

Work-integrated learning: Building a future-ready through skills and experience

Education must do more than prepare students about the world of work – it must prepare them for it

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For decades, India's education system has prepared students about the world of work, not for it. The traditional path of completing school, earning a degree, and then hoping to find a job is proving increasingly out of date in a fast changing economy. Industry data paints a clear picture, while millions of students graduate every year, fewer come out as employable.

The gap that must be closed

According to the India Skills Report 2025, the country's graduate employability rate currently stands at 54.8 percent. In some technical and vocational streams, the numbers are even lower. Meanwhile, about 75 percent of employers now turn apprentices into full time roles, showing the growing success of work based learning models. In other words, while academic credentials still matter, employers are prioritising hands on experience, adaptability and problem solving skills more than ever before. The mismatch between education and work has become one of the key challenges of India's young population. And around the world, countries that are leading the way, from Germany to Singapore, are



those that weave vocational and work integrated learning directly into their school to career pathways.

Why work integrated and vocational learning must take centre stage

1. Industry demands job ready talent

Employers are increasingly looking for people who can hit the ground running. The 'learn for four years, then work it out' model no longer works. Work integrated approaches, from internships and apprenticeships to live industry projects, are closing this gap by turning education into a launch pad for careers. As highlighted by QS

Quacquarelli Symonds and NSN analyses, India's education ecosystem must move from knowledge centric to being career centric.

2. Vocational education builds inclusivity

Vocational education is no longer a second class option; it's a parallel and vital pathway to employability. India currently has more than 14,000 Industrial Training Institutes ITIs and 127 vocational awarding bodies, yet just 4.1 percent of people aged between 15 - 59 have had formal vocational training. With focused investment and social acceptance, vocational

learning could open up opportunities for millions, especially in tier 2 and tier 3 cities, where hands-on skills can help boost regional growth and jobs. Work integrated models deliver real outcomes. Apprenticeship trends prove their worth. The India Employer Forum reports that sectors such as hospitality and manufacturing have seen a Net Apprenticeship Outlook of nearly 79 percent, and more than three quarters of apprentices are taken on into permanent roles. The message is loud and clear: when students are exposed to real world environments, both they and the employers benefit. An



example from the field IIT Delhi's practical learning initiative A recent training session hosted at the IIT Delhi campus for students aged 14-17 years showed how early exposure to experiential learning can prepare students for what is to come. The workshop focused on problem solving, product prototyping and business ideas, giving participants the chance to work directly on real world challenges under the guidance of industry mentors.

Bridging gender, geography and the "missing millions"

The skilling ecosystem must now expand its focus beyond metros and elite institutions.

- Women learners: About 44 percent of employers plan to increase women's participation in appren-

ticeship programmes at this year's India employer forum.

- Tier 2 and tier 3 cities: These regions have untapped potential but need flexible, locally integrated training models.

Alternative pathways:

Short format vocational modules and microcredentials offer quicker, cost effective routes to meaningful employment or entrepreneurship, especially for youth who cannot commit to long duration degree programmes. Programmes should be co-created with employers, using live projects, internships and mentorship. Curriculums must be aligned with actual job roles and changing skill needs rather than static syllabi. Institutions should track employability, internship

The future of education lies in connection – between classrooms and companies, theory and practice, ambition and opportunity. Vocational and work-integrated learning models are helping students gain the skills employers actually need, from digital innovation to real-world problem solving. As apprenticeships grow, institutions modernize, and young people seek alternative pathways, India's next generation has a chance to learn by doing – and build a more inclusive, employable, and resilient workforce for tomorrow

conversions and entrepreneurial ventures to measure real impact.

Why now the cost of delay:

India's demographic advantage depends on turning its young population into a job ready workforce. With industries being reshaped by AI, automation and sustainability, the skills gap is widening faster than traditional education can adapt. The Union Budget 2024-25, which allocated Rs 1.48 lakh crore for education, employment and skilling, signals government awareness of this urgency. The national conversation has shifted, being 'educated' is no longer enough; being 'employable' is what matters.

The way forward:

- For learners: Choose programmes that provide practical exposure and mentorship alongside theory.
- For training providers: Design industry aligned, inclusive pathways that empower women and youth beyond metros.
- For industry: Invest in apprenticeships and early career talent partnerships.
- For policymakers: Incentivise outcome driven training and prioritise skill quality over quantity.

Conclusion

The IIT Delhi experience is just one example of how work integrated learning can inspire a new generation to think, build and lead. When students move seamlessly from school to hands-on environments, they begin to see themselves not just as learners but as problem solvers. Vocational and work integrated learning are not alternatives, they are the future. The faster India embraces this frontier, the sooner it will unlock its full potential, a confident, skilled and employable generation ready to power the country's next decade of growth. The author is Founder, Gaurav Bhagat Academy.



HackWave 2025 – 24 hours of national-level innovation organised

The Career Development Center (CDC) of SNIST organised HackWave 2025, a 24-hour national-level hackathon that brought together some of India's brightest innovators, developers, and problem-solvers. The event celebrated creativity and technology-driven solutions designed to tackle real-world challenges.

HackWave 2025 reflected SNIST's commitment to fostering innovation and excellence under the leadership of Abhijit Rao Kati-

kaneni, CEO, SNIST. Over the course of 24 hours, participant teams collaborated to design and develop prototypes in diverse domains, including FinTech, Healthcare, Education, and Open Innovation, while receiving mentorship from leading industry professionals.

The hackathon featured a distinguished panel of judges, including Om Ashish Mishra (Product Scientist, Deloitte), Sonu Kumar (Co-founder, Sporo Health), Kalyan Prasad (Senior

Advisor, Kaggle), and Vikas Katragadda (Founder, Naandi Ventures; BITS Pilani alumnus).

The event was graced by Chief Guest Anjani Prabhakar, Executive Director at Hexagon Capability Center, along with Dr. Ramesh Kanneganti and Vasudeva Rao Yellapu, Group Directors, CDC, SNIST and Sreenidhi University. They emphasized the importance of innovation, collaboration, and lifelong learning in shaping future technologists and entrepreneurs. Participants

from across India showcased their talent and problem-solving abilities, competing for cash prizes worth ₹1 lakh. The hackathon provided an invaluable platform for students to gain hands-on experience, interact with mentors, and explore career opportunities in cutting-edge technology domains.

HackWave 2025 concluded with the prize distribution ceremony, recognizing top-performing teams and encouraging all participants to continue innovating for real-world impact.

TODAY IS NATIONAL HEALTHY EATING DAY

The student guide to healthy living

In today's fast-paced academic world, students often find themselves juggling classes, deadlines, and social commitments — leaving little time to think about their health. Yet, building healthy habits during student life is one of the most valuable investments for the future. Prioritizing good nutrition, regular exercise, and a heart-healthy lifestyle not only strengthens the body but also sharpens the mind, boosts energy, and improves overall academic performance.



Eating smart for a strong start

A balanced diet fuels both body and brain. Students should aim to include whole grains, fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and healthy fats in their daily meals. Skipping breakfast or relying on processed snacks and sugary drinks can lead to fatigue and lack of concentration. Staying hydrated and choosing nutrient-dense foods — like nuts, yogurt, and fresh fruit — can make a big difference in energy levels and focus throughout the day.

Move more, stress less

Regular physical activity is one of the best ways to protect heart health and relieve academic stress. Whether it's a brisk walk around campus, cycling, dancing, or playing a sport, even 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day can strengthen the heart, improve mood, and enhance sleep quality. Universities and colleges can promote physical wellbeing by organizing fitness challenges, yoga sessions, or active breaks between lectures.

Building lifelong habits

A heart-healthy lifestyle isn't just about food and exercise — it's about balance. Managing stress, getting adequate sleep, and avoiding smoking or excessive caffeine also play crucial roles in long-term wellness. Creating supportive environments — from offering healthy cafeteria options to encouraging peer wellness groups — helps students stay on track.

By taking small, consistent steps, students can build habits that last well beyond college life. A healthy heart fuels a healthy mind — empowering young people to thrive, achieve, and lead with vitality in every aspect of life.

Today is National Stress Awareness Day

Mind matters: Overcoming stress and strengthening your wellbeing

In today's demanding world, maintaining good mental wellbeing is just as important as taking care of your physical health. Whether you're juggling deadlines at work, facing exams at school or college, or managing life's everyday pressures, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. The good news is that with small, consistent changes, you can build stronger mental resilience and feel more in control of your emotions and mindset.

1. Recognize the signs and take action

The first step toward improving mental wellbeing is awareness. Feeling tired, irritable, or demotivated for long periods can be a sign that your mind needs attention. Ignoring these signals often leads to burnout or emotional exhaustion. Acknowledging that you need support — whether through rest, conversation, or professional help — is a sign of strength, not weakness.

2. Create healthy boundaries

Whether you're in the office, classroom, or at home, boundaries protect your mental space. Overworking, overcommitting, or constantly being online can drain your energy. Learn to say no when necessary, take short breaks during the day, and separate work or study time from personal time. Setting clear limits allows your mind to recharge, improving productivity and emotional balance.

3. Practice mindfulness and stress management

Mindfulness — the practice of staying present — can greatly reduce anxiety and stress. Simple activities such as deep breathing, meditation, or mindful walking can calm your thoughts and lower stress hormones. Apps like Headspace or Calm make it

easy to start, even if you only have five minutes a day. Over time, mindfulness improves focus, patience, and self-awareness.

4. Stay physically active

Exercise is one of the most effective ways to boost mental health. It releases endorphins, the brain's natural mood-lifters, and reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety. You don't need to spend hours at the gym — a brisk walk, a dance class, or yoga session can make a big difference. Physical activity also improves sleep, which plays a vital role in emotional stability.

5. Build positive connections

Social connection is essential for mental wellbeing. Surround yourself with people who support and uplift you. Talk openly with trusted friends, family members, or mentors about what you're going through. If you're at school or university, join clubs or groups that align with your interests.

At work, connect with colleagues outside formal settings — small moments of laughter and shared experiences can strengthen your sense of belonging.

6. Develop a growth mindset

Challenges and setbacks are part of life, but how you view them shapes your mental health. A growth mindset — believing you can learn and improve through effort — helps you stay motivated and optimistic. Instead of fearing mistakes, treat them as learning opportunities. This mindset reduces stress and builds confidence over time.

7. Seek professional support when needed

If you're struggling to cope, talking to a counselor, therapist, or mental health professional can make a huge



difference. Many workplaces, schools, and universities offer confidential wellbeing services. Seeking help is not a sign of failure — it's a proactive step toward healing and self-improvement.

Final thoughts

Improving your mental wellbeing doesn't require drastic changes. It's about small, consistent actions — taking a walk, breathing deeply, connecting with others, or simply being kind to yourself. Whether you're managing the stress of exams, the pressures of work, or the ups and downs of daily life, remember: your mental health matters. With awareness, support, and self-care, you can overcome challenges and build a stronger, happier, and more resilient you.