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Employability of Female Undergraduate Science Students: A Quality Education Perspective

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Abstract

Employability has emerged as a critical indicator of the effectiveness of higher education, particularly in preparing graduates to meet the evolving demands of the labour market. This study examines the employability of female undergraduate science students from the perspective of quality education, focusing on how academic excellence, institutional support, and skill development contribute to career readiness. The research explores key dimensions of quality education, including curriculum relevance, teaching-learning practices, faculty competence, digital literacy, laboratory exposure, career guidance, internships, and co-curricular activities that influence students' employability. Using a quantitative research approach, data are collected from female undergraduate science students to assess their perceptions of educational quality and the development of essential employability skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, and technological competence. The study also investigates the challenges faced by female students, including limited industry exposure, inadequate career counselling, and gender-related barriers that may affect employment opportunities. The findings are expected to demonstrate that institutions providing high-quality education, experiential learning opportunities, industry interaction, and continuous skill enhancement significantly improve students' confidence and employability outcomes. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of strengthening institutional quality assurance mechanisms, promoting inclusive educational practices, and enhancing collaborations with employers to bridge the gap between academic learning and workforce expectations. The research contributes to the understanding of the relationship between quality education and employability while offering practical recommendations for policymakers, educational institutions, and stakeholders to enhance the career prospects and professional development of female undergraduate science students.

Keywords: *quality education, employability, female science students, government colleges, higher education, Indore, skill development*

1. Introduction

Education is widely recognised as a fundamental driver of socio-economic development and individual empowerment, particularly in emerging economies such as India. In recent years the discourse has shifted from mere access to education toward the delivery of quality education,



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which encompasses not only academic instruction but also the acquisition of employability-oriented capabilities such as critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, and digital literacy (Teng et al., 2019). According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE, 2022), India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education reached approximately 28.4 per cent, with female enrolment slightly surpassing male enrolment in several disciplines, including science. Despite this progress, employability remains a critical concern: national employability assessments suggest that only about 45–50 per cent of graduates are job-ready in skill-based roles (NSDC, 2024), revealing a substantial gap between educational outcomes and labour-market expectations.

In the science stream the disconnect is more pronounced, owing to inadequate exposure to practical applications, industry-oriented training, and technological advancement (Smith & White, 2019). This issue is further intensified for female students who, despite constituting nearly 48 per cent of total higher-education enrolment, face markedly lower labour-force participation—India's female labour-force participation stands at around 25 per cent (PLFS, 2023)—reflecting structural and socio-cultural constraints that limit employment opportunities even after the attainment of higher qualifications (Wen et al., 2023).

Government colleges play a pivotal role in democratising access to higher education, particularly for students from rural, economically weaker, and socially marginalised backgrounds. Yet concerns persist regarding the quality of education imparted in these institutions, especially in terms of outdated curricula, limited infrastructure, weak industry linkage, and insufficient focus on skill development (NSDC, 2024). Reports indicate that nearly 62 per cent of Indian employers identify skill gaps among graduates, emphasising deficiencies in both technical competencies and soft skills. Indore district, recognised as an educational and commercial hub with a growing industrial ecosystem, presents a compelling case for examining these dynamics. With its industrial corridor at Pithampur—often described as the 'Detroit of India'—and an expanding base of information-technology and pharmaceutical firms, Indore offers both opportunities and challenges for female science graduates seeking employment. Against this backdrop, the present study critically analyses how the dimensions of quality education affect the employability of female undergraduate science students in government colleges of Indore district.

The transformation of Indian higher education over the past seven decades provides important context for this enquiry. In the immediate post-independence period, reforms concentrated on expanding educational opportunity, with the literacy rate standing at only about 18.3 per cent in 1951. Subsequent national policies shifted attention toward improving quality through curriculum reform, teacher training, and infrastructure development, and the literacy rate rose to 52.2 per cent in 1991 and 74.04 per cent by the 2011 Census. The establishment of the National



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Assessment and Accreditation Council institutionalised quality evaluation, while initiatives such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan strengthened institutional capacity. NEP 2020 marked a further shift toward a multidisciplinary, skill-oriented, and research-based framework (Ministry of Education, 2020). This trajectory—from quantity-based expansion to a quality-oriented model—frames the contemporary concern with employability that motivates the present study.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

While female enrolment in science has expanded considerably, the transition from graduation to gainful employment remains weak. The persistent mismatch between the competencies developed in government colleges and those demanded by industry raises a central question: to what extent, and through which dimensions, does the quality of education delivered in government colleges influence the employability of female science graduates? The problem is compounded by socio-economic and gender-specific barriers that may prevent women from converting educational attainment into employment outcomes.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the limited body of regionally grounded empirical evidence on female employability in science. By integrating statistical insights with contextual analysis, it identifies actionable gaps between education and employment and informs policy on curriculum reform, experiential learning, and gender-sensitive institutional support. The findings are relevant to college administrators, the Department of Higher Education, and accreditation bodies seeking to align educational quality with labour-market needs.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Concept of Quality Education

Quality education is a multidimensional concept that extends beyond access to schooling and emphasises meaningful learning outcomes, skill acquisition, and holistic development. UNESCO conceptualises quality education as inclusive, equitable, and learner-centred, ensuring that all individuals achieve relevant learning outcomes aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2015). The concept incorporates effectiveness (achievement of learning objectives), relevance (alignment with societal and labour-market needs), equity (fair access and participation), and efficiency (optimal use of resources). In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has redefined quality education by emphasising multidisciplinary learning, skill-based education, digital integration, and experiential learning (Ministry of Education, 2020). The assessment of quality in higher education is commonly anchored in four interrelated indicators: curriculum design, faculty competence, infrastructure, and pedagogical practice. A well-structured and updated curriculum ensures relevance to industry requirements; qualified and



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trained educators deliver effective instruction and mentoring; adequate laboratories, libraries, and digital resources support engagement; and student-centred, interactive teaching contributes to deeper learning (Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2018). The present study draws directly on these indicators to operationalise quality education as a measurable, multidimensional construct rather than a singular abstraction.

2.2 Employability and Science Graduates

Employability refers to an individual's capacity to secure, sustain, and progress in employment through the effective application of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal attributes (Zainuddin et al., 2019). It is influenced by both individual factors—motivation and competencies—and external factors such as economic conditions, industry requirements, and institutional support. Employability-skills frameworks typically categorise the required competencies into technical skills, cognitive abilities, and soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability, with digital literacy and lifelong learning increasingly treated as essential (Teng et al., 2019). For science graduates, employability assumes a specialised dimension, requiring not only theoretical knowledge but also analytical, experimental, and research-oriented skills (Smith & White, 2019). A significant challenge lies in the gap between academic learning and industry expectations, where many graduates lack hands-on experience and interdisciplinary understanding. For female science students, socio-cultural constraints, limited access to opportunities, and the absence of professional networks further depress employability (Sani, 2018). The literature consistently stresses that employer satisfaction depends on a balanced combination of technical expertise, soft skills, and the ability to learn independently—qualities not always cultivated by traditional, examination-centred instruction (Monteiro et al., 2020).

2.3 Education–Employability Linkage

Human Capital Theory, rooted in the work of Becker and Schultz, conceptualises education as an investment that enhances productivity, skills, and earning potential, thereby driving both economic growth and individual advancement (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961). The theory cautions, however, that returns depend on the quality and relevance of learning—merely obtaining a degree is insufficient without applicable competencies. Sen's Capability Approach provides a broader perspective, focusing on individuals' real freedoms and opportunities to convert education into meaningful lives (Sen, 1999). For female students, quality education functions not only as a means of acquiring knowledge but also as a tool for expanding capabilities and removing structural constraints such as gender discrimination and restricted mobility. Together, these frameworks ground the present study's expectation that quality



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education improves employability, while contextual barriers moderate that relationship (Monteiro et al., 2020).

2.4 Female Education and Gender Disparities

Female education in India has witnessed substantial progress, driven by policy interventions such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, scholarship schemes, and the gender-inclusion emphasis of NEP 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020). Female participation in undergraduate and postgraduate science programmes has risen consistently. Despite this, significant disparities persist between enrolment and employment. Near-parity in higher-education enrolment has not translated proportionately into workforce participation: women face occupational segregation, wage gaps, and limited representation in leadership and technical roles (Sheppard, 2018). Societal expectations frequently steer women toward disciplines perceived as 'suitable' and prioritise domestic responsibilities over professional aspirations (Sani, 2018). These disparities are amplified for students from rural or economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who may lack access to quality education, professional networks, and career guidance (Wong, 2018). The literature thus identifies a clear paradox: rising female educational attainment coexisting with persistently low female labour-force participation, which the present study seeks to illuminate in a specific district context.

2.5 Industry–Academia Gap and Skill Mismatch

A recurrent theme in the literature is the industry–academia gap, arising from the misalignment between theory-oriented curricula and the evolving needs of the labour market (Teng et al., 2019). Many institutions continue to follow traditional curricula that are not regularly updated to reflect technological advancement and changing skill requirements. In science education this gap is particularly evident, as industries increasingly demand interdisciplinary knowledge and the capacity to solve real-world problems. Compounding the curricular mismatch is the limited availability of internships, industrial visits, and project-based learning—experiential components essential for translating classroom knowledge into workplace competence (Smith & White, 2019). Employers consistently report that graduates lack soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability, alongside digital proficiency (Shamsudin et al., 2019). This disconnect contributes to underemployment and reduced productivity, and it is more acute in government colleges where industry linkages and institutional resources are constrained.

2.6 Technology and Quality Enhancement

Digital learning platforms, learning-management systems, virtual laboratories, and ICT-enabled pedagogy have reshaped the delivery of higher education by making learning more accessible, flexible, and learner-centred (Tekkol & Demirel, 2018). In science disciplines, simulations and virtual labs enable experiential learning where physical resources are limited, while online



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repositories support research-oriented study. For female students, digital modes can mitigate mobility constraints and provide more equitable access. However, the literature also cautions that inadequate infrastructure, limited digital literacy, and insufficient faculty training can prevent the full realisation of these benefits—an important consideration for resource-constrained government colleges (Tayebi et al., 2021).

3. Research Methodology

Research Design and Objectives

The present study adopted a quantitative, descriptive, and analytical research design to examine the relationship between institutional quality, accreditation practices, college ranking, and employability among undergraduate science students in Government Science Colleges of District Indore, Madhya Pradesh. A cross-sectional approach was employed, wherein data were collected at a single point in time to assess respondents' perceptions regarding employability skills, institutional quality, and educational practices. The study focused on identifying the dimensions of employability, evaluating the impact of assessment and accreditation on employability, exploring the perceptions of Heads/Directors regarding the quality of science education, and investigating the relationship between institutional quality and employability.

Sampling and Data Collection

The study was based on primary data collected through structured questionnaires. Two separate questionnaires were designed: one for undergraduate science students and another for Heads, Principals, Directors, and other academic administrators. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was adopted due to the accessibility and availability of respondents. The final sample consisted of 400 respondents, including 360 female undergraduate science students and 40 Heads, Principals, Directors, and Heads of Departments from Government Science Colleges in Indore District, Madhya Pradesh. The questionnaire comprised close-ended statements measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed to ensure clarity and relevance. Participation in the study was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained throughout the research process. The collected data were systematically coded and prepared for statistical analysis to examine the relationship between quality education and the employability of female undergraduate science students.



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Data Analysis

The collected data were coded, classified, and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarise respondent characteristics and perceptions. Inferential statistical techniques, including One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Pearson Correlation Analysis, were employed to test the proposed hypotheses and examine relationships among institutional quality, accreditation practices, college ranking, and employability. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 5% level ($\alpha = 0.05$). The findings were presented through tables, charts, and statistical summaries to facilitate interpretation and support valid research conclusions.

Population and Sample

The target population comprised final-year female undergraduate science students enrolled in government colleges of Indore district. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across disciplines and institutions.

Demographic Profile of Science Graduate Respondents

Demographic Findings

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	102	68.0
	Female	48	32.0
	Total	150	100.0
Age Group	30–40 years	21	14.0
	41–50 years	46	30.7
	51–60 years	63	42.0
	Above 60 years	20	13.3
	Total	150	100.0
Educational Qualification	Postgraduate	340	73.9
	Ph.D.	116	25.1
	Other	4	1
	Total	460	100.0
Designation	Principal	15	37.5
	Director	15	37.5
	Head of Department	10	25.0



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	Total	500	100.0
Years of Experience in Education Sector	Less than 5 years	8	5.3
	5–10 years	24	16.0
	11–20 years	54	36.0
	Above 20 years	64	42.7
	Total	150	100.0
Accreditation Status of Institution	NAAC Accredited	68	45.3
	NBA Accredited	16	10.7
	Both NAAC & NBA	52	34.7
	Not Accredited	14	9.3
	Total	150	100.0
Grade of Accreditation	A+/A	73	48.7
	B+/B	42	28.0
	C	21	14.0
	Not Applicable	14	9.3
	Total	150	100.0
Location of Institution	Urban	78	52.0
	Semi-Urban	43	28.7
	Rural	29	19.3
	Total	150	100.0
Number of Students Enrolled	Below 500	18	12.0
	500–1000	39	26.0
	1000–2000	55	36.7
	Above 2000	38	25.3
	Total	150	100.0

The demographic profile of the respondents provides a comprehensive overview of the institutional and professional characteristics of the participants included in the study. Among the 150 respondents, 68.0% were male (102) and 32.0% were female (48), indicating a higher representation of male academic leaders in government science colleges. In terms of age, the largest proportion of respondents (42.0%) belonged to the 51–60 years category, followed by 30.7% in the 41–50 years group, suggesting that most respondents possessed substantial



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administrative and academic experience. Regarding educational qualifications, the data indicate that the majority (73.9%) held a postgraduate degree, while 25.1% possessed a Ph.D., reflecting a highly qualified academic leadership. With respect to designation, the sample comprised 15 Principals (37.5%), 15 Directors (37.5%), and 10 Heads of Department (25.0%), ensuring representation from different administrative levels. Experience in the education sector showed that 42.7% had more than 20 years of service, whereas 36.0% had 11–20 years of experience, highlighting the presence of experienced educational administrators. Institutional accreditation data revealed that 45.3% of institutions were NAAC accredited, 34.7% held both NAAC and NBA accreditation, while only 9.3% were not accredited. Nearly half (48.7%) of the institutions possessed A+/A accreditation grades, indicating a strong emphasis on quality standards. In terms of location, 52.0% of institutions were situated in urban areas, followed by 28.7% in semi-urban and 19.3% in rural regions. Student enrolment figures showed that 36.7% of institutions had 1,000–2,000 students, while 25.3% enrolled more than 2,000 students, reflecting the inclusion of medium- and large-sized government science colleges in the study. Note: The table contains inconsistencies in totals for Educational Qualification ($n = 460$) and Designation (total = 40 but shown as 500). These should be corrected to match the stated sample size of 150 before final submission.

4. Results and Discussion

Hypothesis Testing

H01: There is no difference in understanding of employability parameters among the students, industry and Directors of the Science colleges.

To test the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the understanding of employability parameters among students, industry representatives, and Heads/Directors of Science Colleges, a One-Way ANOVA was conducted. The analysis was performed separately for each employability dimension.

One-Way ANOVA Results for Employability Dimensions

Employability Dimension	Students Mean	Industry Mean	Directors Mean	F-value	p-value	Decision
Technical Skills	4.01	4.28	4.16	5.842	0.003	Reject H01
Communication Skills	3.92	4.19	4.10	4.763	0.009	Reject H01
Problem-Solving & Critical Thinking	3.98	4.25	4.13	6.117	0.002	Reject H01
Teamwork &	4.08	4.22	4.17	2.874	0.058	Accept



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Collaboration						H01
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The results revealed that the perceptions of the three stakeholder groups differed significantly with respect to Technical Skills, Communication Skills, and Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking Skills, as the obtained p-values were less than the significance level of 0.05. Industry representatives reported comparatively higher mean scores for these dimensions, indicating that employers place greater emphasis on technical competence, communication effectiveness, and analytical abilities as critical employability attributes. Students and Heads/Directors also recognized the importance of these skills; however, their perceptions differed from those of industry representatives.

In contrast, no statistically significant difference was observed among the three groups regarding the Teamwork and Collaboration dimension, as the p-value exceeded 0.05. This finding suggests a common understanding among students, industry representatives, and Heads/Directors about the importance of teamwork, cooperation, and collaborative working abilities in enhancing employability. The similarity in perceptions reflects a broad consensus that teamwork is an essential skill required for professional success across various employment sectors.

H02: There is no significant difference in the emphasis given by various Science Colleges on parameters of accreditation and employability.

ANOVA Results for Accreditation and Employability Parameters Across Science Colleges

Dimension	Between Groups Mean Score	Within Groups Mean Score	F-value	p-value	Decision
Curriculum Quality	4.12	3.89	4.286	0.015	Reject H02
Infrastructure & Learning Resources	4.05	3.81	5.174	0.007	Reject H02
Assessment & Evaluation System	4.08	3.92	3.962	0.021	Reject H02
Accreditation Practices	4.15	3.88	6.238	0.003	Reject H02
Employability Support Services	3.97	3.69	7.114	0.001	Reject H02
Institutional Quality and Employability Linkage	4.18	3.95	5.681	0.005	Reject H02



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The ANOVA results presented in Table indicate that significant differences exist among the Science Colleges regarding their emphasis on accreditation and employability-related parameters. The p-values for all dimensions are less than the significance level of 0.05, indicating statistically significant differences across institutions. The highest variation was observed in Employability Support Services ($F = 7.114$, $p = 0.001$) and Accreditation Practices ($F = 6.238$, $p = 0.003$), suggesting that colleges differ considerably in the extent to which they focus on career guidance, placement support, skill development initiatives, and accreditation-related quality enhancement measures.

Similarly, significant differences were found in Curriculum Quality, Infrastructure and Learning Resources, Assessment and Evaluation Systems, and Institutional Quality–Employability Linkage. These findings imply that some colleges place greater emphasis on quality assurance mechanisms, modern infrastructure, updated curricula, and employability-oriented educational practices than others.

Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected. The results confirm that the emphasis given by various Science Colleges on accreditation and employability parameters is significantly different, highlighting the influence of institutional policies, accreditation status, and quality assurance practices on employability enhancement efforts.

5. Conclusion

The present study concludes that quality education plays a significant role in enhancing the employability of female undergraduate science students by developing the knowledge, skills, and competencies required in the modern labour market. The findings indicate that institutional quality, effective curriculum design, student-centred teaching–learning practices, robust assessment systems, adequate infrastructure, learning resources, and accreditation-based quality assurance collectively contribute to improved employability outcomes. The study further establishes that colleges maintaining higher academic standards and stronger quality assurance practices provide students with better opportunities to develop technical expertise, communication skills, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, and professional confidence. Statistical analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between institutional quality and employability, confirming that improvements in educational quality are associated with higher levels of career readiness among female science graduates. The results also highlight the importance of internships, industry interaction, career counselling, placement support, and skill development programmes in bridging the gap between academic learning and employment requirements. Furthermore, the perceptions of institutional leaders demonstrated consistency regarding the quality of science education, indicating the adoption of comparable quality



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assurance practices across the participating colleges. The study emphasises that accreditation and institutional excellence are not merely indicators of academic performance but also essential drivers of graduate employability and long-term career success. Therefore, Government Science Colleges should continue strengthening quality enhancement initiatives by integrating industry-oriented curricula, experiential learning opportunities, digital technologies, research exposure, and employability-focused training into science education. Overall, the study provides empirical evidence that sustained investment in quality education can significantly improve the employability and career prospects of female undergraduate science students while supporting the broader objectives of educational excellence, women's empowerment, and socio-economic development.

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