



EMPLOYABILITY AND ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTION IN THE AI-DRIVEN DIGITAL ERA: PREPARING A FUTURE-READY WORKFORCE

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping labour markets, higher education, and entrepreneurial ecosystems by redefining the competencies required for future employment and entrepreneurship. As intelligent technologies become integral to economic and industrial development, employability increasingly depends on digital competence, adaptability, lifelong learning, and innovation, while entrepreneurial intention has emerged as an important driver of economic resilience and sustainable growth. This study examines the relationship between employability and entrepreneurial intention in the AI-driven digital era through a conceptual research design based on secondary data obtained from official national and international reports. Evidence was synthesized from policy reports published by the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Startup India, NITI Aayog, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum. Based on the synthesized evidence, the study proposes the AI-Driven Employability and Entrepreneurial Readiness (AI-EER) Framework, demonstrating how AI readiness and future skills strengthen employability competencies and entrepreneurial intention to develop a resilient and future-ready workforce. The findings highlight that integrating higher education, AI-enabled skill development, and entrepreneurship is essential for developing a future-ready workforce capable of supporting India's vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

KEYWORDS: Employability, Entrepreneurial Intention, Artificial Intelligence, Future Skills, Workforce Readiness, Digital Transformation, Higher Education, Viksit Bharat 2047.

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become one of the defining technologies of the twenty-first century, transforming industries, labour markets, and educational systems worldwide. The integration of AI, machine learning, automation, and data-driven technologies is changing how organizations operate and redefining the competencies expected from graduates and professionals. Rather than eliminating employment opportunities, AI is restructuring occupations by automating repetitive tasks while increasing demand for analytical thinking, digital literacy, creativity, adaptability, and continuous learning. Consequently, workforce development has shifted from acquiring static knowledge to building dynamic capabilities that enable individuals to work effectively in technology-enabled environments.

This transformation has significantly expanded the concept of employability. Traditionally, employability referred to an individual's ability to obtain and retain employment based on academic qualifications and technical knowledge. In the AI-driven digital economy, however, employability encompasses a broader combination of digital competence, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and lifelong learning. These competencies enable individuals to adapt to technological disruption, respond to changing labour market demands, and sustain long-term career development (OECD, 2026; World Economic Forum, 2025).

Alongside employability, entrepreneurial intention has gained increasing significance as economies seek innovation-driven growth. Entrepreneurial intention reflects an individual's willingness to identify opportunities, mobilize resources, and establish new ventures (Ajzen, 1991; Bird, 1988). The widespread adoption of AI and digital technologies has reduced barriers to entrepreneurship by enabling data-driven decision-making, digital platforms, and scalable business models. Consequently, graduates are expected not only to secure employment but also to develop entrepreneurial capabilities that contribute to innovation, employment generation, and economic resilience.



India provides a significant context for examining these developments because of its demographic advantage, expanding digital economy, and policy emphasis on innovation-led growth. National initiatives such as Digital India, Startup India, Skill India Mission, the National Education Policy 2020, and the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence have collectively strengthened higher education, skill development, entrepreneurship, and digital transformation. Recent reforms under PMKVY 4.0 and the Skill India Digital Hub further integrate AI, future skills, and employability into workforce development, preparing learners for emerging occupations and supporting the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Despite these initiatives, challenges remain in aligning higher education outcomes with rapidly evolving industry expectations. Employers increasingly seek graduates who possess AI readiness, interdisciplinary knowledge, digital competence, and entrepreneurial capability alongside domain-specific expertise. This mismatch highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of how employability and entrepreneurial intention interact within an AI-driven economy.

Accordingly, this study synthesizes evidence from authoritative national and international reports to examine the relationship between employability and entrepreneurial intention in the AI-driven digital era. It further proposes the AI-Driven Employability and Entrepreneurial Readiness (AI-EER) Framework, explaining how AI readiness, future skills, employability competencies, and entrepreneurial intention collectively contribute to developing a resilient, innovative, and future-ready workforce capable of supporting India's long-term economic transformation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The increasing adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed the relationship between higher education, employability, and entrepreneurship, making workforce readiness a strategic priority for governments, educational institutions, and industries. Earlier studies primarily associated employability with educational attainment and occupation-specific skills. Contemporary research, however, views employability as a multidimensional capability comprising digital competence, adaptability, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and lifelong learning. These competencies enable individuals to respond effectively to technological disruption and evolving labour market requirements (OECD, 2026; ILO, 2025).

Entrepreneurial intention represents another important dimension of workforce development. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, entrepreneurial intention reflects an individual's willingness to perform entrepreneurial behaviour based on attitudes, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991). Similarly, Bird (1988) argues that entrepreneurial intention provides the cognitive foundation for venture creation by linking personal aspirations with entrepreneurial action. These theoretical perspectives suggest that entrepreneurial capability develops through education, environmental support, and opportunity recognition rather than individual characteristics alone.

Recent literature further highlights the growing influence of AI on future skills. The World Economic Forum identifies analytical thinking, technological literacy, resilience, creativity, leadership, and continuous learning as critical competencies for future employment (World Economic Forum, 2025). Likewise, the OECD emphasizes that AI is changing the content of work rather than replacing human labour entirely, increasing demand for individuals capable of integrating technological knowledge with human-centred skills such as communication, innovation, and problem-solving (OECD, 2026).

India has adopted a policy-driven approach to address these challenges through initiatives including Digital India, Startup India, Skill India Mission, and the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence. Recent reforms under PMKVY 4.0 and the Skill India Digital Hub demonstrate a transition towards AI-enabled, industry-oriented, and competency-based skill development. These initiatives strengthen employability by integrating digital learning, workplace competencies, apprenticeship opportunities, and future-oriented training within the national skilling ecosystem.

Higher education institutions have simultaneously expanded their role from knowledge providers to workforce development partners. Universities increasingly promote interdisciplinary education, industry collaboration, experiential learning, innovation, and entrepreneurship to improve graduate employability. Entrepreneurship education further contributes by strengthening opportunity recognition, creativity, leadership, and innovation capabilities, thereby supporting both employment and enterprise creation (Lack  s, 2015).

Despite these developments, existing studies generally examine employability, entrepreneurial intention, AI readiness, higher education, and skill development independently. Limited research integrates these dimensions within a single conceptual perspective capable of explaining workforce preparedness in the AI-driven digital era. Addressing this gap, the present study synthesizes evidence from authoritative national and international reports and proposes the AI-Driven Employability and Entrepreneurial Readiness (AI-EER) Framework as an integrated conceptual model explaining how AI readiness, future skills, employability competencies, and entrepreneurial intention collectively contribute to developing a future-ready workforce.

3. RESEARCH GAP AND OBJECTIVES

Although previous studies acknowledge the growing importance of Artificial Intelligence, employability, entrepreneurship, and future skills, these concepts are predominantly examined as separate domains. Existing research provides limited understanding of how AI readiness simultaneously influences employability and entrepreneurial intention through higher education and skill development initiatives. Furthermore, relatively few conceptual studies integrate evidence from national and international policy reports to explain workforce preparedness within the context of India's digital transformation and the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. To address this gap, the present study examines the relationship between employability and entrepreneurial intention in the AI-driven digital era using secondary evidence from authoritative reports. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the changing dimensions of employability in the AI-driven digital economy.
2. Analyse the role of AI readiness and future skills in workforce preparedness.
3. Evaluate the contribution of higher education, skill development, and entrepreneurship initiatives to employability.
4. Develop the AI-Driven Employability and Entrepreneurial Readiness (AI-EER) Framework for preparing a future-ready workforce.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a conceptual research design using secondary data to examine the relationship between employability and entrepreneurial intention in the AI-driven digital era. A conceptual approach is appropriate because the study seeks to synthesize existing evidence and develop an integrated framework rather than empirically test causal relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Secondary data were obtained from official reports published by AISHE, MSDE, NSDC, Startup India, NITI Aayog, OECD, ILO, the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum. These sources provide comprehensive evidence relating to higher education, skill development, entrepreneurship, Artificial Intelligence, and workforce transformation.

The study employs document analysis, thematic analysis, comparative analysis, and trend analysis to identify recurring relationships among AI readiness, future skills, employability, entrepreneurial intention, and workforce development. The synthesized evidence forms the basis for the proposed AI-Driven Employability and Entrepreneurial Readiness (AI-EER) Framework, which explains how these dimensions collectively contribute to preparing a resilient and future-ready workforce.

5. FINDINGS

The analysis of secondary data indicates that the rapid adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming workforce development by redefining the competencies required for employment and entrepreneurship. Evidence from national and international reports demonstrates a growing convergence among higher education, skill development, industry, and entrepreneurship policies to prepare individuals for technology-driven labour markets. The findings are presented under five thematic dimensions that collectively explain how AI readiness, future skills, employability, and entrepreneurial intention contribute to developing a future-ready workforce.

5.1 Artificial Intelligence and Future Skill Requirements

Artificial Intelligence has fundamentally altered workforce requirements by increasing demand for advanced cognitive, technological, and interpersonal competencies. Rather than replacing human labour, AI complements human capabilities by automating routine activities while creating demand for analytical thinking, creativity, communication, digital literacy, and lifelong learning. Consequently, employability increasingly depends on an individual's ability to integrate technological knowledge with transferable skills that remain relevant across changing occupational contexts.

International reports consistently identify future skills as essential for workforce resilience. The OECD highlights that AI adoption is changing job content, requiring employees to continuously update their competencies and adapt to technological innovation. Similarly, the World Economic Forum identifies analytical thinking, technological literacy, resilience, leadership, creativity, and continuous learning as the most important capabilities for future employment. These findings suggest that workforce competitiveness depends not only on technical expertise but also on adaptability and innovation.

India has responded through initiatives such as the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence and PMKVY 4.0, which integrate AI, machine learning, cybersecurity, Industry 4.0, and other emerging technologies into national skilling programmes. These initiatives demonstrate a policy shift from conventional vocational training towards AI-enabled workforce development that aligns education with future labour market demands.

Table 1

Comparison of Future Skills Identified Across Major National and International Reports

Report	Major Future Skills	Strategic Focus
OECD	AI literacy, adaptability, lifelong learning	Workforce resilience
World Economic Forum	Analytical thinking, creativity, technological literacy	Future jobs
NITI Aayog	AI capability, innovation, digital skills	AI readiness
MSDE	Employability skills, AI fundamentals, workplace readiness	Skill development
NSDC	Industry-aligned technical skills, continuous upskilling	Industry preparedness

Note. Compiled by the author using Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2026), World Economic Forum (2025), NITI Aayog (2018), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2025), and National Skill Development Corporation (2024).

The findings indicate that future employability depends upon integrating AI readiness with transferable competencies rather than relying solely on academic or technical qualifications.

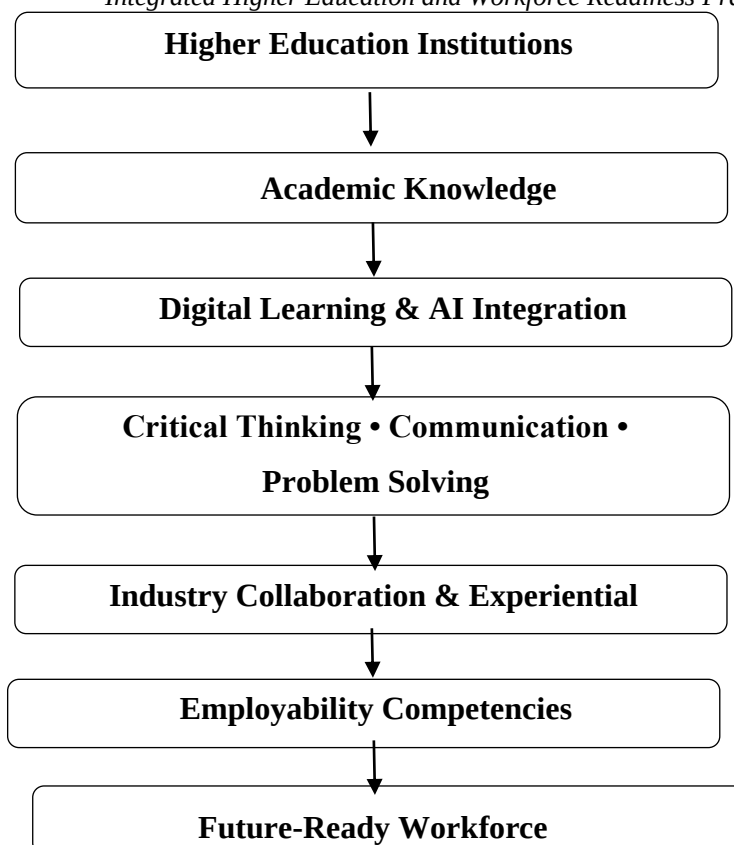
5.2 Higher Education and Workforce Readiness

Higher education institutions play a critical role in preparing graduates for AI-enabled labour markets. AISHE reports indicate continuous expansion in universities, colleges, and student enrolment, reflecting improved access to higher education. However, increasing enrolment alone cannot guarantee employability unless educational outcomes remain aligned with changing industry expectations.

Recent reforms encourage multidisciplinary education, digital competence, experiential learning, and stronger collaboration between universities and industry. These initiatives seek to improve graduate readiness by integrating academic knowledge with practical skills, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Simultaneously, national skilling programmes complement higher education through certifications, apprenticeships, and digital learning opportunities that enhance workforce preparedness.

The evidence suggests that higher education is gradually transitioning from a knowledge-centred model towards a competency-based approach emphasizing AI literacy, problem-solving, communication, innovation, and entrepreneurial capability. This transformation strengthens graduate employability while supporting national workforce development objectives.

Figure 1

Integrated Higher Education and Workforce Readiness Framework

Note. Developed by the author based on All India Survey on Higher Education (2022, 2023, 2024) and Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2025).

5.3 Skill Development Ecosystem and Workforce Readiness

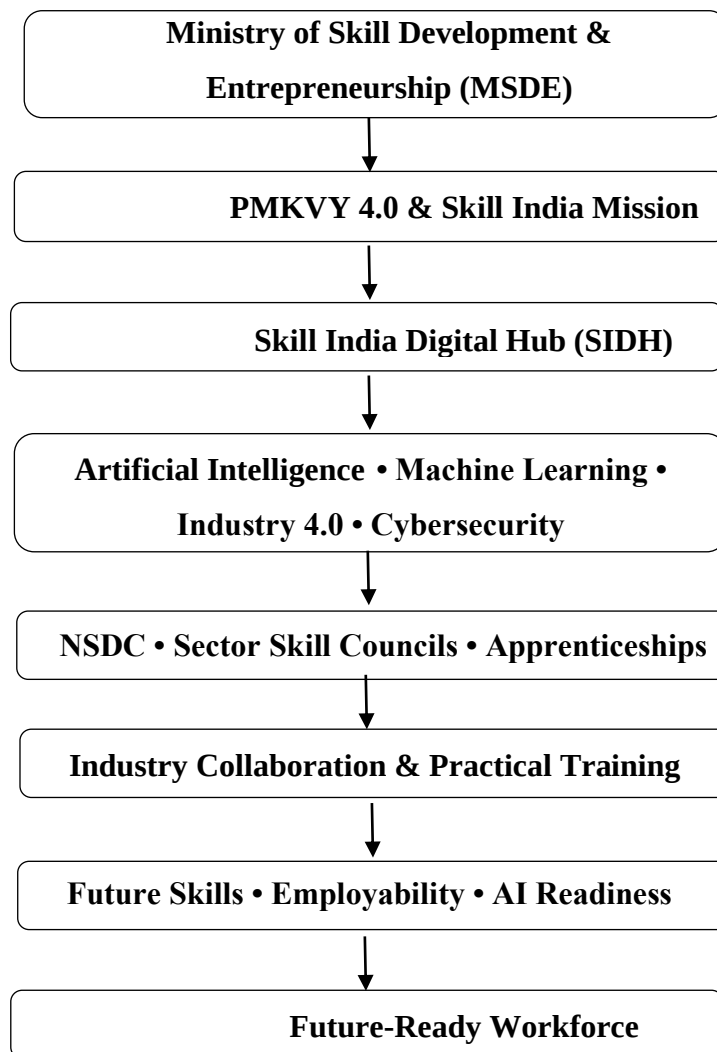
India's skill development ecosystem has evolved from conventional vocational training towards a technology-driven and industry-oriented model that supports workforce transformation. Through initiatives such as PMKVY 4.0, the Skill India Digital Hub, apprenticeship programmes, and Sector Skill Councils, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) have strengthened the alignment between education, industry, and emerging technologies. This transition reflects a broader policy shift towards continuous reskilling and lifelong learning as essential components of employability in the AI-driven economy.

A notable feature of recent reforms is the integration of Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, cybersecurity, Industry 4.0, renewable energy, and other emerging technologies into national skilling programmes. Simultaneously, employability modules focusing on communication, teamwork, digital literacy, financial literacy, and workplace readiness have been incorporated into training curricula to improve graduate preparedness. The Skill India Digital Hub further strengthens this ecosystem by enabling digital registration, certification, candidate tracking, and AI-enabled learning support, thereby improving transparency and accessibility within the national skilling framework.

The findings indicate that India's skill development strategy extends beyond technical training by integrating digital competence, practical experience, and industry collaboration. This integrated approach enhances workforce readiness while supporting innovation, lifelong learning, and sustainable employability within rapidly changing labour markets.

Figure 2

India's AI-Oriented Skill Development Ecosystem





Note. Developed by the author based on Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2025) and National Skill Development Corporation (2024).

5.4 Entrepreneurship Ecosystem and Entrepreneurial Intention

Entrepreneurial intention has become an increasingly important outcome of AI-driven economic transformation. Digital technologies have reduced traditional barriers to entrepreneurship by improving access to information, digital platforms, innovation networks, and global markets. Consequently, entrepreneurship has evolved beyond business creation to become a strategic mechanism for innovation, employment generation, and sustainable economic development.

Government initiatives, particularly Startup India, have strengthened India's entrepreneurial ecosystem by promoting startup recognition, incubation, mentoring, funding support, and digital infrastructure. The continued growth of recognised startups, employment generation, women-led enterprises, and regional innovation ecosystems demonstrates the expanding contribution of entrepreneurship to national development. At the same time, entrepreneurship development programmes implemented through MSDE, NIESBUD, and IIE encourage innovation, opportunity recognition, and enterprise creation among students and young professionals.

Table 2
Key Indicators of India's Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

Indicator	Observation	Strategic Significance
Recognised Startups	Continuous growth since 2016	Expansion of entrepreneurial ecosystem
Employment Generation	Significant increase in startup-created jobs	Economic development
Women-led Startups	Rising participation	Inclusive entrepreneurship
Sectoral Diversity	IT, FinTech, HealthTech, Manufacturing, AgriTech	Innovation-led growth
Regional Expansion	Growth in Tier-II and Tier-III cities	Balanced development
AI Adoption	Increasing use of AI-enabled business models	Global competitiveness

Note. Compiled by the author using Startup India (2025) and Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade publications. The findings indicate that employability and entrepreneurial intention are complementary outcomes of workforce development. Individuals possessing AI readiness, digital competence, innovation capability, and future skills are better prepared for both organisational employment and entrepreneurial careers, strengthening India's transition towards a knowledge-driven economy.

5.5 Integrated Analysis

The findings demonstrate that workforce preparedness in the AI-driven digital era depends on the integration of higher education, skill development, employability, and entrepreneurship rather than treating these domains independently. Higher education provides foundational knowledge, while national skilling initiatives enhance practical competencies through AI-enabled learning, industry collaboration, and lifelong learning opportunities. Entrepreneurship programmes further strengthen innovation capability by encouraging opportunity recognition, enterprise creation, and value generation.

Artificial Intelligence functions as the connecting element across this ecosystem by reshaping educational practices, workforce requirements, industrial transformation, and entrepreneurial opportunities. Consequently, AI readiness, future skills, employability competencies, and entrepreneurial intention should be viewed as mutually reinforcing dimensions of workforce development rather than isolated capabilities.

The integrated evidence from national and international reports therefore provides the conceptual foundation for the AI-Driven Employability and Entrepreneurial Readiness (AI-EER) Framework presented in the following section. This framework explains how AI readiness and future skills collectively strengthen employability and entrepreneurial intention, ultimately contributing to the development of a resilient, innovative, and future-ready workforce.

6. AI-Driven Employability and Entrepreneurial Readiness (AI-EER) Framework

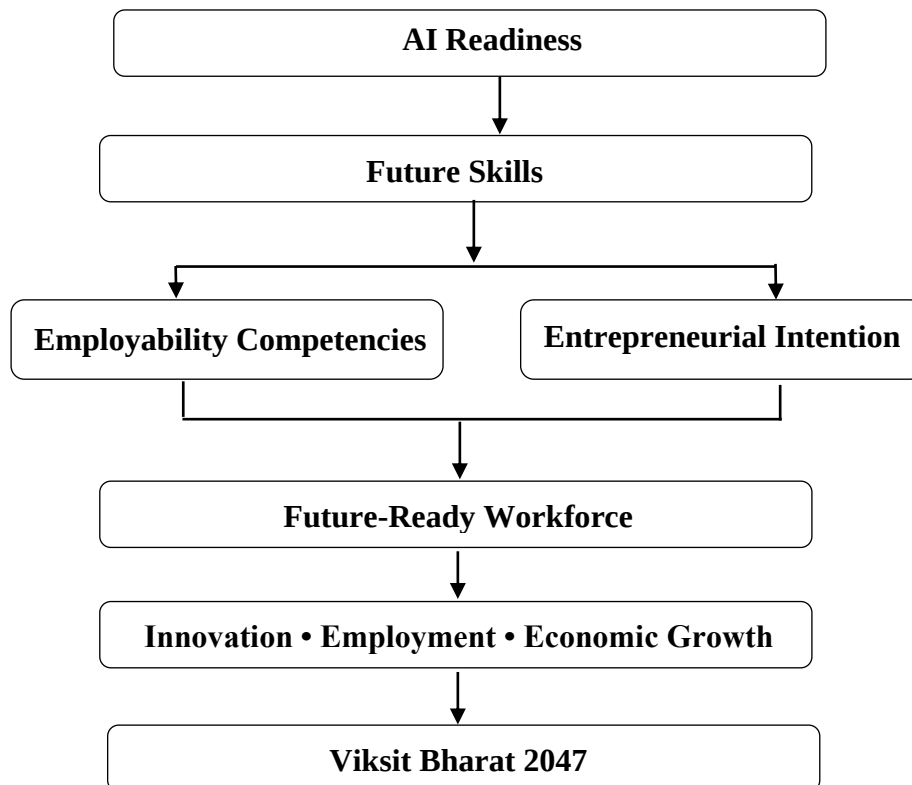
The analysis indicates that workforce preparedness in the AI-driven digital era requires an integrated approach that combines Artificial Intelligence (AI) readiness, future skills, employability competencies, and entrepreneurial intention. Existing studies generally examine these dimensions independently, whereas the present study integrates them into the AI-Driven Employability and Entrepreneurial Readiness (AI-EER) Framework. The framework explains how AI-enabled learning and skill development strengthen employability while simultaneously fostering entrepreneurial capability.

The framework positions AI readiness as the foundation of workforce transformation. AI readiness refers to an individual's ability to understand, adopt, and effectively utilise AI-enabled technologies in educational, professional, and entrepreneurial environments. As AI becomes increasingly embedded across industries, workforce competitiveness depends not only on technical expertise but also on the ability to adapt to technological change and continuously acquire new competencies.

AI readiness facilitates the development of future skills such as digital literacy, analytical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and lifelong learning. These competencies enhance employability by improving workplace adaptability, professional performance, and career resilience. Simultaneously, they strengthen entrepreneurial intention by encouraging opportunity recognition, innovation, value creation, and enterprise development. Consequently, employability and entrepreneurship should be viewed as complementary outcomes supported by the same set of future-oriented competencies. The AI-EER Framework therefore provides an integrated perspective for higher education institutions, policymakers, industry, and skill development agencies to design education and training systems that simultaneously enhance workforce readiness and entrepreneurial capability. By strengthening AI readiness and future skills, the framework contributes to building a resilient, innovation-driven, and globally competitive workforce capable of supporting India's vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Figure 3

AI-Driven Employability and Entrepreneurial Readiness (AI-EER) Framework



Note. Developed by the author. The AI-Driven Employability and Entrepreneurial Readiness (AI-EER) Framework illustrates how AI readiness and future skills collectively strengthen employability competencies and entrepreneurial intention, leading to the development of a resilient and future-ready workforce supporting India's vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

7. DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Artificial Intelligence has fundamentally reshaped the relationship between higher education, skill development, employability, and entrepreneurship. Rather than treating employability and entrepreneurial intention as separate outcomes, the study shows that both are strengthened by a common set of competencies, including AI readiness, digital literacy, analytical thinking, adaptability, and innovation. This integrated perspective reflects the changing nature of work, where individuals are expected to possess the capability to succeed in organisational employment while simultaneously identifying entrepreneurial opportunities.

The AI-EER Framework extends existing literature by positioning AI readiness as the foundation for developing future skills that enhance both employability and entrepreneurial intention. Unlike conventional approaches that focus primarily on employment or entrepreneurship independently, the framework demonstrates how these dimensions reinforce one another through continuous learning, industry collaboration, and technology-enabled skill development.

The findings further suggest that higher education institutions, government agencies, industry, and entrepreneurship support organisations should adopt collaborative strategies that integrate AI education, practical skill development, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Such an ecosystem-oriented approach will strengthen workforce resilience, improve global competitiveness, and support India's transition towards a knowledge-driven economy aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.



8. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicate that preparing a future-ready workforce requires coordinated action across education, industry, government, and entrepreneurship ecosystems. Based on the analysis, the following strategic recommendations are proposed.

Higher education institutions should integrate Artificial Intelligence, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and experiential learning into academic curricula to improve graduate readiness. Government agencies should strengthen policy convergence among higher education, skill development, and entrepreneurship initiatives while expanding AI-enabled skilling programmes and industry partnerships.

Industry should actively collaborate with educational institutions through internships, apprenticeships, mentoring, and curriculum development to reduce the gap between education and employment. Skill development agencies should prioritise continuous reskilling, lifelong learning, and micro-credential programmes to address rapidly changing workforce requirements. Entrepreneurship support organisations should strengthen incubation, mentoring, financial assistance, and innovation ecosystems to encourage enterprise creation, particularly among women and young entrepreneurs.

Table 3

Strategic Roadmap for Developing a Future-Ready Workforce

Stakeholder	Strategic Priority
Government	Strengthen AI, higher education, and skilling policy integration
Higher Education Institutions	Embed AI, future skills, and entrepreneurship into curricula
Industry	Expand internships, apprenticeships, and collaborative training
MSDE & NSDC	Scale AI-enabled skilling and lifelong learning initiatives
Entrepreneurship Support Agencies	Strengthen incubation, mentoring, and startup support
Students & Professionals	Continuously upskill and develop entrepreneurial capabilities

Note. Developed by the author based on the findings of the study.

9. CONCLUSION

Artificial Intelligence is redefining workforce development by transforming the competencies required for employment and entrepreneurship. The findings of this study demonstrate that employability in the digital era extends beyond academic qualifications and depends upon AI readiness, future skills, adaptability, innovation, and lifelong learning. Entrepreneurial intention complements employability by enabling individuals to create innovative solutions, generate employment, and contribute to sustainable economic development.

The proposed AI-Driven Employability and Entrepreneurial Readiness (AI-EER) Framework provides an integrated perspective explaining how AI readiness strengthens future skills, which subsequently enhance employability competencies and entrepreneurial intention. The framework offers practical guidance for higher education institutions, policymakers, industry, and skill development agencies seeking to prepare a resilient and future-ready workforce.

Overall, the study concludes that strengthening AI-enabled education, competency-based skill development, and entrepreneurship ecosystems will enhance workforce resilience, foster innovation, improve global competitiveness, and contribute to achieving India's vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. This integrated approach positions human capital as a strategic driver of inclusive and sustainable national development.

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