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Graduate Employability of Management Students in India: A Critical Review and Bibliometric Analysis

Abhinanda Bhattacharya,[1,2] Dr. Ginni Chawla[1] Dr. Manik Batra[2] Dr. Mohammed Rashid[2], Dr. Himanshi Puri[2], Dr. Saumya Kumar[2]

[1]Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) - Delhi, IIFT Bhawan, B-21, Qutub Institutional Area, New Delhi, India

[2]Sharda University, plot no 32, 34, Knowledge Park III, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201310

Correspondance Email abhinandabhattacharya2023@gmail.com

ORCID - https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9995-3563

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Abstract

Purpose: *The aim of the paper is to provide a critical review and multi-tool bibliometric analysis of graduate employability in management education, specific to India. The study reviews 85 papers (2003-2025) selected using PRISMA and introduces the Multi-Level Employability Framework (MLEF) as an integrative theoretical framework aimed at answering the structural factors behind issues impacting employability of management students in India.*

Design/Methodology/Approach: *Scopus and ABDC-indexed papers were searched using PRISMA, which provided 540 preliminary records, reduced to 85 articles. The tools used were: VOSviewer (v1.6.20) used to map key words co-occurrences; bibliometrix used to plot strategic themes; a country affiliation analysis across 22 countries; and ABDC 2022 quality distribution list. Cross-validation was done by deploying a dual-network diagram that compared an author co-citation and keyword co-occurrence networks.*

Findings: S*ix thematic clusters were found. The biggest cluster (n=19, 22.4%), was the India and Emerging Economies cluster, which is a rarity as most studies favour western scholarship over emerging countries. The dominance towards supply-side of talent pool, i.e., quality of institutions, curriculum etc. is bibliometrically validated. The dual-network analysis shows that grit and cultural intelligence have standalone empirical support, but are marginal to the mainstream models of employability, even though they have been found to be relevant to the outcomes of Indian management graduates.*

Originality/Value: *This is an original work not published anywhere.*

Keywords: *graduate employability, management education, India, bibliometric analysis, PRISMA, skill gap, grit, cultural intelligence, Multi-Level Employability Framework*

1. Introduction

Graduate employability stands at the intersection of higher education policy, labour market economics and institutional practice. The tension is nowhere as pronounced as in India. The country has the largest volume of management education system in the world with hundreds of thousands of MBA and PGDM graduates passing out every year (AISHE, 2022). However, there is an ever-expanding and growing distance between this quantitative measure and quality employment results. The overlap between surveys of employers, national skills reports, and longitudinal institutional studies continually show large percentage of management graduates do not meet professional labour market standards (India Skills Report, 2023, 2024; ASSOCHAM, 2016; Bhatnagar, 2020). India Skills Report (2024) reveals that less than half of management graduates have the competencies needed to enter the professional sphere on the entry-level, thus, the employability gap is not a marginal issue but an endemic one. It is not an incidental, but a structural gap, which is created by six interlocking conditions (credential inflation, curriculum-industry misalignment, pedagogical inertia, underdeveloped

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career infrastructure, dispositional deficits and social capital disadvantages) that interact to create and maintain the gap and are difficult to counteract through incremental intervention. The scholarly research on graduate employability has been growing tremendously within the past 20 years which involves the human capital theory (Becker, 1964), the Career EDGE competency model (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007), psycho-social frameworks (Fugate et al., 2004), graduate capital theory (Tomlinson, 2017) and others. Current bibliometric reviews, however, have not exclusively addressed India as an integral subject for such studies, but have treated it as a local addition to the bibliometric, instead of a significant research strand. This paper addresses these gaps in three ways: (i) by presenting an India-specific bibliometric corpus (n=85, 2003-2025); (ii) by cross-validating the networks in author co-citation and keyword co-occurrence networks, (iii) and by proposing a Multi-level Employability Framework (MLEF) as an integrative architecture relating individual, institutional, and structural antecedents. The main suggestion of the paper is that there is a need to have all three levels of intervention about employability reforms.

2. Review of Literature

The macro-level explanation of the investment in higher education is based on human capital theory (Becker, 1964) which is silent on the issue of dispositional, social, and institutional mediators of the outcome variance. Credential inflation and tiering market segmentation in India is directly explained by signaling theory (Spence, 1973). When credentials are overinflated beyond any skill formation, as is the case with 5,500+ AICTE-approved institutions (AISHE, 2022), the value of the educational content of the degree collapses, and employers' regard such inflated credentials for shortlisting institutes (Brown and Hesketh, 2004). Both theories, however, do not offer prescriptive ways of reforming the institutions. The most popular and actionable framework is the Career EDGE model (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Career EDGE incorporates five pillars, namely, career development learning, work experience, degree subject knowledge, generic skills, and emotional intelligence as the key to employability pointing directly at the deficit in India. The incorporation of all five pillars in a systematic manner is proven by longitudinal validation (Dacre Pool et al., 2014) to have much greater employment results as compared to the selective application of the pillars. Psycho-social framework by Fugate et al. (2004) views employability as a dispositional construct which includes career identity, personal adaptability, social and human capital. There is longitudinal support (De Vos et al., 2011; Rudolph et al., 2017) that agrees that dispositional variables are predictors of career success without considering initial measures of competency. Construct validity has not been made in the Indian management context and there has been selective application of the framework instead of systematic. Graduate capital framework suggested by Tomlinson (2017) illustrates that social, cultural, psychological, and identity capital determine the results in the labour market beyond a formal level of competency-a process that is verified in Malaysia (Singh and Singh, 2008), United Kingdom (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006), and Nigeria (Pitan, 2016). The possession-position-process model by Holmes (2013) argues that the construct of graduate qualities is relationally produced via recognition and social positioning as opposed to the competency bundles, which directly oppose supply-side deficit models. Clarke (2018) builds upon this criticism by showing that individual factors are influenced by the contextual factors to generate consequences that cannot be sufficiently accounted for by any one level of the model. The construct of grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals by Duckworth et al. (2007) is presented as a predictive construct of both academic and career persistence, especially in the case of first-generation learners in tier-2 and tier-3 institutional settings. The cultural intelligence framework developed by Earley and Ang (2003) covers metacognitive, motivational and behavioural aspects of cross-cultural effectiveness, which are directly applicable to the graduates into the various corporate settings. Although both constructs have good independent empirical pedigrees, they are both marginal to mainstream models of employability -

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the bibliometrically validated positioning in Section III and Figure 1.

3. Research Design and Methods

3a. Search String

For the PRISMA, peer-reviewed, empirical or conceptual articles in English published between 2003-2025, indexed in Scopus or the ABDC Journal Quality List (2022) were taken as inclusion criteria. The entire PRISMA screening flow is shown in table 1.

Table 1: PRISMA Screening Flow

Stage	Action	Records (n)	Result (n)
Database search	Multi-string search across Scopus and ABDC-indexed sources	540	540
Deduplication	Removal of duplicates across all strings	78 excluded	462
Title & abstract screening	Excluded: peripheral topics (n=148); restricted access (n=87); non-English (n=52)	287 excluded	175
Full-text eligibility	Excluded: thematic irrelevance (n=34); paywall (n=31); significant overlap (n=25)	90 excluded	85

Source: Authors' compilation following PRISMA (Page et al., 2021).

3b. Bibliometric Analysis and the Dual-Network Diagram

VOS viewer (v1.6.20; Van Eck & Waltman, 2010) was used to create networks of key word co-occurrence with a minimum of five occurrences creating 40 keywords in six clusters. They were generated using Bibliometrix (v4.1.3; Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017) which generated thematic strategic maps that separated motor, niche, basic, and emerging themes. The country-affiliations were confirmed using author metadata in all 85 articles. The ABDC Journal Quality List (2022) provided a quality distribution profile. The methodological novelty of the research is the dual-network diagram (Figure 1), which compares networks of co-citing authors and co-occurrences of keywords to each other. The intellectual genealogy of the field is mapped by Panel A (who cites whom) and the terminological evolution (which concepts cluster together) of the field by Panel B. The two panels can be cross-read to cross-method validate thematic architecture, which has been rarely used in graduate employability reviews before. In cases where theoretical tradition seems to be very evident in Panel A (co-citation) but when its vocabulary is not found in Panel B (keywords co-occurrence), a gap in diagnosis is proved: the tradition is mentioned but has not yet entered the set of effective vocabulary of the discipline.

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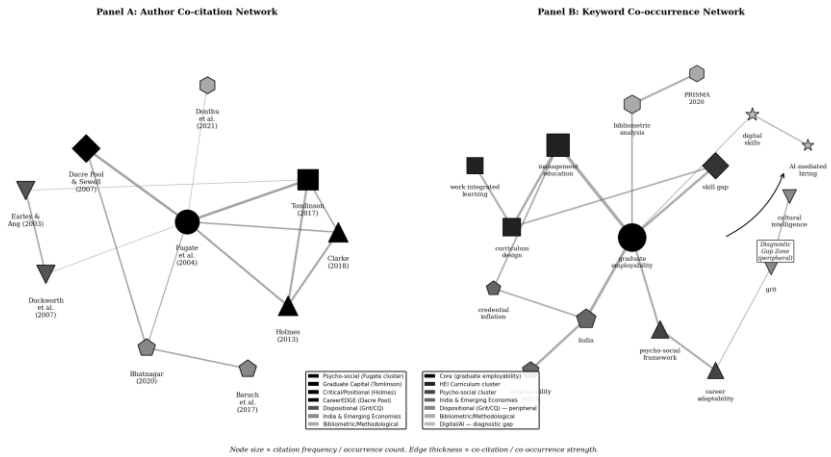
Figure 1: Dual-Network Diagram — Panel A: Author Co-citation Network; Panel B: Keyword Co-occurrence Network (VOSviewer v1.6.20; n=85 articles)



Note: Node size reflects citation frequency (Panel A) and keyword occurrence count (Panel B). Edge thickness reflects co-citation strength and co-occurrence frequency respectively. The 'Diagnostic Gap Zone' in Panel B identifies concepts—AI-mediated hiring, algorithmic literacy, grit, cultural intelligence—that are empirically established in Panel A but peripheral to the terminological core of the field, confirming their under integration into mainstream employability discourse.

Source: Author's own

4. Results and Discussion

4a. Thematic Cluster Distribution

The 85 selected articles were spread over six thematic groups as determined through VOS viewer (Table 2). The cluster with the highest number of publications (n=19, 22.4%), is the India and Emerging Economies cluster. The pre-eminence of the HEI Curriculum cluster (n=16, 18.8%) and the Graduate Skills cluster (n=11, 12.9) as motor themes confirm that focus is more on supply-side of graduates, i.e., quality and curriculum of HEIs than towards industry requirements. The cluster of Digital and Future Skills (n=6, 7.1%), although at the periphery of the network, indicates the fastest growing research front in the field.

Table 2: Thematic Cluster Distribution — VOS viewer Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

#	Cluster Theme	n	%	Strategic Position	Representative Studies
1	Graduate Competencies & Skill Gap	11	12.9	Motor theme	Bhatnagar (2020); Andrews & Higson (2008)
2	HEI Curriculum & Institutional Design	16	18.8	Motor theme	Abelha et al. (2020); Jackson & Bridgstock (2021)
3	Psychological & Psycho-Social Frameworks	13	15.3	Basic/transitional theme	Fugate et al. (2004); Li et al. (2022)
4	India & Emerging Economies	19	22.4	Largest cluster; peripheral to theoretical core	Baruch et al. (2017); Attri & Kushwaha (2020)
5	Digital Skills & Future Employability	6	7.1	Emerging peripheral cluster	Schlegelmilch (2020); Tokas et al. (2025)
6	Bibliometric & Methodological Research	20	23.5	Niche/specialised theme	Donthu et al. (2021); Wahab (2024)

Source: Authors' VOSviewer analysis (v1.6.20); minimum keyword co-occurrence threshold = 5.

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4b. Country Affiliation, Journal Quality, and the Diagnostic Gap

The 85 papers have a high representation of India (n=29, 34.1%). The United Kingdom (n=8) and Australia (n=9) are the next. The ABDC quality distribution reflects an intentional balance between rigour and representativeness: A* (n=3, 3.5%), A-rated (n=21, 24.7%), B-rated (n=34, 40.0%), C-rated (n=12, 14.1%), and Scopus-indexed non-ABDC (n=15, 17.6%). The final category over-represented India-specific journals and open-access journals covering the sources that Scopus-only searches overlook.

The structural node of the co-citation network (Panel A) is Fugate et al. (2004) which serves as the principal co-citation hub. Conceptually, the dominant organizing construct is graduate employability around which curriculum design, graduate skills, career adaptability and even digital themes amalgamate. The high number of keywords related to higher education and curriculum confirm a strong bent in literature towards the supply side, while structural factors like labour market dynamics or even employer practices or needs are seen to be comparatively underrepresented.

However, in Panel B, one can observe that such terms as algorithmic literacy and AI-mediated hiring that are not mentioned at all in the topology of co-occurrence of the keywords, while grit and cultural intelligence, although having a high level of co-citation, are in the peripheral zone of diagnostic gaps. This lack of connection between theoretical establishment (Panel A) and terminological integration (Panel B) validates the fact that these constructs, although referred to frequently in literature, have not yet been thoroughly integrated in the mainstream vocabulary used in the field, thus indicating a gap.

4c. Structural Causes of the Indian Management Employability Deficit

The deficit in management employability in India is structural in nature. The systematic result of six conditions that are interlocked and cannot be dealt with in an incremental manner (Table 3). Credential inflation has led to the loss of educational value of management degree in 5,500+ AICTE-approved institutions (AISHE, 2022), which have caused employers to replace institutional-affiliation screening with qualification-based assessment (Spence, 1973; ASSOCHAM, 2016). Curriculum-industry misalignment is based on content and pedagogical issues. Most management programmes taught are affiliated with outdated syllabi, and applied reasoning and decision-making are suppressed by using standardised curricula and lecturing techniques (Datar et al., 2010; Andrews and Higson, 2008). Pedagogical inertia contributes to the misalignment. Soft skills are highly sought-after learning outcomes, but they are not measured in a manner that would demand its demonstration (Bhatnagar, 2020). Career infrastructure has always been reactive in nature with a shift in focus to placement logistics rather than career development education (Bridgstock, 2009). Dispositional gaps, especially of grit and cultural intelligence, are empirically proven separately, but not addressed on the institutional level (Duckworth et al., 2007; Earley and Ang, 2003). Institutional tier effects are enhanced by social capital differentials and barriers among first-generation learners in a systematic manner, which guarantees structural disadvantage to be replicated across programmes (Tomlinson, 2017; Holmes, 2013).

Table 3: Structural Causes of the Indian Management Employability Deficit

Structural Cause	Core Manifestation	Theoretical Lens
Credential inflation	MBA degree signal eroded; tier-based market segmentation	Spence (1973); Brown & Hesketh (2004)
Curriculum–industry misalignment	Outdated syllabi; knowledge reproduction privileged over application	Datar et al. (2010); Andrews & Higson (2008)
Pedagogical inertia	Lecture-based delivery dominant; soft skills claimed but not assessed	Barrie (2006); Bhatnagar (2020)
Immature career infrastructure	Placement cells focused on logistics; career identity support absent	Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007); Savickas (2005)

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Dispositional deficits	Motivational persistence gaps; insufficient cultural navigation capacity	Duckworth et al. (2007); Earley & Ang (2003)
Structural disadvantage	Social capital differentials; first-generation learner barriers	Tomlinson (2017); Holmes (2013)

Source: Authors' synthesis.

5. The Multi-Level Employability Framework (MLEF)

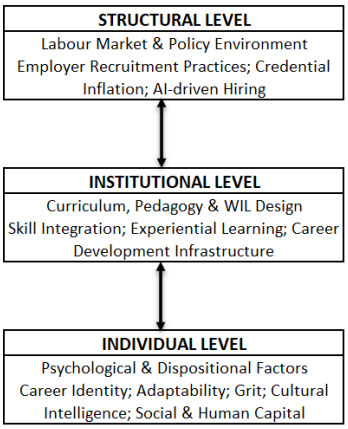
Existing frameworks are analysed on a single level. Thus, none of these can be sufficient and independent of the Indian management context. The MLEF is a combination of psycho-social capital (Fugate et al., 2004), the graduate capital model (Tomlinson, 2017), work-integrated learning (Jackson and Bridgstock, 2021), the critical structural accounts (Holmes, 2013; Clarke, 2018), and the new dispositional literature. Employability is presented as an outcome of dynamic interactions across individual, institutional and structural levels rather than a cumulative product of built-up skills and qualifications.

Level 1- Individual (Psychological Capital Formation) includes career identity, self-efficacy, personal adaptability and social and human capital (Fugate et al., 2004; Van Dam, 2004) with grit (Duckworth et al., 2007) and cultural intelligence (Earley and Ang, 2003) as empirically supported predictors. Digital capital and algorithmic literacy act as mediators in an AI-controlled labour market representing emerging needs (Tokas et al., 2025).

Level 2 - Institutional (Curriculum and WIL Design) includes transversal competency integration, architecture of work-integrated learning and infrastructure of career development. Institutional quality heterogeneity is a moderating variable: curriculum interventions have systematically varied effects on institution levels (Bhatnagar, 2020; Lall, 2011), and it requires institution-level differentiated implementation.

Level 3 - Structural (Labour Market and Policy Environment) has labour market segmentation, the practice of employer recruitment, and the dynamics of credential inflation (Holmes, 2013; Clarke, 2018). The conceptualization of employability is not based on an individual trait, but as a inter-dependent property of individual capabilities, institutional resources, and institutional opportunities and constraints.

Figure 2: THE MLEF FRAMEWORK



Source: Author's own

The Multi-Level Employability Framework (MLEF) introduced in Figure 2 is a layered system where employability is a result of the conformity and non-conformity of three analytically independent yet interconnected domains. The visual structure emphasizes a vertical hierarchy of macro conditions to micro capabilities whereas the

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connecting arrows emphasize that there is continuous feedback as opposed to one-way influence. The top level takes external constraints and cues defining opportunity structures, the middle level is the processes of translating these cues into educational design and delivery processes, and the bottom level is the processes of internalising, responding and acting on these conditions through their competencies and dispositions. The figure should underline the point that failures in employability outcomes are not necessarily due to any level but can be the result of poor coupling between levels, such as when institutional practices do not adapt to labour market changes, or when individual capabilities are not well realised in existing recruitment systems. In this regard, the framework brings into focus the idea of alignment as the key mechanism that creates employability and does not consider it as a fixed attribute or an outcome.

6. Managerial and Policy Implications

The evidence base supports six priority interventions to the management institutions. To achieve transversal competency integration, there must be systematic mapping of Career EDGE dimensions in all courses and reformed assessment methodologies in case studies, group projects, reflective portfolios and others demand demonstration over reproduction of knowledge (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007). In pedagogical transformation, it is important to substitute the lecture delivery with case based and problem-based learning, live consultancy project and business simulation platform. Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) architecture needs to be refocused based on administrative logistics of placements to a structured pedagogical experience with pre-internship professional preparedness, quality-ensured placements and formal post-internship reflection (Jackson and Bridgstock, 2021). The infrastructure of career development needs to be re-established as a curricular role in terms of personalized counseling, labour market literacy and mentoring of alumni. The development of dispositional competencies must include entry validated grit and cultural intelligence tests and should include persistence-building in curriculum implementation. Implementation should be differentiated with tier-2 and tier-3 institutions seeking targeted differentiation, peer consortia of WIL placement pooling and regional employer relationship building. To the employers, the most logical alternative to institutional brand screening is competency-based recruitment that consists of behavioral interviewing, situational judgement tests, and work samples assessment with blind resume screening to remove the affiliation bias (Hogan et al., 2013; Holmes, 2013). To policymakers, there are five priority areas that arise, Firstly, establishing a system to monitor national graduate outcomes. Secondly the develop a competency framework suitable to India using participatory methods. Thirdly, provide more support to research into employer or industry requirements. Fourthly, integrate AI literacy in management courses and lastly offer systematic faculty capacity-building support in work-integrated learning design.

7. Conclusion

Indian management education has been facing a challenging scenario with graduate employability. This critical review and bibliometric analysis have charted the scholarly work using 85 peer-reviewed articles, published in 22 countries, over 20 years and identified six structural causes of the Indian management employability deficit. The study shows that the issue is not owing to a single factor, but a multilevel systemic issue and remedial measures taken are usually fragmented and insufficient.

The paper presents the MLEF as a way to bring together the different levels of influence as the complex environment of Indian management education would require a coordinated effort of students, HEIs, employers and policymakers all working together.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS
The authors declare no conflict of interest.
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