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DESIGNING CAREERS THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF CURRICULUM FLEXIBILITY AND SKILL-BASED LEARNING IN ENHANCING CAREER READINESS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose:

This study examines the role of interdisciplinary education in enhancing career readiness among undergraduate students. Specifically, it investigates how interdisciplinary exposure, skill-based learning, and curriculum flexibility influence career readiness through the mediating roles of career clarity and critical thinking.

Design/Methodology/Approach:

A quantitative cross-sectional research design was adopted. Data were collected from 150 undergraduate students enrolled in an interdisciplinary degree programme using a structured questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale. Hypotheses were tested using structural model analysis.

Findings:

The results indicate that interdisciplinary exposure significantly enhances career clarity and critical thinking. Skill-based learning and curriculum flexibility were found to have direct positive effects on career readiness. Furthermore, career clarity and critical thinking significantly predict career readiness. The structural model explains 68% of the variance in career readiness, indicating substantial explanatory power.

Implications:

The findings suggest that universities should promote interdisciplinary structures, embed

skill-based learning components, and provide flexible curriculum pathways to enhance students' vocational preparedness. Structured career development support should also be integrated within academic programmes.

Originality/Value:

This study contributes empirical evidence to the limited literature on interdisciplinary degree models and employability, highlighting the importance of outcome-based and flexible educational frameworks in strengthening youth career readiness.

Keywords:

Interdisciplinary Education; Career Readiness; Curriculum Flexibility; Skill-Based Learning; Career Clarity; Critical Thinking; Outcome-Based Education; Youth Employability

1. INTRODUCTION

The global labour market is undergoing structural transformation driven by digitalisation, automation, artificial intelligence, and rapid technological convergence. Traditional degree structures that emphasise narrow disciplinary knowledge are increasingly criticised for failing to equip graduates with adaptive, transferable, and employability-oriented skills. Across countries, concerns have emerged regarding the growing mismatch between academic qualifications and industry requirements, particularly in the context of youth unemployment and underemployment. This shift has intensified the call for higher education institutions to redesign curricula in ways that prioritise competencies, flexibility, and career readiness.

In response to these challenges, outcome-based education (OBE) has gained prominence as a pedagogical framework that shifts focus from content delivery to measurable learning outcomes. OBE emphasises clearly defined competencies, practical skills, and demonstrable performance indicators that align educational experiences with real-world demands (Spady, 1994). Unlike traditional input-driven systems, outcome-based models prioritise what learners can actually do after completing a programme, thereby strengthening the link between education and employability. Within the Indian context, the National Education Policy 2020 explicitly advocates multidisciplinary learning, flexibility in curriculum design, and integration of vocational skills to enhance graduate employability (Government of India, 2020).

Interdisciplinary education has emerged as a complementary reform strategy within this broader transformation. Research suggests that exposure to multiple domains enhances cognitive flexibility, problem-solving ability, and integrative thinking (Repko & Szostak, 2017). By encouraging students to connect concepts across disciplines, interdisciplinary learning fosters critical thinking and adaptability—skills widely recognised as essential for the twenty-first-century workforce (World Economic Forum, 2023). In addition, experiential and skill-based learning approaches have been shown to improve self-efficacy and career preparedness among students (Kolb, 1984; Yorke, 2006). Career readiness, often conceptualised as the possession of knowledge, skills, and attributes necessary for successful transition into employment, is increasingly treated as a central outcome of higher education (Yorke, 2006). Beyond technical competence, career readiness encompasses soft skills, adaptability, decision-making ability, and career clarity. Theoretical perspectives such as Human Capital Theory posit that investment in education enhances productivity and employability (Becker, 1964), while Career Construction Theory emphasises the role of personal agency and adaptability in shaping career trajectories (Savickas, 2005). These frameworks collectively highlight the importance of educational structures that enable students not merely to acquire knowledge but to actively design their careers. In line with these reforms, flexible interdisciplinary programmes such as the “Design Your Degree” model introduced at the University of Jammu aim to operationalise the principles of outcome-based and multidisciplinary education. By allowing students to select courses across domains and align their academic pathways with career aspirations, such programmes seek to foster career clarity, skill development, and professional confidence. However, despite policy advocacy and conceptual discussions, empirical research examining how students experience and interpret such interdisciplinary models remains limited, particularly within the Indian higher education context.

The present study addresses this gap by exploring student narratives to understand how interdisciplinary education contributes to career design and readiness. Specifically, it investigates how flexibility in curriculum, exposure to multiple disciplines, skill-based learning, and career orientation collectively influence students’ perceptions of career clarity, critical thinking, and employability preparedness. By foregrounding student experiences, this research contributes preliminary empirical evidence to the growing discourse on outcome-based and interdisciplinary higher education reforms.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Interdisciplinary Education and Career Clarity

Interdisciplinary education has emerged as a transformative model in higher education, particularly in response to the increasing complexity of global socio-economic and technological landscapes. Traditional discipline-specific programmes often compartmentalise knowledge, limiting students' exposure to diverse perspectives and problem-solving frameworks. In contrast, interdisciplinary education promotes integration of concepts across domains, thereby enhancing cognitive flexibility, synthesis, and integrative reasoning (Repko & Szostak, 2017).

Empirical research suggests that interdisciplinary exposure broadens students' understanding of real-world issues by enabling them to connect knowledge from multiple fields (Lattuca, Voigt, & Fath, 2004). This expanded intellectual horizon not only strengthens analytical capabilities but also allows students to explore varied professional pathways. Exposure to different disciplines can stimulate reflection about interests, strengths, and career possibilities, ultimately contributing to greater career clarity.

Career clarity refers to the degree to which individuals possess a defined understanding of their career goals and pathways. According to Career Construction Theory, individuals actively shape their vocational identities through exploration and meaning-making processes (Savickas, 2005). Interdisciplinary environments, by offering academic exploration, may facilitate this process by enabling students to align academic experiences with emerging career aspirations. Thus, interdisciplinary education is not merely a pedagogical innovation but also a structural mechanism that may influence career decision-making and vocational awareness.

H1: Interdisciplinary exposure is positively associated with career clarity among students.

2.2 Interdisciplinary Learning and Critical Thinking

One of the most widely acknowledged benefits of interdisciplinary education is the development of higher-order cognitive skills. Interdisciplinary learning requires students to synthesise information from different knowledge systems, evaluate contrasting viewpoints, and apply integrative reasoning to complex issues (Repko & Szostak, 2017). Such intellectual

engagement promotes critical thinking—defined as the ability to analyse, evaluate, and interpret information in a reasoned manner.

Research indicates that interdisciplinary programmes enhance students' ability to approach problems from multiple perspectives and engage in reflective judgement (Lattuca et al., 2004). In contemporary labour markets characterised by uncertainty and rapid innovation, critical thinking is consistently identified as a core employability competency (World Economic Forum, 2023). Critical thinking may also function as an intermediate mechanism linking educational experience to career readiness. Students who develop stronger analytical and evaluative skills are better equipped to interpret labour market demands, assess opportunities, and make informed career decisions.

H2: Interdisciplinary exposure is positively associated with the development of critical thinking skills.

2.3 Outcome-Based and Skill-Oriented Learning

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) represents a shift from content-centred instruction to competency-driven educational design. Spady (1994) emphasised that learning should be defined in terms of demonstrable outcomes that reflect real-world application. Within higher education, outcome-based models typically integrate experiential learning, project-based assessments, and skill-oriented activities. Experiential Learning Theory suggests that knowledge acquisition is strengthened when learners engage in active experimentation and reflective observation (Kolb, 1984). Such experiential and skill-based pedagogies enable students to develop practical competencies alongside theoretical knowledge. Research indicates that skill-oriented learning enhances self-efficacy, communication ability, and problem-solving competence (Yorke, 2006).

In employability discourse, skill-based training is often considered a primary determinant of career readiness. Graduates equipped with applied competencies are perceived to transition more effectively into professional roles. Therefore, outcome-based and skill-oriented learning structures may directly influence students' perception of their preparedness for employment.

H3: Skill-based and outcome-oriented learning is positively associated with perceived career readiness.

2.4 Curriculum Flexibility and Career Design

Flexible curriculum structures provide students with autonomy in selecting courses aligned with personal interests and career goals. Such autonomy fosters ownership of learning and enhances alignment between academic pathways and vocational aspirations. Social Cognitive Career Theory suggests that self-directed exploration strengthens career decision-making self-efficacy (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

Flexibility also allows students to combine diverse disciplinary areas, thereby creating customised academic trajectories. This personalised approach can promote greater engagement and deeper reflection about professional identity. When students perceive that their degree structure supports intentional career design, they may experience stronger confidence in navigating future occupational transitions.

In the context of rapidly evolving industries, flexibility is increasingly recognised as essential for preparing adaptable graduates capable of responding to emerging opportunities.

H4: Curriculum flexibility is positively associated with career readiness.

2.5 Career Clarity and Career Readiness

Career clarity plays a central role in shaping professional outcomes. Individuals who possess a clear understanding of their career goals are more likely to engage in strategic skill acquisition, proactive networking, and informed decision-making (Savickas, 2005). Career clarity enables students to align educational efforts with long-term objectives, thereby strengthening preparedness for employment.

Empirical research suggests that clarity of vocational goals enhances motivation, persistence, and self-regulation—factors that contribute to successful career transitions (Lent et al., 1994). In interdisciplinary and flexible educational settings, career clarity may function as a psychological mechanism through which academic experiences translate into employability readiness.

H5: Career clarity is positively associated with career readiness.

2.6 Critical Thinking as a Pathway to Career Readiness

Critical thinking not only enhances academic performance but also strengthens professional adaptability. Employers increasingly prioritise graduates who can evaluate information, solve novel problems, and make evidence-based decisions (World Economic Forum, 2023).

From a theoretical standpoint, critical thinking supports adaptive career behaviours by enabling individuals to assess risks, interpret labour market trends, and respond strategically to changing environments. As interdisciplinary education promotes integrative reasoning, critical thinking may serve as an intermediary linking educational exposure to employability outcomes.

Students who demonstrate higher levels of analytical competence may perceive themselves as more prepared to engage in professional contexts requiring independent judgement and problem-solving.

H6: Critical thinking is positively associated with career readiness.

Conceptual Integration

The literature collectively suggests that interdisciplinary exposure, outcome-based skill development, and curriculum flexibility function as foundational educational inputs. These inputs contribute to internal psychological and cognitive mechanisms particularly career clarity and critical thinking which ultimately enhance students' perception of career readiness.

This integrated framework provides a coherent theoretical basis for examining how interdisciplinary education influences career design through student narratives.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design using descriptive and correlational approaches to examine the relationship between interdisciplinary education and career readiness among undergraduate students. The descriptive component was used to determine the overall level of interdisciplinary exposure, skill-based learning, curriculum flexibility, career clarity, critical thinking, and career readiness. The correlational component was utilized to examine the relationships among these variables and to test the proposed hypotheses.

The research was conducted among students enrolled in an interdisciplinary degree programme that allows flexibility in course selection and emphasizes outcome-based and skill-oriented learning. The study aimed to investigate how academic structure and learning experiences influence students' perceptions of career readiness.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected at a single point in time from undergraduate students. This design was considered appropriate because it allows examination of relationships among variables without manipulating the study environment.

The descriptive analysis was used to compute mean scores, standard deviations, and distribution levels of the studied variables. Inferential analysis, including correlation and regression analysis, was used to examine the strength and direction of relationships among



interdisciplinary exposure, skill-based learning, curriculum flexibility, career clarity, critical thinking, and career readiness.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in the interdisciplinary degree programme. A total of 150 students participated in the study. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who were actively enrolled in the programme and had experienced its interdisciplinary and flexible learning structure. The sample included students from different academic years to ensure representation of varied learning experiences.

The sample size of 150 was considered adequate for statistical analysis, including correlation and regression testing, and sufficient to examine the proposed hypotheses.

3.3 Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising multiple sections (see table 1). The instrument was developed based on established theoretical foundations including Career Construction Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory, and Outcome-Based Education principles.

The questionnaire consisted of the following constructs:

1. Interdisciplinary Exposure
2. Skill-Based Learning
3. Curriculum Flexibility
4. Career Clarity
5. Critical Thinking
6. Career Readiness

Higher scores indicated stronger agreement with the statements and higher levels of the measured construct. Content validity was ensured through expert review and alignment with existing literature. Reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine internal consistency of the constructs.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed to students during academic sessions with prior permission from the concerned authorities. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential and used strictly for academic purposes.

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. Respondents were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using statistical software. The analysis was conducted in the following stages:

1. Descriptive statistics to determine mean, standard deviation, and distribution levels of all variables.
2. Reliability analysis to assess internal consistency of the measurement scales.
3. Pearson correlation analysis to examine relationships among variables.
4. Regression analysis to test the predictive influence of interdisciplinary exposure, skill-based learning, curriculum flexibility, career clarity, and critical thinking on career readiness.

The significance level for hypothesis testing was set at $p < .05$.

Participants were informed about the objectives of the study prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. No personal identifying information was recorded, and data were used solely for academic research purposes.

Table1: Constructs of the study

Construct	Code	No. of Items	Sample Item	Measurement Scale
Interdisciplinary Exposure	IE	4	“Studying subjects from different disciplines has broadened my career perspectives.”	5-point Likert (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)
Skill-Based Learning	SBL	4	“Practical assignments and projects have enhanced my job-related skills.”	5-point Likert
Curriculum Flexibility	CF	3	“The flexibility in choosing courses has helped me align my studies with my career goals.”	5-point Likert
Career Clarity	CC	4	“I have a clear understanding of my future career path.”	5-point Likert
Critical Thinking	CT	4	“This programme has improved my ability to analyse complex problems.”	5-point Likert
Career Readiness	CR	4	“I feel prepared to enter the job market after completing my degree.”	5-point Likert

4. RESULT

4.1. Measurement Model

The reliability and convergent validity of the constructs were assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha (α), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Cronbach’s Alpha values for all constructs ranged from 0.842 to 0.903, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.904 to 0.931, surpassing the recommended cut-off value of 0.70, thereby confirming strong construct reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All AVE values were above the minimum threshold of 0.50, as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), indicating that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its indicators. This demonstrates adequate convergent validity.

Overall, the measurement model (Table 2) satisfies the recommended criteria for internal consistency and convergent validity. These findings confirm that the latent constructs—Interdisciplinary Exposure, Skill-Based Learning, Curriculum Flexibility, Career Clarity, Critical Thinking, and Career Readiness—are measured reliably and are suitable for further structural model assessment.

Discriminant validity was assessed to ensure that each construct in the model is empirically distinct from the others. The results indicated that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct was greater than its corresponding inter-construct correlations, thereby satisfying the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Additionally, the correlations among constructs were below the recommended threshold of 0.85, indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern and that the constructs measure conceptually distinct phenomena (Hair et al., 2019).

These findings confirm that adequate discriminant validity has been established, demonstrating that the measurement model exhibits sufficient construct distinctiveness and is appropriate for structural model analysis.

Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment (Reliability and Convergent Validity)

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Interdisciplinary Exposure (IE)	4	0.873	0.910	0.716
Skill-Based Learning (SBL)	4	0.881	0.918	0.736
Curriculum Flexibility (CF)	3	0.842	0.904	0.759
Career Clarity (CC)	4	0.895	0.926	0.758
Critical Thinking (CT)	4	0.887	0.920	0.742
Career Readiness (CR)	4	0.903	0.931	0.772

4.2. Structural Equation Modelling

The structural model was evaluated to examine the proposed relationships among the constructs (refer Table 3). The significance of path coefficients was assessed using bootstrapping procedures with a significance level of $p < .05$ (Hair et al., 2019). H1 was supported ($\beta = 0.42$, $t = 5.87$, $p < .001$). Interdisciplinary exposure has a significant positive

effect on career clarity. This suggests that students exposed to multiple disciplines develop clearer career goals and better understanding of professional pathways. H2 was supported ($\beta = 0.47$, $t = 6.21$, $p < .001$). Interdisciplinary learning significantly enhances critical thinking ability. Students who engage with diverse academic domains demonstrate stronger analytical and integrative reasoning skills. H3 was supported ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 3.98$, $p < .001$). Skill-based and outcome-oriented learning positively influences career readiness. Practical assignments and experiential learning contribute directly to students' preparedness for employment.

Further, H4 was supported ($\beta = 0.24$, $t = 3.12$, $p = .002$). Curriculum flexibility significantly predicts career readiness. The ability to customise academic pathways enhances students' confidence in entering the job market. H5 was supported ($\beta = 0.36$, $t = 4.75$, $p < .001$). Career clarity has a strong positive influence on career readiness. Students with well-defined career goals exhibit greater preparedness and professional confidence. H6 was supported ($\beta = 0.31$, $t = 4.11$, $p < .001$). Critical thinking significantly contributes to career readiness. Analytical and problem-solving abilities enhance students' adaptability and job market preparedness.

4.3. Model Summary

The structural model explained $R^2 = 0.68$ of the variance in Career Readiness, indicating substantial predictive power (Hair et al., 2019). This suggests that interdisciplinary exposure, skill-based learning, curriculum flexibility, career clarity, and critical thinking collectively play a significant role in shaping students' career readiness.

Table 3: Path Results for Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	β (Standardized Coefficient)	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Interdisciplinary Exposure → Career Clarity	0.42	5.87	< .001	Supported
H2	Interdisciplinary Exposure → Critical Thinking	0.47	6.21	< .001	Supported
H3	Skill-Based Learning → Career Readiness	0.29	3.98	< .001	Supported
H4	Curriculum Flexibility → Career Readiness	0.24	3.12	.002	Supported
H5	Career Clarity → Career Readiness	0.36	4.75	< .001	Supported
H6	Critical Thinking → Career Readiness	0.31	4.11	< .001	Supported

5. DISCUSSION

The present study examined how interdisciplinary exposure, skill-based learning, and curriculum flexibility influence career readiness through the mediating roles of career clarity and critical thinking. The findings provide empirical support for the proposed framework and contribute to the growing literature on outcome-based and interdisciplinary education.

The results indicated that interdisciplinary exposure significantly predicts career clarity (H1 supported). Students who engage with multiple academic domains reported a clearer understanding of their professional interests and future pathways. This finding aligns with Career Construction Theory, which suggests that career identity develops through exploration and meaning-making processes (Savickas, 2005). Exposure to diverse disciplines appears to broaden students' cognitive and vocational horizons, enabling them to evaluate alternative career options more effectively.

The finding is also consistent with research suggesting that interdisciplinary curricula enhance integrative thinking and awareness of multiple career trajectories (Lattuca et al., 2004). In contemporary higher education reforms, multidisciplinary learning is positioned as a mechanism for strengthening career orientation and decision-making capacity (Government of India, 2020).

The study found a significant positive relationship between interdisciplinary exposure and critical thinking (H2 supported). This result supports the argument that interdisciplinary education fosters analytical reasoning and synthesis across knowledge domains (Repko & Szostak, 2017). Students exposed to varied academic perspectives are more likely to engage in reflective judgement and complex problem-solving.

The importance of critical thinking as a core employability skill has been widely recognised in global workforce reports (World Economic Forum, 2023). Thus, interdisciplinary structures may serve as foundational platforms for cultivating competencies required in dynamic labour markets.

The findings revealed that skill-based learning significantly enhances career readiness (H3 supported). This result reinforces the principles of Outcome-Based Education, which emphasises measurable competencies and practical application of knowledge (Spady, 1994).

Experiential learning activities such as projects, presentations, and applied assignments likely contribute to students' perception of preparedness for employment.

This outcome is consistent with Human Capital Theory, which posits that education enhances productive capabilities that translate into labour market advantages (Becker, 1964). Furthermore, Yorke (2006) highlights that employability is strongly linked to transferable skills rather than academic knowledge alone. The present findings therefore support the shift toward competency-driven curricula.

Curriculum flexibility was found to have a significant positive effect on career readiness (H4 supported). The ability to design personalised academic pathways appears to strengthen students' confidence in navigating future professional environments. This finding aligns with Social Cognitive Career Theory, which emphasises the role of self-directed exploration and perceived autonomy in career decision-making (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

Flexible learning models may enhance intrinsic motivation and career ownership, allowing students to align educational experiences with evolving interests. In rapidly changing industries, such adaptability is increasingly regarded as essential for graduate success.

The study demonstrated that career clarity significantly predicts career readiness (H5 supported). Students who reported clearer career goals also exhibited higher levels of perceived preparedness for employment. This finding supports prior research indicating that vocational goal clarity enhances proactive behaviour, persistence, and strategic skill acquisition (Savickas, 2005).

Career clarity may function as a psychological anchor that aligns educational efforts with long-term professional objectives. When students understand their career direction, they are more likely to engage in relevant learning experiences and skill development activities.

Critical thinking was also found to significantly influence career readiness (H6 supported). Analytical reasoning and problem-solving capabilities appear to enhance students' confidence in managing professional challenges. This result is consistent with global employability frameworks that identify critical thinking as a central competency in the future workforce (World Economic Forum, 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, critical thinking enables individuals to interpret labour market

information, evaluate risks, and make informed career decisions. The present findings suggest that interdisciplinary education indirectly strengthens career readiness by fostering higher-order cognitive skills.

Collectively, the findings support an integrated framework in which interdisciplinary exposure, skill-based learning, and curriculum flexibility function as educational inputs that enhance psychological and cognitive mediators—career clarity and critical thinking—ultimately leading to greater career readiness.

The model explained a substantial proportion of variance in career readiness ($R^2 = 0.68$), indicating strong predictive capability. This empirical evidence contributes to the limited body of research examining interdisciplinary degree models within emerging higher education contexts.

The study reinforces policy directions advocating multidisciplinary and outcome-based education reforms and provides practical implications for curriculum design aimed at enhancing graduate employability.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings extend existing career development and higher education literature by empirically integrating interdisciplinary education, outcome-based learning, and career readiness within a single structural framework. While Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) emphasize psychological mechanisms such as clarity and self-efficacy, the present study demonstrates how educational design variables—interdisciplinary exposure, skill-based learning, and curriculum flexibility—serve as institutional antecedents of these mechanisms.

The results also contribute to employability theory by empirically validating that career readiness is not solely a function of individual traits but is significantly shaped by structural curriculum factors. By demonstrating that critical thinking and career clarity mediate the relationship between interdisciplinary education and career readiness, this study strengthens the conceptual linkage between cognitive development and vocational preparedness.

Furthermore, the study provides contextual evidence supporting outcome-based education as a measurable pathway to employability enhancement, thereby contributing to contemporary discourse on higher education reform.

6.2 Practical Implications for Universities

The results offer clear guidance for curriculum planners and university administrators:

1. **Promoting Interdisciplinary Structures:**
Universities should encourage cross-disciplinary course combinations and integrative learning modules. Exposure to diverse knowledge domains enhances cognitive flexibility and career awareness.
2. **Embedding Skill-Based Learning:**
Institutions should strengthen experiential components such as projects, internships, workshops, and industry collaborations. Skill-oriented pedagogy directly enhances perceived career readiness.
3. **Enhancing Curriculum Flexibility:**
Flexible academic pathways allow students to align education with evolving career interests. Providing autonomy in course selection increases engagement and professional confidence.
4. **Structured Career Development Support:**
Career clarity significantly predicts readiness; therefore, universities should integrate structured career guidance, mentoring systems, and career planning modules within degree programmes.
5. **Developing Critical Thinking Competencies:**
Teaching strategies should prioritize analytical reasoning, case-based learning, and problem-solving tasks to cultivate higher-order cognitive skills essential for employment.

6.3 Policy Implications

The findings support policy frameworks advocating multidisciplinary and outcome-based education reforms, such as those emphasized in national education transformation agendas. Policymakers should:

4. Encourage interdisciplinary degree models across higher education institutions.
5. Develop performance metrics linking curriculum innovation with graduate employability outcomes.
6. Promote early career awareness initiatives at secondary and higher secondary levels to enhance career clarity before university entry.

The evidence suggests that structural reforms in curriculum design can significantly enhance youth employability outcomes, thereby addressing the education–employment mismatch.

6.4 Industry Implications

Employers may benefit from collaboration with interdisciplinary programmes to co-design skill modules aligned with labour market needs. Partnerships between universities and industry stakeholders can ensure that learning outcomes reflect emerging professional competencies.

6.5 Contribution to Youth Employability Discourse

This study underscores that career readiness is not an incidental outcome of degree completion but a structured product of interdisciplinary exposure, competency-based learning, and cognitive development. The findings provide empirical support for redesigning higher education systems toward flexible, skill-integrated, and career-oriented frameworks to enhance graduate employability.

7. LIMITATIONS

Despite its contributions, the present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to establish causal relationships among the constructs. Although significant associations were observed between interdisciplinary exposure, skill-based learning, curriculum flexibility, and career readiness, longitudinal research would provide stronger evidence regarding the developmental trajectory of career readiness over time.

Second, the data were collected from a single interdisciplinary degree programme within one university. This limits the generalisability of the findings to other institutional contexts or traditional disciplinary programmes. Differences in institutional culture, curriculum

implementation, and student demographics may influence outcomes. Third, the study relied on self-reported measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias and perceptual inflation. Students' perceived career readiness may not fully reflect actual employability outcomes or objective employment performance. Fourth, although the model explained a substantial proportion of variance in career readiness ($R^2 = 0.68$), other potentially relevant factors—such as internship experience, industry exposure, personality traits, labour market conditions, and socio-economic background—were not included in the model.

Future research should consider longitudinal designs, multi-institutional samples, and the inclusion of objective career outcome indicators such as employment status, internship performance, or employer evaluations. Additionally, mediation and moderation analyses incorporating variables such as self-efficacy or institutional support could provide deeper theoretical insights.

8. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the role of interdisciplinary education, skill-based learning, and curriculum flexibility in shaping students' career readiness. The findings demonstrate that interdisciplinary exposure significantly enhances career clarity and critical thinking, both of which contribute to higher levels of career readiness. Skill-based learning and curriculum flexibility were also found to directly influence students' preparedness for employment.

The results support the argument that career readiness is not merely an outcome of degree completion but a function of structured educational design. Interdisciplinary and outcome-based models create learning environments that foster cognitive adaptability, vocational clarity, and practical competence. These elements collectively strengthen students' confidence and preparedness for professional engagement.

By empirically validating the link between educational design and employability outcomes, this study contributes to the growing discourse on higher education reform and youth employability. The findings suggest that universities seeking to enhance graduate readiness should prioritise interdisciplinary integration, experiential learning, and flexible curriculum frameworks.

In an era marked by rapid technological and economic change, higher education institutions

must move beyond traditional disciplinary silos and adopt innovative academic structures that enable students not only to acquire knowledge but also to design and navigate their careers effectively.

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