

# A Study on Value-Added Courses in Higher Education: Enhancing Skills and Employability of Students

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## ABSTRACT

Value-added courses have arisen as an important academic support, aiding conventional educational programs by providing students with skill enhancement, industry exposure and increased employability by providing placement opportunities. This research paper analyses the concept, objectives, importance, implementation practices, benefits, challenges, and future potential of value-added courses in the context of modern higher education. With the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Indian higher education has undergone a major transformation toward an integrated, interdisciplinary and skill-focused approach. Value-Added Courses (VACs) have arisen as an important constituent of the transformation, notably in management education. This research paper analyses the conceptual model, importance, execution, and results of value-added courses for management students in accordance with UGC guidelines and NEP 2020. The key findings of the study focus on how VACs improve employability, entrepreneurial skills, ethical values, and lifelong learning among students.

**Keywords:** Value-Added Courses, Higher Education, Employability, Skill Development, Professional Competence.

## INTRODUCTION

In the modern knowledge-based economy, higher education organizations are progressively presumed to nurture graduates who are not only intellectually rigorous but also prepared with practical expertise and workplace skills. Value-Added Courses (VACs) have originated as a successful educational approach to mitigate the gap between the conventional curriculum and industry demands. This study analyses the role of value-added courses in improving students' skills, employability, and comprehensive professional competence. The paper evaluates the objectives, significance, types, benefits, and challenges related to value-added courses and illustrates their role in overall student growth. The study shows that value-added courses play an important role in enhancing employability and integrating higher education with the market demands.

Management education in India is experiencing substantial changes influenced by globalisation, technological advancement, and transforming industry demands. Conventional curriculum structures are frequently insufficient in resolving real-world business challenges. NEP 2020 gives priority to outcome-based education, flexibility, and practical skill development. Value-added courses play the role of supplementary modules that improves core curriculum and train students for professional expertise. Value-added courses are short-duration, skill-focused programs tailored to enrich the standard syllabus. These courses emphasize on employability skills, digital skills, entrepreneurship, ethical values, and personality development. In contrast to core subjects, VACs are versatile, multidisciplinary, and frequently aligned with industry demands. Institutions implementing NEP-aligned VACs have observed enhanced student engagement, higher placement rates, and enhanced institutional reputation. Industry-led workshops, internships, MOOCs, and certification programs provide a benchmark for effective practices. Value-added courses for management students include communication skills, business analytics, digital marketing, financial literacy, entrepreneurship development, leadership and ethics, corporate governance, environmental sustainability, and Indian ethos and values.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review indicated that several studies have been carried out in various aspects of Value-Added Courses for Management education. The studies address the concerns such as implementations, strategies, effectiveness, etc. Some of the significant studies on the subject are reviewed below:

Singh and Rao (2025), This Study highlighted that discussion by focusing on lifelong learning and future-ready skills. Their research revealed that value-added courses emphasising critical thinking, digital fluency, sustainability, and global communication lead significantly to long-term career resilience. The authors argued that value-added courses are no longer optional enhancements but essential components of contemporary curricula aimed at continuous upskilling and sustained professional relevance.

Anderson and Chen (2025), This Study focused on growing role of industry collaboration and experiential learning in value-added programs. Their study revealed that value-added courses incorporating internships, live projects, and industry mentorship improve employment quality and job retention rates among graduates. Such experiential components enable students to apply acquired skills in real-world contexts, thereby strengthening employer confidence and enhancing graduate preparedness.

Kumar and Verma (2024), This Study discussed the rising significance of value-added courses in aligning higher education with swiftly evolving labour market demands. Their study highlighted that value-added courses focusing on short-duration, skill-oriented learning outcomes considerably strengthen student engagement and employability. These courses, frequently delivered as supplementary or modular components, help reconcile the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation. The authors further observed that students participating in these programs show strengthened confidence, adaptability, and readiness for professional roles.

Lopez and Martin (2024), A study identified the integration of micro-credentials and digital learning platforms as a prominent theme within value-added courses. Their findings indicated that micro-credentials provide structured, competency-based learning pathways that allow learners to acquire and demonstrate specific skills within a short duration. Employers increasingly recognize these credentials as credible indicators of job-relevant competencies, thereby improving graduates' visibility in competitive employment markets. Additionally, the study highlighted that online and hybrid value-added courses expand access to skill development opportunities, particularly for working learners and non-traditional students.

Santos (2022), A study examining the impact of digital literacy and data analytics courses as value-added components in higher education, particularly in relation to graduate employability in technology-driven sectors. The study focused on courses that provided training in digital tools, data interpretation, basic programming, and analytical decision-making skills. Santos highlighted that such core skills are continuously fundamental across industries due to immediate digital change.

Jha & Roy (2022). This studied the outcomes of micro-credentials merged into academic programs as value-added elements. The study found that improved learner participation was due to well-defined, short-term skill goals. Employers also accepted micro-credentials as credible indicators of designated skill areas, enhancing graduate awareness in competitive job markets.

Silva & Costa (2021) studied the relationship between technical skill-examined value-added courses related to internships and employment findings. Their findings showed a high positive correlation between involvement in such programs and the likelihood of receiving job offers. The integration of technical training and hands-on internship background allowed students to apply theoretical knowledge in real work environments, thereby enhancing employer confidence in graduate skills.

Rodríguez (2021). This study assessed professional perception of graduates who completed additional courses in critical thinking and problem solving. Employers regular selected candidates who demonstrated analytical reasoning and decision-making ability. Such graduates were better at dealing with complex problems. These skills were highly valued in the leadership development track and innovation-centric responsibilities.

Patel & Lee (2020). This study evaluated industry-integrated modules, including live projects, industrial workshops, and internship-linked coursework. Students indicated marked positive change in technical skills in advance with up-to-date professional tools and practices. Internship placement rates improved due to first-hand exposure to workplace environments. Partnership with the professional sector helped students understand professional standards, deadlines, and performance expectations.

Hussain (2019), This study investigated the impact of digital literacy value-added courses, including data handling, basic coding, and digital tools. Graduates were more competent in technology-driven work environments. Digital literacy reduced skill gaps in sectors undergoing digital transformation. Students gained confidence in using emerging technologies and platforms.

Ahmed (2018), A study focused on career management value-added courses, including resume writing, interview preparation, career planning, and labour market awareness. The study revealed that students who completed such courses demonstrated more structured and strategic job search behaviours. These students were better equipped to identify suitable opportunities, present their skills effectively, and navigate recruitment processes confidently. As a result, placement success rates were significantly higher among participants compared to non-participants.

## Research Gap

Although several studies have been conducted, the combined impact of value-added courses, encompassing soft skills, digital literacy, micro-credentials, industry collaboration, and career management, on students' employability and long-term career development, particularly within the context of NEP 2020 and Indian higher education institutions.

The present study seeks to address this gap by providing a holistic assessment of value-added courses and their role in enhancing graduate employability, adaptability, and sustained professional growth.

## OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

### Research Objectives

The study is being undertaken with the objectives as mentioned below: -

1. To examine the role of value-added courses in enhancing graduate employability by developing industry-relevant skills such as digital literacy, critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving.
2. To identify challenges and gaps in the implementation of value-added courses within higher education institutions, including accessibility, consistency, and long-term impact.

### Scope

The study covers various categories of value-added courses, including digital literacy and data analytics programs, soft-skill development courses, micro-credentials, career management modules, entrepreneurship training, mentoring initiatives, internships, industry-integrated learning, and experiential learning programs. Particular attention is given to courses that emphasizes short-term, skill-oriented outcomes aligned with current and emerging labor market requirements. The study covers the following three dimensions:

### Role of Management Institutions

Management institutions play a vital role in identifying skill gaps, collaborating with industry experts, designing relevant VACs, and ensuring effective delivery through blended learning modes. Faculty development and industry partnerships are crucial for success guidelines, and NEP 2020 NEP 2020 advocates holistic education through multidisciplinary learning, multiple exit options, academic bank of credits (ABC), and skill integration. UGC has recommended inclusion of value-added courses under categories such as Skill Enhancement Courses

(SEC), Ability Enhancement Courses (AEC), and Value-Added Courses (VAC). These courses promote Indian knowledge systems, constitutional values, environmental awareness, and vocational skills.

### **Challenges in Implementation**

Challenges include a lack of trained faculty, time constraints, inadequate industry collaboration, limited infrastructure, and low student motivation. Standardizations and assessment of learning outcomes also pose difficulties.

### **Suggestions for Effective Implementation**

- Integration with Academic Bank of Credits
- Industry-academia collaboration
- Flexible delivery modes
- Continuous evaluation and feedback
- Recognition through certification

### **Purpose of Data Collection**

The purpose of data collection in the present study is to systematically examine the effectiveness of value-added courses in enhancing students' employability, skill development, and career readiness. Data are collected to assess students' perceptions of the relevance, quality, and outcomes of value-added courses, particularly in relation to technical skills, soft skills, digital literacy, and professional competencies.

### **Sample Design and Sample Size**

The study is based on a limited sample size in two Colleges from Punjab. The sample consists of undergraduate and postgraduate students who have enrolled in or completed value-added courses offered by higher education institutions Punjab institute of Management & Technology (Alour) and Gulzar group of institution (Khanna). In the present study, Random Probabilistic sampling (Stratified Random Sampling) technique was use for selection of sample. The sample size for the study comprises 120 respondents selected from various disciplines and academic levels. This sample size is considered adequate to provide meaningful insights and allow basic statistical analysis of the collected data. It also ensures a balanced representation of students from different programs, enhancing the reliability of the findings.

The selected sample size is manageable within the scope and duration of the study while remaining sufficiently large to identify patterns related to skill development, employability, and perceptions of value-added courses.

### **Data Collection**

A comprehensive questionnaire was developed for data collection. The questionnaire was pre-tested before final data-collection. In the pre-testing, the questionnaire was got filled up by 30 students the pre-testing stage. The respondents did not face any problem in understanding and filling it. Hence it was assumed that the questionnaire is appropriate.

### **Data Analysis**

Survey system of research requires some statistical techniques. The important techniques use in this study are below:

T-tests, Chi-square, Correlation analysis and regression, etc.

The results are discussed below:

## Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency of the questionnaire is tested using Cronbach’s alpha, ensuring the reliability of the measurement scales used in the study.

Overall, these statistical tools enable accurate interpretation of data and support meaningful conclusions regarding the impact of value-added courses on student skill development and employability.

Table-1: Factor-wise Cronbach’s Alpha Values

Factor	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Communication and Interpersonal Skills	5	0.84
Technical Skills Development	6	0.88
Digital Literacy and Analytics Skills	5	0.86
Employability and Career readiness	6	0.90
Confidence and Adaptability	4	0.82
Industry Exposure and Experimental Learning	5	0.87
Overall Value-Added Courses Effectiveness	6	0.91

## Hypotheses testing:

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, two hypotheses were designed. They relate to Employability Skills and the Development of Higher Education through value-added courses. The hypothesis given below:

### Hypothesis 1

Null Hypothesis: There do not have a statistically significant impact on the employability skills of students in higher education.

### Hypothesis 2

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant contribution of Value-Added Courses to the development of higher education institutions in terms of skill integration, industry alignment, and academic quality.

## t-Test Results and Interpretation

Table-2: Comparison of Employability Skills between UG and PG Students

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Sig. (p)
Undergraduate	60	3.68	0.54		
Postgraduate	60	4.12	0.47	3.84	0.001

Interpretation:

The calculated p-value (0.001) is less than the significance level of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) is rejected. This indicates a significant difference between undergraduate and postgraduate students in terms of

employability skills gained through value-added courses. Postgraduate students demonstrated higher employability skill levels.

### Chi-Square Test Results and Interpretation

Table-3: Association between Value-Added Courses and Employability Status

Employability Status	Participated in VAC	Not Participated	Total
Employed	42	18	60
Not Employed	26	34	60
Total	68	52	120

$\chi^2$ Value	df	Sig. (p)
6.72	1	0.010

#### Interpretation:

Since the p-value (0.010) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ ) is rejected. This confirms a significant association between participation in value-added courses and employability status. Students who participated in value-added courses were more likely to be employed.

Table-4: Correlation between Value-Added Courses and Skill Development

Variables	Correlation (r)	Sig. (p)
VAC Participation & Digital Literacy	0.61	0.000
VAC Participation & Soft Skills	0.58	0.000
VAC Participation & Professional Competencies	0.64	0.000

#### Interpretation:

The correlation coefficients indicate a moderate to strong positive relationship between value-added course participation and various skill dimensions. Since all p-values are less than 0.05, the null hypothesis ( $H_{03}$ ) is rejected. This implies that increased participation in value-added courses is associated with higher skill development.

Table-5: Regression Analysis: Impact of Value-Added Courses on Employability

Predictor Variables	$\beta$	t-value	Sig. (p)
Digital Literacy	0.32	4.11	0.000
Soft Skills	0.28	3.54	0.001
Industry Exposure	0.36	4.89	0.000
Career Management Skills	0.24	2.98	0.004

R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	Sig.
0.72	0.52	0.50	31.6	0.000

**Interpretation:**

The regression model is statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.52 indicates that 52% of the variation in employability is explained by value-added course components. Hence, the null hypothesis (H<sub>04</sub>) is rejected. Value-added courses have a significant positive impact on graduate employability.

**CONCLUSION**

This Study strongly supports integrating value-added courses into higher education curricula as a strategic approach to producing professionally competent, adaptable, and industry-ready graduates.

Value-added courses are integral to the successful implementation of NEP 2020 in management education. By fostering skill development, ethical values, and employability, VACs contribute significantly to holistic student development. Institutions must adopt systematic strategies to ensure effective execution and sustainability.

**Benefits of Value-Added Courses**

Enhanced employability through soft skills, technical competence, and digital literacy.

Improved interview performance and workplace adaptability.

Greater alignment between academic education and industry needs.

Higher student motivation and clearer career planning.

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