https://www.amitrakshar.co.in/journal

Volume – 2

ISSN: 3049-0278 (Online) **Amitrakshar International Journal** of Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Research (AIJITR) (A Social Science, Science and Indian Knowledge Systems Perspective) Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Bi-Monthly, International E-Journal

EMPLOYABILITY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIO-ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS **IN HIGHER EDUCATION: BRIDGING THE GAP**

Dr. Parimal Sarkar¹

Avijit Pradhan²

Abstract

India stands at a critical juncture with its youth population offering immense potential for national progress. However, a significant employability gap persists, particularly among socio-economically disadvantaged students in higher

education. While enrollment rates are rising, many graduates remain ill-equipped for the job market due to outdated curricula, inadequate teaching quality, limited industry exposure, and systemic barriers. These challenges are more severe for students from marginalized backgrounds, who often lack access to quality learning environments, mentorship, and practical skill-building opportunities. This study explores the core issues affecting their employability, including the poor alignment between academic instruction and market demands, faculty demotivation, lack of soft skills, and minimal industry collaboration. It also examines emerging opportunities through digital learning, curriculum reform, and entrepreneurship-based education. Drawing from policy frameworks like the New Education Policy 2020, the research provides targeted recommendations to bridge the employability divide. By advocating for structural reforms, inclusive governance, and skill-focused learning, the study emphasizes the need to transform higher education into a system that equips all students—regardless of background—with the tools to succeed in a dynamic and competitive economy.

Keywords: Employability, Higher Education, Socio-economically Disadvantage, Skill Development, Education Policy

Introduction

India has a large number of young people, with 65% of the population under 35 years old and an average age of just 25 (Bhattacharya, 2012). This is a big opportunity for the country. But to make the most of this, India needs to create around 300 million jobs by 2040, which means about 10 million jobs every year. Without enough jobs, it will be hard for the country to grow and stay stable (Khem Chand et al., 2017; Mitra, 2021). However, there is a big problem. Many young people in India are finishing college, but they are not ready for jobs. The India Skill Report 2021 says that the employability of graduates (their ability to get and keep a job) has gone down since 2018. This shows that the education system is not teaching the skills that companies need. Studies show that only 7% of MBA graduates from top B-schools in India are ready for work (Assocham, 2016). Across the country, less than 10% of business school graduates are employable (Aspiring Minds, 2012). This is a big concern because companies need good workers to survive and grow. There are many reasons for this problem. Most colleges still teach using old and outdated courses.

DOI Link (Crossref) Prefix: https://doi.org/10.63431/AIJITR/2.II.2025.24-30

AIJITR, Volume 2, Issue -II, March-April, 2025, PP. 24-30 Received and Accepted on 11th March, 2025, Published: 30th April, 2025



: www.amitrakshar.co.in



Copyright © 2025 by author (s) and (AIJITR) This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0)

Issue – II

March-April 2025

¹ Assistant Professor, School of Education, Netaji Subhas Open University, Kalyani Regional Centre, Nadia, Email-p.sarkar@wbnsou.ac.in ² Project Assistant, School of Education, Netaji Subhas Open University, Kalyani Regional Centre, Nadia, Email-

avijitpradhan2699@gmail.com



The content is often copied from other countries and does not include Indian knowledge or examples (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014). Also, teachers are not always trained to help students build real-world skills (Dhawan, 2014). Important skills like communication (Charles & Krishnan, 2014), teamwork, thinking clearly, and emotional intelligence are often not taught properly. Also, many teachers are not motivated, because they don't have good support or chances to grow in their careers (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014, 2018, 2014). As a result, students leave college with degrees, but without the skills or confidence they need to do well in a job (Dhingra, 2017; Gethe & Hulage, 2020; Sanghi, 2019; Sarkar & Choudhary, 2014). They often do not get practical training or chances to do internships, and they rarely get to learn from people in the industry (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic made many people think more about education and skills (Hillman, 2020; Kaushal & Kaushal, 2021; Sabharwal, 2020). More students are joining colleges to improve their job chances. But still, many are struggling with stress, low salaries, and few job options after they graduate. To solve this, India needs to change how education connects with jobs (The Financial Express, 2021). New kinds of colleges, called skill universities, based on the idea of Purna Swaraj (complete self-reliance), are being suggested. These places would focus on real skills and give students more control over their learning. The government is also promoting the use of technology (Kapilan & Vidhya, 2021), online learning (Anjum & Tiwari, 2013, 2012), and private sector help (Tiwari et al., 2013; Tiwari & Anjum, 2015, 2014), which can make learning better and more available. Projects like impact sourcing are also helping, by training and hiring people from less privileged areas (Aman, 2021). But many problems remain. Different states have different education rules, and there is no strong national plan to fix everything. Policies are confusing, and many vocational training programs do not work well (Pilz & Regel, 2021). Also, we don't have enough data to understand the real problems and make better decisions. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 gives hope (Varma et al., 2021). It supports modern learning, Indian values, and closer ties with industries (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014, 2015, 2014). It also suggests using tools like virtual labs (Kapilan & Vidhya, 2021) and sharing top resources with smaller colleges, which could help students learn better. In the end, for India to create jobs and grow its economy, it must change the way students are educated. Education should focus more on quality, practical skills, and real job needs (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Iyer et al., 2014). This is not just a good idea-it is very important for India's future.

Rationale of the Study

India has a very young population, which gives the country a great chance to grow and develop. But to make the most of this, it is important to make sure that young people are ready for jobs. Many students, especially those from poor or disadvantaged backgrounds, are going to college but are not learning the skills they need to get good jobs (Bhatnagar, 2021; Dhingra, 2017). There is a big gap between what students learn in college and what employers actually need (Gethe & Hulage, 2020; Sanghi, 2019; Sarkar & Choudhary, 2014). This problem is worse for students who come from low-income families because they often don't have access to good teachers, career advice, job training, or real work experience. Many graduates from smaller colleges struggle to find jobs (Tilak & Choudhury, 2021; Tilak, 2021). This shows that the current education system is not working well for everyone (Sharma et al., 2013; Tiwari & Anjum, 2012). Poor students also face more challenges because they may not have money, support, or the right connections to succeed. This study will look at the problems these students face in getting jobs and try to find ways to help them. It will explore how changes in government policy (Varma et al., 2021), new learning tools (Kapilan & Vidhya, 2021; Anjum & Tiwari, 2013), and help from private companies (Tiwari et al., 2013; Tiwari & Anjum, 2015, 2014) can make a difference. This is in line with the New Education Policy 2020 (Varma et al., 2021), which aims to improve learning and make it more useful for real jobs. The goal of this study is to find simple and practical ways to help disadvantaged students become job-ready. Helping them will not only improve their lives but also support the growth and future of the country (Rana & Tiwari, 2014; Tiwari et al., 2017).

Objectives of the Study

O1. To identify the key employability challenges faced by socio-economically disadvantaged students in higher education.

O2. To explore the available opportunities that can support employability for these students.

O3. To provide practical and policy-based recommendations for bridging the employability gap.

Issue – II

March-April 2025



Methodology

This study is based on a review of existing literature related to the employability of graduates in India. Various published research papers, reports, and secondary data sources were analyzed to understand the current situation. The focus of the study is on higher education in the Indian context. Based on the review, the study presents key findings and offers suggestions to improve the employability of students in the country.

Interpretation

O1: "To identify the key employability challenges faced by socio-economically disadvantaged students in higher education."

Poor Quality of Education:

Many private institutions focus on profits over outcomes, leading to substandard teaching practices and minimal investment in infrastructure or faculty development. Public institutions, on the other hand, are marred by political interference and vacant faculty positions, diminishing the quality of education delivered to disadvantaged students who often rely on these institutions (Sharma et al., 2013; Tiwari & Anjum, 2018).

Lack of Faculty Motivation and Support:

Faculty in both sectors are often underpaid, overworked, and lack dignity in their roles, as highlighted by Professor Yash Pal (YashPal, 2009). This demotivates talented individuals from joining or remaining in the profession (Dhawan, 2014; Tiwari & Anjum, 2014, 2018, 2014), especially affecting institutions catering to economically weaker students.

Outdated and Theoretical Curriculum:

The syllabus in many institutions remains disconnected from industry needs, with little emphasis on practical or hands-on skills (Bhatnagar, 2021; Dhingra, 2017; Sanghi, 2019). This severely limits the readiness of disadvantaged students for real-world employment, as they often lack access to supplemental learning resources.

Insufficient Industry Collaboration:

There is a stark absence of partnerships between academia and industry, which could otherwise help align education with current job market trends (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014, 2015, 2014; Tiwari et al., 2013; Gertner et al., 2011). Students from disadvantaged backgrounds miss out on exposure to professional environments and internships that can boost employability.

Grade-Oriented Learning over Skill Development:

An overemphasis on rote learning, theoretical exams, and grades undermines the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and technical skills (Bala, 2021). Internal assessments are often manipulated, depriving students of genuine learning experiences.

Communication and Soft Skill Deficiency:

Socio-economically disadvantaged students often struggle with English communication and soft skills (Charles & Krishnan, 2014), which are heavily weighted in campus placements. The system's focus on these traits, often at the cost of domain knowledge, creates an uneven playing field.

Systemic Corruption and Regulatory Gaps:

Corruption in granting approvals to substandard institutions (The Indian Express, 2009; Pandey, 2009) and the focus on physical infrastructure (like land) over academic excellence further worsens the situation for students who can't afford elite education.

Issue – II

March-April 2025



Lack of Motivation and Learning Culture:

Disadvantaged students often do not receive the academic guidance or motivational support needed to build confidence and self-directed learning habits, leaving them underprepared for the competitive job market (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014, 2018, 2014).

O2: "To explore the available opportunities that can support employability for socio-economically disadvantaged students in higher education."

Curriculum Reforms for Practical Relevance:

Updating the syllabus to align with industry needs by removing outdated theoretical content and incorporating skillbased, experiential learning can significantly improve job readiness (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Iyer et al., 2014).

Filling Faculty Vacancies and Empowering Educators:

Recruiting qualified, motivated, and experienced teachers on a permanent basis (Dhawan, 2014; YashPal, 2009), while allowing senior educators to run virtual colleges and engage in applied teaching, can improve educational quality for underprivileged students (Kapilan & Vidhya, 2021; Anjum & Tiwari, 2013).

Entrepreneurship-Based Education:

Promoting entrepreneurship as a viable career path through skill-building, mentorship, and practical training can empower students, especially women and rural youth, to become self-reliant and job creators (Chinchure, 2020; Rana & Tiwari, 2014).

Outcome-Oriented Funding and Governance:

Linking institutional support and affiliation to measurable outcomes like student employability, entrepreneurship, and feedback can help drive accountability and quality improvement.

Digital and Online Learning Opportunities:

Online platforms and virtual classrooms provide access to quality education and teacher-student interaction beyond geographical and economic constraints (Anjum & Tiwari, 2013, 2012), especially beneficial for under-resourced students.

Collaboration with Industry and Practicing Professionals:

Involving industry experts and professionals as "Professors of Practice" and fostering strong academia-industry collaboration can bridge the theory-practice divide and expose students to workplace realities (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014, 2015, 2014; Tiwari et al., 2013; Gertner et al., 2011).

Performance Appraisal Reforms:

Shifting from publication-focused faculty evaluations to holistic teacher assessments that emphasize student outcomes and employability can realign faculty efforts towards student development.

Improved Internal Evaluation Practices:

Honest and fair assessment systems, such as exit tests and reduced manipulation of internal marks, can ensure that students graduate with real competencies rather than just paper degrees (Bala, 2021).

Supportive Policies and Affirmative Action:

Continued support through reservation, financial aid (Tiwari & Anjum, 2013), and affirmative hiring can level the playing field for disadvantaged groups in both academic and employment sectors.

27 | Page

Issue – II

March-April 2025



Teacher Motivation and Training Models:

Implementing models like the Skill Hierarchy Motivation Model can encourage faculty at all levels to contribute effectively to student skill development and employability (Tiwari & Anjum, 2018, 2014).

O3: "To provide practical and policy-based recommendations for bridging the employability gap."

Policy Reforms in Higher Education Governance:

Introducing policy changes that prioritize learning outcomes, employability metrics, and equitable access to quality education over infrastructural or land-based criteria for institutional affiliation (Varma et al., 2021; YashPal, 2009).

Curriculum Overhaul and Skill Integration:

Recommending the integration of practical, industry-aligned skills and employability training within mainstream curricula to ensure that students graduate with both academic knowledge and job-ready competencies (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Iyer et al., 2014).

Strengthening Industry-Academia Linkages:

Suggesting structured collaborations with industry experts, including the appointment of practicing professionals as faculty, to bring real-world experience into classrooms and make education more application-oriented (Tiwari & Anjum, 2014, 2015, 2014; Tiwari et al., 2013; Gertner et al., 2011).

Revising Faculty Recruitment and Appraisal Systems:

Advocating for teacher recruitment based on merit and motivation (Dhawan, 2014; Tiwari & Anjum, 2014, 2018, 2014), and shifting from publication-heavy appraisal systems to holistic evaluations that consider student success and employability as key indicators.

Promoting Digital and Inclusive Learning Models:

Encouraging the expansion of virtual learning platforms and open educational resources to reach disadvantaged students and provide equal opportunities for skill enhancement regardless of location or economic status (Anjum & Tiwari, 2013, 2012; Kapilan & Vidhya, 2021).

Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment Focus:

Recommending policies that support entrepreneurship education (Chinchure, 2020; Tiwari & Anjum, 2014), mentorship programs, and startup incubators to empower students to become job creators, particularly in rural and underserved areas (Rana & Tiwari, 2014).

Ensuring Fair and Transparent Assessment:

Proposing reforms to internal and exit evaluation processes to uphold academic integrity and ensure that degrees reflect genuine learning and capability, rather than grade inflation (Bala, 2021).

Targeted Financial and Institutional Support:

Advocating for outcome-linked subsidies, scholarship programs (Tiwari & Anjum, 2013), and support for institutions that demonstrate a commitment to inclusive education and high employability rates.

Conclusion

In a world increasingly shaped by technological disruption and global competition, India's higher education system must evolve beyond outdated frameworks that no longer serve its youth-especially those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The current structure, with its colonial legacy and profit-driven motives, fails to equip https://www.amitrakshar.co.in/journal

March-April 2025



students with the skills (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Charles & Krishnan, 2014), mindset, and opportunities necessary for meaningful employment or entrepreneurial success (Chinchure, 2020; Rana & Tiwari, 2014).

To bridge the employability gap, it is imperative to shift the focus of higher education from rote learning and superficial achievements to critical thinking, innovation (Tiwari et al., 2017; Tiwari & Anium, 2014) and real-world applicability. India needs an education system that empowers students to become creators, problem-solvers, and nation-builders—individuals who not only seek jobs but are capable of generating opportunities for others.

This transformation requires strong political will, visionary leadership, and a collaborative approach among all stakeholders-governments, institutions, industries, educators, and communities. The aim should be to foster an ecosystem that prioritizes student growth, national development, and social equity over commercial gains. By realigning the purpose of higher education with the broader goals of societal progress and inclusive growth, we can create a generation of empowered individuals ready to uplift themselves and contribute meaningfully to the nation. Only through such a values-driven and inclusive model can the employability challenges of disadvantaged students be effectively addressed—and higher education become a true engine of opportunity and transformation for all.

References:

8). Entrepreneurship should February Hindu. Chinchure, A. (2020,begin school. The in https://www.thehindu.com/education/entrepreneurship-should-begin-in-school/article30769384.ece

The Financial Express. (2021, March 5). Education to employability: IITs engaging industry shoguns to teach a good *idea*. https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/education-to-employability-iits-engaging-industry-shoguns-to-teacha-good-idea/2206578/

Hillage, J., & Pollard, E. (1998). Employability: Developing a framework for policy analysis. Department for Education and Employment.

Assocham. (2016). Only 7% MBA graduates are employable. Business Standard. https://www.businessstandard.com/article/pti-stories/only-7-percent-mba-graduates-employable-assocham-study-116042700823 1.html

Aspiring Minds. (2012).National *Employability* **MBA** Graduates 2012. Report https://www.aspiringminds.com/researchreports/national-employability-report-mba-graduates-2012/

Dhingra, M. (2017). Higher education and professional graduates' employability status - An alarming situation for India. Amity Global Business Review, 12(2), 77–84.

Bhatnagar, N. (2021). Employability and skill gap among MBA graduates in India: A literature review. Industrial and Commercial Training, 53(1), 92–104. https://doi.org/10.1108/ICT-10-2019-0098

Sabharwal, M. (2020, June 15). Covid crisis underlines urgency of more inclusive employment, employability and education. The Indian Express. https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/covid-crisis-employment-educationskill-universities-6458972/

Tilak, J., & Choudhury, P. (2021). Employment and employability of engineering graduates in India. Journal of Contemporary Educational Research, 5(3), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.26689/jcer.v5i3.1825

Bala, R. (2021). Perception towards employability skills: Comparative analysis of students and faculty viewpoint. Social Science Research Network. https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3832708

Tiwari, R., & Anjum, B. (2014). Industry academia interface: A study of North Indian universities. International 139-146. Journal Marketing, Financial Services k Management Research, of 3(7), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329072110



Tiwari, R., & Anjum, B. (2014). Role of higher education institutions and industry academia collaboration for skill enhancement. *Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research*, 3(11), 27–34. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329072522

Gethe, R., & Hulage, M. (2020). Current employability scenario of Indian graduates (Engineering, MBA & Other Streams): A review. *International Journal of Advances in Management and Economics*, 9(3), 1–9. https://www.managementjournal.info/index.php/IJAME/article/view/655

Tiwari, R., & Anjum, B. (2014). Transformation of higher education in India. *GE-International Journal of Management Research*, 2(11), 160–168. <u>https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346399553</u>

Kapilan, N., & Vidhya, P. (2021). Role of virtual laboratories in teaching learning processes of India. In P. Ordonez de Pablos (Ed.), *IT and the Development of Digital Skills and Competences in Education* (pp. 235–252). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-4972-8.ch014

