

Need of Employability and Vocational Training in Teacher Education Institutions in the Current Era

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Abstract:

(The twenty-first century has reshaped the role of teacher education institutions (TEIs), expanding their responsibility beyond academic instruction to preparing teachers who can nurture employability, vocational competencies, and essential life skills. In today's dynamic environment, driven by globalization, evolving labor markets, and rapid digital transformation, TEIs must respond by aligning their curricula with workplace demands and holistic development goals. Employability and vocational training are no longer supplementary but essential for producing educators who can guide students toward professional readiness, adaptability, and innovation. This paper examines the need, existing gaps, and emerging opportunities for integrating such training into teacher education. It underscores the transformative potential of TEIs in creating teachers who serve as mentors, innovators, and catalysts of socio-economic development. By embedding skill-based pedagogy and vocational perspectives, TEIs not only ensure job-ready graduates but also contribute significantly to national growth, equity, and sustainable progress in the twenty-first century.)

Keywords: Teacher Education, Employability, Vocational Training, Skill Development, 21st Century Education, Professional Competencies, Lifelong Learning

Introduction

Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) have historically been established with the core responsibility of training future teachers in the essential aspects of pedagogy, curriculum design, assessment techniques, and classroom management strategies. The traditional outlook of teacher education emphasized imparting theoretical knowledge about child psychology, learning processes, and instructional methodologies, ensuring that teachers were adequately prepared to manage classrooms and deliver prescribed syllabi. While these aspects remain critical, the 21st century has introduced a dramatically altered socio-economic and educational landscape, requiring TEIs to

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extend their focus far beyond conventional practices. The present era is characterized by dynamic technological advancement, globalization, flexible labor markets, and the necessity of lifelong learning. These changes demand a teacher who is not only a transmitter of knowledge but also a facilitator of skill development, an innovator in teaching practices, and a mentor capable of guiding students toward employability and real-world success. In this context, employability and vocational training become essential pillars of teacher preparation, ensuring that graduates of TEIs are equipped not only with academic and pedagogical expertise but also with competencies aligned to the needs of the modern labor market. The scope of employability for teachers, therefore, transcends personal job security; it involves cultivating in learners the qualities, attitudes, and practical skills necessary to thrive in competitive and evolving professional environments.

The inclusion of vocational training within teacher education emerges as a vital necessity because it bridges the often-criticized gap between academic learning and workplace requirements. In many education systems, there exists a disconnection between what is taught in classrooms and the demands of industries, resulting in a significant skill gap. Teachers, who themselves may not have been exposed to vocational or industry-relevant education during their training, are less likely to prepare their students with the skills necessary for employability. This creates a cycle of academic under-preparedness and unemployment, which directly impacts national productivity and socio-economic growth. By embedding vocational dimensions into teacher education, TEIs can prepare educators who not only understand the importance of employment-oriented skills but are also capable of designing lessons, projects, and learning environments that integrate academic knowledge with practical applications. For instance, teachers trained in vocational pedagogy can connect theoretical concepts with entrepreneurial activities, digital tools, or skill-based projects, thereby making education more meaningful for students. Moreover, in the context of globalization and technological revolutions such as Industry 4.0, vocational training equips teachers with digital literacy, problem-solving ability, adaptability, and collaboration skills—competencies essential for guiding students in navigating dynamic career paths. Employability thus ceases to be an individual concern; it becomes a systemic necessity where teachers act as enablers of economic resilience and social mobility through education.

Another dimension of this discussion relates to the inclusive development role of TEIs. Employability and vocational training within teacher education ensure that education serves as a transformative tool for all sections of society, particularly

marginalized groups who are more vulnerable to unemployment and underemployment. Teachers trained in these domains can democratize access to skill development, ensuring that students from rural, semi-urban, and disadvantaged backgrounds acquire competencies that improve their life chances. For example, integrating vocational training modules such as ICT skills, entrepreneurship, communication, or technical crafts within school curricula can create livelihood pathways for students who may not pursue higher education. TEIs that equip teachers with such approaches directly contribute to social equity by reducing dependency, enhancing productivity, and preparing learners for diverse opportunities. Furthermore, the necessity of lifelong learning in the current era requires teachers to continuously adapt, upgrade their competencies, and serve as role models of adaptability for their students. Vocational training embedded in teacher education inculcates this ethos of lifelong learning, resilience, and innovation, positioning teachers as both job creators and facilitators of employability. Therefore, the integration of employability and vocational training in TEIs is not a peripheral addition but a strategic necessity, central to the redefinition of teacher education in the 21st century. It aligns teacher preparation with national education policies, international development goals, and the broader vision of creating empowered, employable, and future-ready generations.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Employability in Teacher Education

The concept of employability has gained prominence in recent decades as education systems worldwide shift their focus from purely academic instruction to equipping learners with the competencies required for professional survival and growth in a competitive, globalized economy. Employability is more than just the ability to secure a job; it encompasses a blend of knowledge, transferable skills, attitudes, values, and adaptability that enable individuals to thrive in varied contexts. Within teacher education, employability holds a dual significance. On the one hand, teacher trainees themselves must be equipped with the capacity to adapt to dynamic labor market trends, technological disruptions, and policy reforms in the education sector. On the other hand, teachers carry the responsibility of instilling employability traits in their learners, preparing them not only to pass examinations but to develop as holistic individuals capable of navigating uncertain and evolving work environments. Essential employability traits for teachers include communication proficiency, critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, digital literacy, and socio-emotional skills. When these traits are embedded within teacher education

curricula, graduates emerge as competent professionals who can model employability for their students. For example, a teacher proficient in digital tools does not merely use them for instruction but demonstrates to students how adaptability to technology enhances learning and employability.

Employability in teacher education also ensures that the teaching profession itself gains greater relevance in the 21st century. Traditionally, teaching has been perceived as a stable profession with limited emphasis on career adaptability. However, contemporary teachers often work in diverse environments: conventional schools, digital learning platforms, NGOs, corporate training, and even freelance education initiatives. For such a spectrum of opportunities, teacher trainees must be future-ready, with skills that go beyond pedagogy. Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) that integrate employability into their frameworks thus produce graduates who can contribute meaningfully not only within classrooms but also in broader social and professional contexts. Another critical aspect is the emphasis on socio-emotional intelligence, which ensures that teachers can build meaningful relationships with students, collaborate with peers, and handle workplace challenges effectively. Moreover, the integration of employability fosters lifelong learning, encouraging teachers to constantly upgrade their competencies through professional development, certifications, and research engagement. This adaptability not only strengthens their career trajectories but also positions them as role models for their learners, who witness first-hand the value of flexibility and continuous learning. Ultimately, employability in teacher education bridges the gap between traditional academic preparation and contemporary professional realities, ensuring that teacher graduates are not only employable themselves but also capable of cultivating job-readiness, resilience, and adaptability in future generations.

2.2 Vocational Training in Teacher Education

Vocational training has long been recognized as an important element of workforce development, yet it is often treated as separate from mainstream education. In the current era, however, the integration of vocational training into teacher education has become increasingly necessary, particularly as education systems worldwide seek to reduce the mismatch between classroom learning and workplace competencies. Vocational training equips individuals with practical, occupation-oriented skills that prepare them for specific professions or trades. Within the context of teacher education, vocational training plays a transformative role: it enhances teachers' ability to integrate skill-based pedagogy, conduct project-based learning,

and guide students in acquiring competencies that directly relate to employment and livelihood opportunities. For example, a teacher trained in vocational pedagogy may design projects that blend mathematics with entrepreneurial activities, or integrate information technology into science teaching, thereby demonstrating to learners the applicability of knowledge in real-world scenarios. This approach makes education more engaging, relevant, and impactful, especially for students from backgrounds where access to higher education or white-collar employment is limited. By bridging the traditional gap between academic content and workplace skills, vocational training ensures that schooling is not confined to rote memorization but becomes a pathway to meaningful participation in economic life.

Vocational training in teacher education also holds broader socio-economic implications. Teachers trained in vocational approaches can democratize access to skills by reaching marginalized and rural communities, where formal employment opportunities may be scarce but self-employment and entrepreneurship can flourish with proper guidance. For instance, vocationally trained teachers can introduce students to technical crafts, agricultural innovations, digital entrepreneurship, or creative industries, thereby equipping them with skills that can generate livelihoods even in resource-constrained environments. At the same time, vocational training strengthens teachers' own professional identities by making them versatile educators capable of delivering both academic knowledge and practical skills. This dual capability makes teacher education graduates more attractive in the labor market, where employers increasingly value multifaceted professionals who can adapt to diverse contexts. Moreover, vocational training aligns with national and international education policies, such as India's National Education Policy 2020, which emphasizes the integration of vocational education at all levels of schooling. Teacher Education Institutions that embrace vocational dimensions thus become key drivers of policy implementation, bridging the intent of governments with the realities of classrooms. Beyond immediate employment outcomes, vocational training fosters critical values such as self-reliance, problem-solving, creativity, and resilience among learners—qualities that are indispensable in an era of rapid change and uncertainty. Ultimately, vocational training in teacher education ensures that schools are not isolated academic spaces but dynamic institutions connecting learning with life, thereby fulfilling the broader mission of education as a catalyst for personal growth, social equity, and national development.

3. Need for Employability and Vocational Training

3.1 Globalization and Market Dynamics

Globalization has dramatically redefined the expectations from education systems, transforming how societies perceive the role of teachers and institutions. In an interconnected world where borders are increasingly porous and economies are tightly integrated, education cannot remain confined to traditional classroom practices. Teacher education must evolve to produce educators who can prepare students not only for local employment opportunities but also for global citizenship. This requires a comprehensive understanding of international labor market trends, cross-cultural communication, adaptability, and awareness of global challenges such as sustainability, migration, and technological disruptions. Teachers who undergo employability and vocational training are better equipped to foster global competencies in their students, enabling them to compete successfully in international arenas. Such training also ensures that education contributes to inclusive growth by reducing inequalities between students from urban and rural backgrounds. Furthermore, globalization places pressure on educational systems to produce a workforce that can respond flexibly to market demands, where skills often become obsolete within short spans of time. Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) that embed employability frameworks and vocational skills prepare future teachers to impart resilience, adaptability, and lifelong learning attitudes to their students, making education relevant in a fast-evolving global economy.

3.2 Bridging the Skill Gap

One of the most pressing challenges in developing economies is the persistent mismatch between the skills acquired in educational institutions and those demanded by industries and workplaces. Graduates often emerge from schools and colleges with strong theoretical foundations but lack the practical competencies, problem-solving ability, and workplace readiness needed to succeed professionally. This “skill gap” undermines both individual employability and broader economic progress. Teachers, as the primary facilitators of learning, hold a crucial role in bridging this divide. Through training in employability and vocational approaches, teachers can align pedagogy with practical and professional needs, ensuring that education is directly connected to employable skills. For instance, integrating project-based learning, vocational modules, and experiential tasks into classroom activities can help students acquire hands-on skills while reinforcing academic concepts. Teachers who are themselves trained in employability frameworks can foster communication, teamwork, adaptability, and entrepreneurial thinking among

learners—skills consistently highlighted by employers as essential. By reducing this disconnect, TEIs contribute not only to better job prospects for graduates but also to a more skilled, productive workforce. Bridging the skill gap is therefore central to transforming education into a system that truly empowers students to succeed in both local and global markets.

3.3 Digital Transformation and Industry 4.0

The ongoing digital revolution, often described as Industry 4.0, is reshaping industries, workplaces, and education systems worldwide. It demands a new generation of teachers who are technologically competent, adaptable, and capable of preparing students for careers in a rapidly evolving digital economy. Traditional teaching approaches that focus exclusively on textbooks and rote memorization no longer suffice in a world dominated by artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing, and automation. Teacher education, therefore, must prioritize employability and vocational training that fosters digital readiness. Teachers need to be proficient in integrating ICT tools, AI-driven learning platforms, online resources, and digital collaboration methods into their pedagogy, thereby modeling adaptability for students. Such integration not only enriches learning experiences but also prepares students with digital literacy skills critical for future workplaces. Employability-oriented teacher training ensures that educators can guide students in developing problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and digital ethics—essential competencies in Industry 4.0. Additionally, teachers trained in vocational pedagogy can create simulated work environments, digital projects, and entrepreneurial tasks that mirror real-world industry expectations. By aligning education with technological transformation, TEIs ensure that both teachers and students remain competitive, resilient, and prepared for the demands of a digital-first future.

3.4 Holistic Student Development

In the 21st century, education is no longer restricted to academic excellence; it extends to developing well-rounded individuals capable of thriving in personal, professional, and social spheres. Students today require not just subject knowledge but also career awareness, creativity, problem-solving ability, emotional intelligence, and teamwork skills. Holistic development emphasizes preparing students to be adaptable, innovative, and socially responsible citizens. Teachers trained in vocational pedagogy and employability approaches are uniquely positioned to nurture these dimensions in learners. By integrating skill-based education into their teaching, they can expose students to practical problem-solving exercises, collaborative projects, and entrepreneurial tasks that encourage creativity and

resilience. Such practices shift the focus from rote memorization to experiential learning, where students gain confidence, communication skills, and leadership qualities alongside academic knowledge. Moreover, teachers with training in socio-emotional skills can support learners in managing stress, resolving conflicts, and cultivating empathy—qualities essential for success in both professional and personal life. Teacher Education Institutions that embrace employability and vocational training thus contribute to producing graduates who are not only academically competent but also capable of navigating real-world complexities with confidence, adaptability, and a strong sense of responsibility.

3.5 National Economic Growth

The integration of employability and vocational training in Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) extends beyond the classroom, producing long-term benefits for national economies. By equipping teachers with the ability to instill workplace-relevant skills, TEIs indirectly prepare generations of students who are better aligned with industry demands and more capable of securing meaningful employment. This creates a multiplier effect: graduates enter the workforce with confidence, productivity increases, and economic dependency decreases. Teachers who foster entrepreneurial skills and vocational competencies among students also contribute to the creation of self-employment opportunities, thereby reducing unemployment and underemployment challenges. Furthermore, skilled and employable graduates strengthen national competitiveness in global markets by ensuring that the workforce is adaptive to technological and industrial shifts. From a policy perspective, the emphasis on employability and vocational education aligns with national goals of sustainable development, innovation, and inclusive growth. When TEIs embed these elements into their training programs, they not only enhance the professional relevance of teaching but also transform education into a driver of socio-economic progress. Ultimately, empowering teachers with employability and vocational skills contributes directly to building a skilled workforce, fostering entrepreneurship, and achieving long-term national economic resilience and prosperity.

4. Strategies for Integration

4.1 Curriculum Redesign

Redesigning teacher education curricula is a vital strategy for integrating employability and vocational training. Traditional pedagogy must be complemented with modules that emphasize communication skills, leadership development, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and problem-solving. Embedding these competencies

ensures that teachers graduate with both pedagogical expertise and transferable skills essential for 21st-century classrooms. Curriculum redesign should adopt interdisciplinary approaches, experiential projects, and competency-based assessments that link theory with practice. This shift makes teacher education more dynamic, equipping educators to guide students toward holistic development. By balancing academic rigor with employability training, TEIs can prepare teachers to meet evolving societal and workplace demands effectively.

4.2 Industry-Academia Collaboration

Industry-academia collaboration plays a transformative role in bridging the gap between classroom instruction and workplace realities. Partnerships with industries, NGOs, and vocational institutions can provide teacher trainees with access to internships, fieldwork, joint projects, and guest lectures by practitioners. Such collaborations expose future teachers to industry expectations, skill requirements, and real-world problem-solving. Teachers who experience this integration can design lessons that are practically relevant, career-oriented, and aligned with contemporary job markets. Moreover, sustained partnerships create opportunities for innovation, research, and resource sharing between academia and industry. Ultimately, industry-academia collaboration strengthens the employability focus of teacher education, fostering graduates capable of preparing students for professional success.

4.3 Capacity Building for Teacher Educators

Capacity building for teacher educators is central to embedding employability and vocational training in TEIs. Faculty members must undergo regular professional development in vocational pedagogy, ICT integration, experiential learning strategies, and skill-based curriculum design. Training workshops, certification courses, and industry exposure can enhance faculty competence, enabling them to mentor students more effectively. Educators who are confident in skill-oriented teaching approaches can model innovation, adaptability, and lifelong learning for teacher trainees. Moreover, empowering faculty with updated knowledge and digital competencies ensures that they remain relevant in rapidly changing educational landscapes. Strong capacity building creates a multiplier effect, as well-trained educators produce employable, future-ready teachers.

4.4 Establishment of Skill Labs

Establishing skill labs in Teacher Education Institutions provides teacher trainees with hands-on experiences that bridge theory and practice. Such labs can

include facilities for ICT, vocational crafts, entrepreneurship, communication training, and life skills development. Skill labs create interactive environments where students experiment, innovate, and acquire practical competencies beyond traditional classrooms. These spaces encourage collaborative learning, creativity, and real-world problem-solving, equipping future teachers to integrate similar practices into schools. By engaging with modern tools and methodologies, teacher trainees build confidence in facilitating vocational and employability-oriented lessons. Ultimately, skill labs institutionalize experiential learning in TEIs, strengthening their role in producing practice-ready and versatile educators.

4.5 Policy Support and Monitoring

Policy support and monitoring are critical for ensuring the sustained integration of employability and vocational training in teacher education. Government bodies must allocate adequate funding, develop accreditation frameworks, and provide incentives for institutions that effectively implement skill-based education. Policies should encourage innovation, industry collaboration, and research while setting clear benchmarks for outcomes. Continuous monitoring through assessments, audits, and stakeholder feedback ensures accountability and improvement. National education policies, such as India's NEP 2020, provide frameworks for integrating vocational education, but success depends on consistent institutional adoption. Effective policy support transforms TEIs into dynamic centers of employability, aligning teacher training with developmental priorities.

4.6 Promoting Research and Innovation

Promoting research and innovation within Teacher Education Institutions strengthens their role in employability and vocational training. Encouraging action research, innovation projects, and entrepreneurial initiatives helps faculty and students explore new methods for integrating skills into teaching practices. Such initiatives generate evidence-based strategies, align pedagogy with industry needs, and support continuous improvement. Research can identify emerging skill demands, while innovation fosters creative solutions for resource limitations and contextual challenges. Entrepreneurial activities within TEIs also nurture problem-solving and leadership among teacher trainees. By institutionalizing a culture of inquiry and experimentation, TEIs move beyond static instruction, producing teachers who are innovators, researchers, and catalysts for societal transformation.

6. Case Studies and Best Practices

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (India)

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a landmark shift in India's educational vision, strongly advocating for the integration of vocational education across school and higher education systems. It emphasizes that by 2025, at least 50% of learners should have exposure to vocational education, ensuring that practical skills complement academic knowledge. For Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), this directive has significant implications, as it requires future teachers to be trained in vocational pedagogy, employability skills, and multidisciplinary approaches that align with real-world contexts. NEP 2020 also stresses digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and life skills as essential components, reflecting the needs of a rapidly evolving global economy. By restructuring curricula, promoting experiential learning, and fostering industry-academia collaborations, the policy envisions creating teachers who are not only academically sound but also capable of equipping students with employability traits. This makes NEP 2020 a catalyst for transforming teacher education into a more holistic and future-ready enterprise.

Germany's Dual Education Model

Germany's Dual Education Model is globally recognized for its unique integration of academic learning with vocational training, offering valuable lessons for teacher education systems worldwide. This model emphasizes a balance between theoretical instruction in schools and practical, hands-on training within industries, ensuring that learners develop both conceptual knowledge and job-ready skills. The approach enhances employability by making education directly relevant to workplace requirements, reducing skill gaps, and strengthening industry-academia collaboration. For teacher education, this model highlights the importance of preparing teachers who can facilitate project-based learning, encourage applied knowledge, and establish partnerships with industries. Teacher trainees exposed to such a framework learn to embed employability skills in their pedagogy, making education more career-oriented. Adapting aspects of the dual system within TEIs can help create a workforce of teachers who not only meet classroom demands but also prepare students for diverse vocational and professional opportunities, fostering economic growth and social empowerment.

UNESCO-UNEVOC Network

The UNESCO-UNEVOC Network serves as a global platform dedicated to advancing technical and vocational education and training (TVET), fostering collaboration among institutions, policymakers, and practitioners worldwide. Through its extensive network, UNESCO-UNEVOC promotes sharing of best practices, innovative methodologies, and capacity-building initiatives that can be adapted for teacher education programs. The network emphasizes lifelong learning, inclusivity, and sustainability, aligning vocational education with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For Teacher Education Institutions, UNESCO-UNEVOC offers resources that help integrate employability skills, vocational pedagogy, and global perspectives into curricula. Teachers trained under such frameworks are better prepared to bridge skill gaps, embrace digital transformation, and nurture holistic student development. Moreover, the network facilitates international collaboration, allowing TEIs to learn from diverse contexts and adopt strategies that meet local labor market needs. By connecting global expertise with local action, UNESCO-UNEVOC strengthens the role of teacher education in promoting equitable and future-ready education systems.

7. Conclusion

In the current era, teacher education is no longer confined to the traditional domains of pedagogy, curriculum design, and classroom management. The rapid transformations brought about by globalization, technological advancement, and the dynamic labor market demand that teacher education institutions (TEIs) embrace a broader vision. Employability and vocational training are not supplementary additions but essential pillars of teacher preparation, as they ensure that teachers themselves are equipped with critical 21st-century skills such as communication, problem-solving, digital literacy, and adaptability. More importantly, such competencies empower teachers to instill these traits in their students, bridging the long-standing gap between academic knowledge and employability. When TEIs embed vocational and employability components into their curricula, they produce teachers who can nurture not only intellectual growth but also professional readiness, thereby aligning education with the broader socio-economic realities of the current era. This alignment reflects a paradigm shift in teacher education—from producing knowledge transmitters to preparing holistic educators who are agents of transformation.

Moreover, the integration of vocational training within teacher education has significant implications for both learners and society at large. Teachers trained in skill-oriented pedagogy can create classrooms that emphasize experiential learning, project-based activities, and problem-solving approaches. Such teaching methodologies not only make learning more engaging but also directly connect it with workplace requirements and everyday challenges. In this sense, teachers serve as bridges between education and the economy, guiding students toward careers and livelihoods that are meaningful and sustainable. Employability-focused teacher education also contributes to reducing youth unemployment, a pressing concern in many developing economies. By equipping teachers to integrate entrepreneurial thinking, technical skills, and vocational awareness into school education, TEIs help prepare a generation of learners capable of adapting to industry changes, leveraging opportunities, and contributing to innovation-driven growth. At the same time, the emphasis on employability ensures inclusivity, as vocational approaches can open up diverse opportunities for students from marginalized or economically disadvantaged backgrounds, reducing inequities in access to quality livelihoods.

Finally, the broader vision of integrating employability and vocational training in teacher education resonates with national and global development goals. Initiatives such as India's NEP 2020, Germany's Dual Education Model, and the UNESCO-UNEVOC Network highlight the global consensus on the centrality of vocational integration in education systems. For TEIs, aligning with such frameworks means moving beyond outdated models of teacher preparation and adopting innovative, research-driven, and industry-aligned approaches. By fostering digital adaptability, entrepreneurial skills, sustainability awareness, and socio-emotional intelligence in future teachers, TEIs can contribute directly to national economic growth, global competitiveness, and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. Ultimately, teacher education must be envisioned as a catalyst for shaping a future-ready workforce, where teachers play a dual role: securing their own professional relevance while empowering students to thrive in uncertain, complex, and competitive labor markets. Thus, the integration of employability and vocational training into teacher education is not just a reformative step but a transformative necessity for holistic, inclusive, and sustainable educational progress in the current era.

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