 2015). Employees involved in technical job profile like the operation of machinery or tools require more technical skills and those are engaged in managerial level requires more organizational skills. It is also important to note that the complete absence of any of the skills might have an impact on their performance (Bhiwa, 2018)

National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) report³ (2018-2019) revealed that skills require for the tea growers are both technical and non-technical such as plantation skills (preparation of nurseries, choosing saplings, the use of fertilizers, and maximizing the yield), manufacturing skills (purchase of raw materials, productions, operation of machines) marketing skills (packaging, advertising, selling & distribution, etc), Entrepreneurship skill, leadership skills, managerial skills, communication skills, etc. The present study has been carried out among the small tea growers who are mostly engaged in organizing, plantation, and marketing of tea leaves.

The present study aimed to understand the effect of skill development on the performance of small tea growers and also to identify the challenges of skill development among the tea growers.

Hence the following hypothesis has been framed to understand the effect of skill development on the performance of the small tea growers.

H1 = Developing skills have a significant effect on the performance of small tea growers.

Skill development has been identified as an independent variable whereas the performance of the small tea growers is the dependent variable.

Measurement & scaling

The present study has identified two variables: the Skill Development and Performance of the small tea growers. Previous literature revealed that skill development can be measured by identifying different skills set required for the employees of different sectors having different job profiles (Wade, & Parent, 2002; Palit, 2009). Employees who are working with machines & equipment require operating skills whereas employees who are involved in clerical jobs require office management skills (Venkatesh & Singh 2015). People working as a teller in the banks require cash management skills whereas salespeople in the banks require persuading skills (Prasad, & Purohit, 2017). Managerial skills are required for people working as a manager (Wade, & Parent, 2002). The present study has been carried out among the small tea growers. Small tea growers are the entrepreneurs who planted tea and sell green tea leaves to the tea factory of larger tea estates. Small tea growers hire laborers for the plantation of tea and plucking of tea leaves. They do not require production skills. Reviewing previous literature revealed that no scale has been developed to measure the skills development of tea growers as there is rarely any study on the skill development of tea growers. Therefore, based on the NSDC report (2018-2019), skills required for the small tea growers are identified as Organizing skills, plantation skills, entrepreneurship skills, and marketing skills. Five-point rating scale has been used consist of eight items under four skill dimensions to measure the skill development of small tea growers. The reliability and validity of the scale have been tested.

The performance measurement scale used for the entrepreneurs has been considered for measuring the performance of small tea growers as they are considered as the entrepreneurs selling green tea leaves to the larger tea manufacturers (Roy, 2013). Significant research works have already been conducted on performance measurement for the entrepreneurial organization. Murthy et al., (1996) argued that entrepreneurial performance can be measured by measuring efficiency, growth, profit, success/failure, size, market share, and leverage. The entrepreneur Performance Index has been developed by Fried and Tauer (2015). As per this index, the performance of the entrepreneurs can be determined by measuring different dimensions like Comparative advantage, education, Gender, Owner percentage, work experience, Race, Produce a product. It is also been found that most of the studies conducted for measuring the performance of entrepreneurship used "growth" as the only parameter of measurement (Zamanian, 2017). Growth has been measured on efficiency, productivity, accuracy, and revenue generation (Zamanian, 2017). Hence the present study has developed five items under the four dimensions under growth factor to measure the performance of small tea growers and a five-point rating scale has been used for the purpose. The reliability and validity of the scale have been tested.

Methodology

The present study has been undertaken in the Cachar district of Assam among some selected tea growers to understand the role of skill development among the tea workers. Small tea growers were targeted for the study. As

there was no previous study available on the small tea growers, so it was a quite arduous task to collect the information about small tea growers. Tea Board of India, Silchar (Dist. Cachar, Assam) branch have been approached to get the information about the small tea growers. A list of 350 registered small tea growers in the Cachar district with their contact numbers has been collected after taking due approval from the approving authority. An attempt was made to contact all the registered small tea growers in the list on the mobile number provided but in some cases the mobile number was found to be not correct or switched off. People who were contacted were met physically and at the same time reference has been taken from these registered tea growers about the other small tea growers who were not registered with the Tea Board association and finally approached them physically. A total of 291 small tea growers were interviewed using personal interview method and self-administered questionnaire. Screening of the data rejects 27 responses due to incorrect or incomplete responses. Hence 264 responses were used for analysis purposes.

A self-administered questionnaire was designed was validated based on the pilot study and expert advice. Internal consistency of the five-point rating scale has been used for measuring skill development and performance measurement has been tested using Cronbach's alpha test. Face validity and content validity of the scale has been tested using expert advice. The expert team consist of some selected academician, selected tea growers, and some selected employees of Tea board Association of Assam, Silchar branch.

Table: 1 - Reliability of the scale

Variables	N of Items	Scale Statistics			Reliability Statistics
		Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Skill Development	8	33.8712	17.983	4.24068	.898
Performance	5	21.2765	8.155	2.85573	.869

Source: Author

If the Cronbach's alpha value is more than 0.7 and close to 1, then it can be considered that items in the scale are highly consistent with each other and the scale is said to be highly

reliable (Kothari & Garg, 2014). Cronbach's alpha value is 0.898 and 0.869 for both the variables used in the scale. Hence it can be said that the scale is highly reliable.

Table: 1 - Reliability of the scale

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Skills	264	4.2339	.53008	-.784	.150	-.332	.299
Performance	264	4.2553	.57115	-.826	.150	-.317	.299
Valid N (list wise)	264						

Source: Author

Skewness and Kurtosis test has been conducted to examine the normality of the data for all test variables included in the study (Table: 2). If the value of the Skewness and Kurtosis test within the range of +2 and -2, then it is considered that the data is normally distributed (George, and Mallery, 2010). Results showed that Skewness and Kurtosis value for all the test variables 1 is -0.784 and variable 2 is -0.826, which is in the range of +2 to -2. Therefore it is considered that the data in the present study is normally distributed and it is free from outliers.

The relationship between two variables: Skill development and performance of small tea growers has been investigated by investigating the unit change in the skill development of small tea growers on the unit change on their performance. It would help to determine the effect of skill development on the performance of the small tea growers. Linear Regression model has been used to investigate the relationship between these two variables.

Table: 3 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.881 ^a	.775	.775	.27118

a. Predictors: (Constant), Skill Development

Source: Author

The model summary table examines the value of R & R Square. R denotes the correlation coefficient where R square denotes the coefficient of determination. R indicates the correlation between two variables and R square indicates the percentage of the variance of the dependent variable explained by the independent variable. Adjusted R square is generally used in multiple regression models

where there is more than one independent variable. Correlation Coefficient (R) 0.881 indicates that there is a strong correlation between skill development and performance of small tea growers. The coefficient of determination (R square) is 0.775; it means 77.5% of the total variance of the performance of small tea growers explained by the skill development.

Table:4- ANOVAa

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	66.526	1	66.526	904.655	.000 ^b
	Residual	19.267	262	.074		
	Total	85.793	263			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance
b. Predictors: (Constant), Skill Development

Source: Author

ANOVA table explains the variability of the dependent variable from the independent variables in the regression model. Here, the value of significance (p-value) is 0.000

which is less than the alpha value (α value=0.05). Hence, it can be said that the regression model is statistically significant and it can well explain the variability.

Table: 5 -Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.211	.135		1.558	.121	-.056	.478
	Skill Development	.950	.032	.881	30.077	.000	.888	1.012

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

Source: Author

The coefficient table indicated that the coefficient is statistically significant, as the p-value (0.000) < alpha value (0.05). Therefore the null hypothesis has been rejected and the alternative hypothesis has been accepted. It indicates that there is a positive relationship between Inclusionary Skill development and the performance of small tea growers.

Regression equation can be written as

$$X = a + bY$$

Where X is the dependent variable and Y is the independent variable. 'a' is the constant and 'b' is the coefficient. Constant is the slope and coefficient is the interception to the regression line.

Performance of small tea growers = 0.211 + 0.950 Skill development

Here, 0.211 is the constant and 0.950 is the regression coefficient. On interpreting the equation, it can be said that one unit increase in the skill development will lead to a 0.950 unit increase in the performance of small tea growers. Therefore, it has been found that skill development has a significant positive effect on the performance of small tea growers. On providing skill training to the small tea growers, it will increase their overall skills and finally has a significant positive effect on their performance.

Table: 6 - Importance of different skills

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Organizing Skills	264	3.00	5.00	4.1932	.55204
Plantation Skills	264	3.00	5.00	4.1648	.62301
Entrepreneurship Skills	264	3.00	5.00	4.3106	.63942
Marketing Skills	264	3.00	5.00	4.2670	.66819
Valid N (list wise)	264				

Source: Author

On analyzing the importance of different skills required for the small tea growers, it has been found that all the four skills namely organizing skills (mean score=4.19), Plantation skills (mean score=4.16), Entrepreneurship Skills (mean score=4.31) and Marketing Skills (mean score=4.27) are found to be important for small tea

growers. Among all these skills, Entrepreneurship Skills are found to be highly important followed by marketing skills. Providing adequate skill training will help to increase their required skill set and it will have an impact on their performance.

National Skill Development Corporation report (2018-19) on the skill development of tea growers in Assam & Tripura has highlighted some issues or challenges in providing skill training in remote areas of the respective states. Moreover, it was also revealed in pilot testing that small tea growers in the Cachar districts of Assam are facing some challenges in skill development. Hence an investigation has been carried among the targeted small tea growers using structured pre-determined 20 items emphasizing the possible challenges to analyze the intensity of the challenges in skill development programs among the small tea growers of Cachar district and how these challenges can be overcome. The intensity of the occurrence of the problems has been identified using descriptive statistics by calculating the mean score for each item and then factor analysis has been conducted to reduced 20 variables into few factors.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) has been used to extract the latent factors from the observed variables. KMO

sampling adequacy test is found to be satisfactory as KMO value is 0.729 & Bartlett's test of sphericity found to be satisfactory.

The total number of factors that can be extracted from the analysis has been tested by considering the Eigen Values of the variables. Variables whose Eigenvalue is more than 1 can be considered as a factor. There are five cases, where Eigenvalue is more than 1. Hence it can be said that there would be five factors that can be extracted from the analysis.

The rotated component matrix (table: 24) explained the factors loading of the variables. It explains the correlations of the variables with each other and with the underlying factor. It reduces the number of factors under which variables having higher loading. The rotated component matrix reduces 20 variables into five factors with five variables under each factor.

Table: 7 Rotated Component Matrixa

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
VAR00001	.900				
VAR00002	.917				
VAR00003	.938				
VAR00004	.933				
VAR00005					.907
VAR00006					.921
VAR00007					.886
VAR00008					.893
VAR00009				.781	
VAR00010				.824	
VAR00011				.876	
VAR00012				.851	
VAR00013		.731			
VAR00014		.950			
VAR00015		.919			
VAR00016		.931			
VAR00017		.885			
VAR00018			.782		
VAR00019			.879		
VAR00020			.915		
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.					
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.					
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.					

Source: Author

Table: 8 - Factors extracted

Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Item 1, Item 2, Item 3, Item 4	Item 5, Item 6, Item 7, Item 8	Item 9, Item 10, Item 11, Item 12	Item 13, Item 14, Item 15, Item 16, Item 17	Item 18, Item 19, Item 20
Lack of awareness	Poor infrastructure	Improper implementation	Low literacy	Unorganized sector

Source: Author

Rotated component matrix (Table: 7) revealed that 22 variables are categorized under five factors having high factor loadings. Factors are named based on the nature of the items loaded under each factor (Table: 8). Items under factor 1 are related to the poor awareness level of the small tea growers; hence it is named as the Lack of awareness factor. Similarly, items under factor 2 are related to infrastructural issues of the location. Hence it is named as improper implementation factor. Items under factor 3 are related to the lower level of literacy, hence it is named as Low literacy factor and finally, items under factor 5 are related to the issues related to the unorganized sectors, hence it is named as an unorganized sector factor.

Discussions & conclusion

Small tea growers are one of the important contributors to the overall tea production of the country. It helps in the growth of the exports and generates employment opportunities to the rural people that help simultaneously in the growth of the economy of the nation. Skill development is a crucial need for today's economy. Skill development is very important for the tea workers. It will increase efficiency, productivity, and the quality of the products. The skill development program will impart different knowledge and skills to the small tea workers such as preparation of nurseries, choosing saplings, use of fertilizers and maximizing the yield, marketing skill, entrepreneurship skills, etc. There are different challenges in the development of skills among the small tea growers such as lack of awareness of the skill development programs, poor infrastructure, improper implementation of the program, lack of access to basic education, and prevailing unorganized sector. Improper implementation, Poor infrastructure, and Lack of awareness of the programs among the tea growers are the prime challenges for skill

development among the small tea growers in the Cachar district of Assam. The remoteness of the district is also another prevailing factor that acts as a challenge for organizing the skill development programs in the locality. Lack of access to basic education among the tea garden laborer is another obstacle for conducting skill development programs among the tea workers. Most of the small tea growers are not even registered with the tea board of the state as a result tea board association is unaware of the existence of such tea growers in the state. The government should be supportive of the development of the tea growers Assam by imparting skill development programs with the help of National Skill Development Corporation and other skill development agencies. Infrastructural and communicational issues of the remote areas of the state should be addressed. The literacy rate of the people of the tea garden labors should be increased by emphasizing on imparting basic educational facilities and vocational training in the tea gardens of Assam. Small tea growers who are not registered should emphasis on having the proper land document for their tea gardens and registered their name in the tea board association of the state. Advanced digital technology such as video conferencing methods can be used to impart skill training to the people of the remote tea gardens. Small tea growers can keep track of various information and training program schedules through the registered website of NSDC and other training institutes with the help of the internet. It will increase productivity and increase the quality of the Tea that will be highly beneficial for the economy of the nation.

Managerial implication and future scope

The present study emphasized the need for skill development among the small tea growers. The tea industry is a labor-intensive industry and developing skills among

the tea growers is found to be a dire need of the industry. Tea remains to be a significant contributor in the GDP of the nation and prime exporter and employee generator for the state of Assam. Nevertheless, there was a serious skill gap among the tea growers especially small tea growers of the state. The present study revealed the bridging of the skill gap by imparting skill development training to the tea growers. Imparting requisite skills set like plantation skills, marketing skills, entrepreneurship skills would catalyze the efficiency and productivity of the tea growers and thus it leads to growth. Surprisingly it was found that nevertheless of having significant importance and existence of skill gap, there was hardly any focus on the research of skill development among the tea growers. There is a wide scope for future research in the area. The present study presumed the impact of skill development on the growth based on the response of the tea growers but it actually can be measured by comparing the present performance level after imparting skill training with their previous performance before skill training.

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Endnotes:

1. <https://www.aicte-india.org/sites/default/files/India%20Skill%20Report-2019.pdf>
2. <http://www.teaboard.gov.in/TEABOARDCSM/Ng==>
3. <https://nsdcindia.org/sites/default/files/files/annual-report-NSDC.pdf>