PREPARING FUTURE EDUCATORS: AN ANALYSIS OF 21ST-CENTURY EMPLOYABILITY COMPETENCIES

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Introduction

The teaching profession has changed dramatically beyond the "sage on a stage" model that once dominated the classroom (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Teachers in the 21st century are expected to demonstrate more than academic strength; rather, they need to be equipped with a broad base of "employability skills." These include the essential soft skills, character attributes, and professional capacities required to be successful in any profession. For pre-service teachers, employability skills are a prerequisite to establishing employment and achieving success in their professions, as well as to ultimately teaching students to thrive in an uncertain future. This is because there has been a significant shift in what society and schools expect teachers to accomplish. Quality education is no longer measured based on standardized test scores alone. It is defined now by developing a whole child with his or her critical thinking skills, collaboration, and learning of new challenges-21st-century skills (National Research Council, 2012). To foster these skills in their students, teachers must first embody them. A teacher who has poor communication skills cannot engage with students, colleagues, and parents at large. Similarly, a teacher not digitally literate will be poorly equipped to embed technology in the classroom, leaving their students at a disadvantage in a world where digital literacy has become mandatory (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2019).

Employability Skills and Their Importance for Teachers

These skills can be considered important under three main headings: professional effectiveness, career advancement, and student empowerment.

Professional Effectiveness

- **The foundation of a great teacher**: This lies at the core of the effective teacher lies a mix of technical and soft skills. while pedagogical knowledge and subject expertise are the "hard skills" of teaching, employability skills are the soft skills that give life to the knowledge for effectiveness in teaching. that is what Deng et al. (2018) say.
- **Communication and Interpersonal Skills**: The job of a teacher is an unrelenting exercise in communication. they must be able to explain complex ideas clearly,

listen to student concerns with empathy, and communicate effectively with parents and school administrators also (Stronge, 2018). Strong interpersonal skills enable a teacher to build rapport, handle conflicts, and produce a positive and inclusive classroom environment-all linked directly to student engagement and academic success (Hattie, 2009).

- **Collaboration and Teamwork**: No teacher works in isolation; rather, all teachers are part of a bigger team that also includes other teachers, school staff, and administrators. the ability to collaborate on curriculum development, share best practices, and work together on solving school-wide problems is crucial (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Teachers who are adept at teamwork contribute to a more cohesive and successful school community-one that benefits everyone.
- **Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking**: The classroom is a dynamic environment, replete with unexpected challenges. it could be that a student isn't understanding something, a lesson plan isn't going as expected, or perhaps a conflict arises with other students. it is this ability for critical thought and the solving of problems in the spur of the moment that separates the good teacher from the great one (Marzano, 2017). These skills empower educators to be innovative and adaptable, constructing learning experiences that are effective and engaging.
- **Digital Literacy and Technology Integration**: The digital revolution has significantly altered education. today, teachers are expected to be conversant with various educational technologies, including learning management systems and interactive whiteboards. Teachers should know how to use these tools not only to enhance student learning but also in teaching responsible digital citizenship (ISTE, 2017). A digitally literate teacher can open a world of resources and opportunities for their students, thus making learning all the more interactive and relevant.

Career Development

- **Securing and Sustaining A Teaching Career**: Employability skills in a competitive job market are a major differentiator. school administrators, when hiring, look at candidates who, apart from having the right qualifications, possess personal qualities that will make them an asset to the school.
- **Self-Management and Professionalism**: Schools appreciate teachers for being responsible, organized, and dedicated to their work. this involves time management, meeting deadlines, and a professional approach to interactions with all persons. according to Ingersoll & Strong (2011), such a teacher shows great initiative, welcomes feedback, and strives for self-improvement and, therefore, is likely to be hired and retained.

- **Adaptability and Resilience**: Education is a dynamic environment in which new curricula, policies, and technologies emerge continuously. for a teacher, therefore, the ability to adapt to these changes and be resilient when confronted with setbacks is important for long-term career success (Spillane&Thompson, 1997). Thus, employers would like to have individuals who embrace such change and seek to meet the challenges associated with it as opportunities, not problems, since this flexibility assists in reducing the unpredictability of the environment.
- **Leadership and Initiative**: although the leadership role of the teacher extends to his or her ability to perform effective classroom management, an employable skill means going beyond that. sometimes, teachers who show initiative by taking extracurricular activities or mentoring new teachers, or even conducting professional development activities are considered as potential leaders at school. according to Leithwood (2012), this proactive approach not only benefits the school but also opens up pathways for career progression and greater influence within the educational community.

Student Empowerment

- Preparing the next generation: Most importantly, however, the reason a teacher should have employability skills is to model and teach these to the students. a teacher is not an information bank; he is a mentor and a role model too (Bandura, 1977.
- **Modeling 21st Century Skills**: When a teacher demonstrates effective communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, they provide a powerful real-world example to be emulated by their students. students learn through observing and imitating, and a teacher modeling these skills is a critical tool for learning (Vygotsky, 1978). This implicit instruction is just as important as any formal lesson.
- **Relevant Learning Experiences**: A teacher with a good employability skillset will thus be able to design a curriculum that is not merelyacademic. the teacher can create multiple projects, group activities, and simulations of real life to let students first practice and then hone their soft skills. the same is explained by Larmer&Mergendoller (2010), where a group project wherein communication, collaboration, and mutual problem-solving are needed supersedes the traditional lecture method of teaching any day.
- **Building A Foundation for Success**: The contemporary workplace requires adaptability, collaboration, and creativity among its employees (OECD, 2018). In encouraging these skills in the classroom, educators are taking this a step further to help them become prepared for challenges and opportunities in life and beyond. it would, in effect, be education that serves as a springboard to successful careers, not

merely the route to a diploma-which ensures students leaving school are academically, professionally, and personally ready for whatever awaits them after school.

- In this respect, the development of employability skills for a future teacher is not just a matter of personal career success but also a cornerstone of modern education. by cultivating such competencies, teachers can become better educators, secure and advance their careers, and, more importantly, equip the next generation with what they need to flourish in an ever-shifting world.

Review of Related Literature

Various studies emphasize the importance of employability skills for new teachers, particularly in light of the rapid changes in education and technology. a review conducted by Caingcoy (2024) in the Philippines defined the important employable skills for teacher education graduates, such as communication, ICT, problem-solving, collaboration, research, and leadership. given this, he recommended that these competencies be included in the curriculum. Arif et al. (2023), in a parallel study conducted in Lahore, Pakistan, concluded that school employers believed new graduates lacked practical application skills, communication competencies, and the potential to connect academic knowledge with teaching practice in schools. their suggestion included an extension of more exposure for students and updating the curriculum. Rajendran and Gopalswamy (2022) underlined that techno-competency-based training can help pre-service teachers become successful in their missions in the digital era. The results of another parallel study conducted by Khand Gale in 2020 on student teachers, mostly from Kolhapur, India, indicated that they scored high on lifelong learning and leadership but were low in academic communication and ICT skills. overall, these studies share a common message: that a gap remains in what teacher education graduates possess in terms of skills and what their employers demand, particularlyin practical application and digital competencies.

Research Gap

While there is existing literature from the Philippines, Pakistan, and India that identifies various employability skills, there is a general gap between graduate capabilities and employer expectations; thus, a significant research gap still remains. there is a lack of comprehensive and comparative studies that analyse the specific 21st-century employability competencies of teacher education graduates across different national contexts. the current studies are often confined to specific regions or institutions and fail to provide a broader cross-cultural understanding. thus, a research gap exists by way of conducting a cross-national or multi-institutional comparative analysis that identifies commonalities and differences in the employability skills gap and investigates how different national curricula

and educational policies shape the development of such competencies. A study quantitatively and qualitatively measuring the proficiency of future educators in these competencies, such as digital literacy, critical thinking, and communication, would offer a more robust and generalizable framework for curriculum enhancement.

Need and Significance of the Study

While the importance of 21st-century skills for teacher employability has been consistently emphasized in research, there is still a significant gap regarding this issue: understanding in depth how they are implemented and how effective they prove to be in different contexts. however, there is still a lack of longitudinal studies tracking how acquisition during teacher education programs translates into job performance and career success. moreover, few studies have framed the growing disconnect between what teacher training institutions teach and what school employers truly value and assess as part of the hiring process. This therefore points to the greater need for an evidence-based approach at a more granular level regarding integrating employability skills within teacher education curricula and assessment of real-world impact. the investment in these skills means an investment in quality education itself and, finally, in the future success of each student they will teach. therefore, it was decided to analyze the employability skills of prospective teachers.

Title of the Study

The title of the study is "Preparing Future Educators: An Analysis Of 21st-Century Employability Competencies."

Objectives of the Study

1. The employability skills of the student teachers were to be studied.
2. To assess significant differences in prospective teachers' employability skills across chosen sub-samples.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. The employability skills among the prospective teachers will be at a moderate level.
2. The prospective teachers will have significantly different employability skills based on their different educational qualifications.
3. Prospective teachers from different major disciplines will differ significantly in their employability skills.
4. The prospective teachers from the English medium will show a higher level of employability skills compared to those from the Tamil medium of instruction.
5. Prospective teachers from urban geographical locales will have a higher employability skills level than rural prospective teachers.

6. Prospective teachers who come from a nuclear family background will show more employability skills than those coming from joint families.

Research Design

The study used a survey research design to investigate the employability skills of prospective teachers. This method was selected because it is efficient in collecting data from a sample population to describe certain characteristics and behaviours. The participants in this study were 47 prospective teachers. The method of selecting these participants utilized cluster sampling. in this approach, intact groups (clusters) of prospective teachers, rather than individual participants, are identified and selected to form the sample of the research study. The main data collection instrument used was the "Teacher Employability Skills Survey Scale," designed by the researchers for this research. It is a five-point Likert-type rating scale comprising 45 items to measure eight important dimensions of employability skills: digital literacy and technology integration, critical thinking and problem-solving, communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation, adaptability and flexibility, global and cultural awareness, emotional intelligence and social skills, self-direction and lifelong learning. The face and content validity were ensured through the scrutiny of the scale by experts in the area of study. The experts reviewed the items in the scale to ascertain whether they depicted the intended construct in sufficient depth. the reliability analysis for the scale came out at 0.89 through Cronbach's alpha. This is a high internal consistency value, and as such, it means that items making up the scale are measuring the same constructs in a consistent manner. result and analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation

HO1: The prospective teachers' employability skills will be at a moderate level.

Table 1: The level of prospective teachers' employability skills

Variable	Low		Moderate		High	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Employability skills	0	0%	6	12.5%	41	85.41%

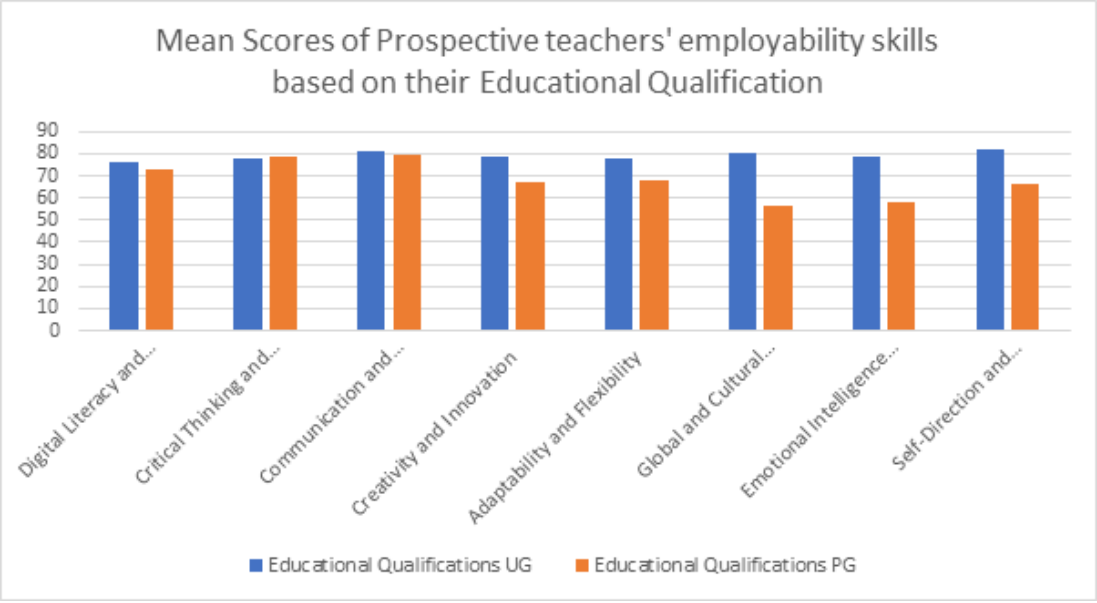
The interpretation of the employable skills of the prospective teacherscontradicts the stated hypothesis (H0) based on the data in Table 1. The skills will be at a modest level, according to the formulated hypothesis. Nonetheless, the table shows a high level of skill concentration. In particular, 85.41% of aspiring teachers have high-level employability skills. None are at a low level, and only 12.5% are at a moderate level. This implies that all of the aspiring instructors have a high level of employable skills. A curriculum that emphasises practical skills, successful teacher training programs, or a strong emphasis on professional growth within their educational institutions are some of the variables that may

be responsible for this high level of abilities, but are not covered in length in the literature offered. The data show a high level of competency throughout the sample, thus refuting the notion that their skills are only average.

HO2: The prospective teachers will have significantly different employability skills based on their different educational qualifications.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Prospective teachers' employability skills based on their Educational Qualification

Variable	Sub Sample	N	Digital Literacy and Technology Integration	Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving	Communication and Collaboration	Creativity and Innovation	Adaptability and Flexibility	Global and Cultural Awareness	Emotional Intelligence and Social Skills	Self-Direction and Lifelong Learning
Educational Qualifications	UG	31	75.91	77.95	81.29	78.83	77.84	80.25	78.58	82.15
	PG	16	73.12	78.75	79.58	66.75	68.12	56.25	57.75	66.66



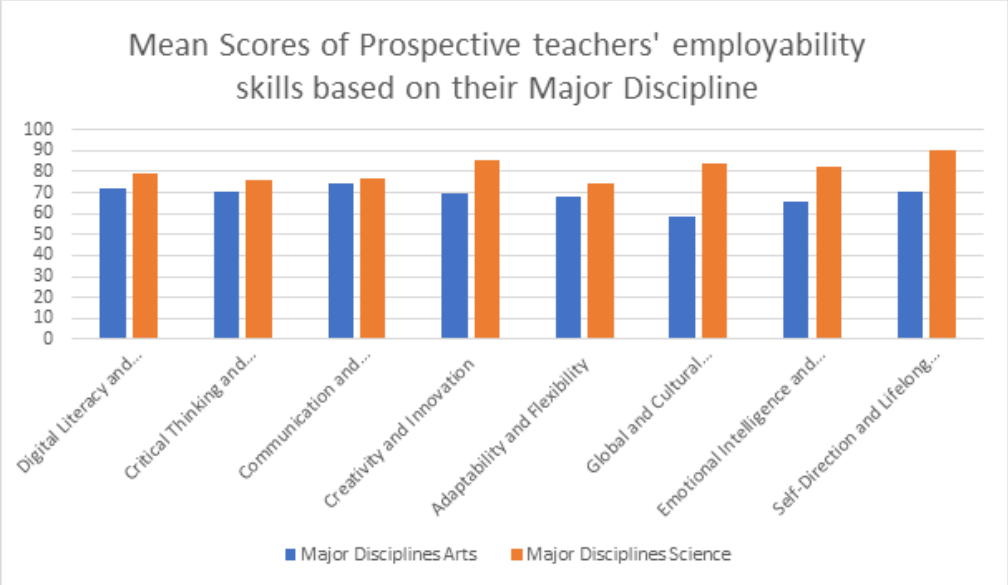
There is a noticeable difference between undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students based on the data shown in Table 2, which looks at the mean scores of prospective teachers' employability abilities based on their educational credentials. According to the hypothesis (Ho2), prospective teachers' employability skills will differ greatly depending on their educational background. This theory is supported by the evidence. In all eight employability skill areas, the mean scores show that UG students regularly outperformed

PG students. For example, the mean scores for Digital Literacy and Technology Integration were 75.91 for UG students and 73.12 for PG students. In the same way, PG students received a score of 66.66 for Self-Direction and Lifelong Learning, while UG students received a score of 82.15. This consistent pattern suggests that educational qualification is a significant factor influencing the level of employability skills. The reason for this difference could be a stronger emphasis on practical and skill-based learning in undergraduate teacher education programs, or that the curriculum for UG students is more aligned with the development of these specific employability skills compared to the postgraduate curriculum.

HO3: Prospective teachers from different major disciplines will differ significantly in their employability skills

Table 3: Mean Scores of Prospective teachers' employability skills based on their Major Discipline

Variable	Sub Sample	N	Digital Literacy and Technology Integration	Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving	Communication and Collaboration	Creativity and Innovation	Adaptability and Flexibility	Global and Cultural Awareness	Emotional Intelligence and Social Skills	Self-Direction and Lifelong Learning
Major Disciplines	Arts	15	72.22	70.66	74.66	69.73	68.44	58.66	65.86	70.66
	Science	32	79.58	76.25	77.18	85.87	74.58	84.25	82.37	90.37

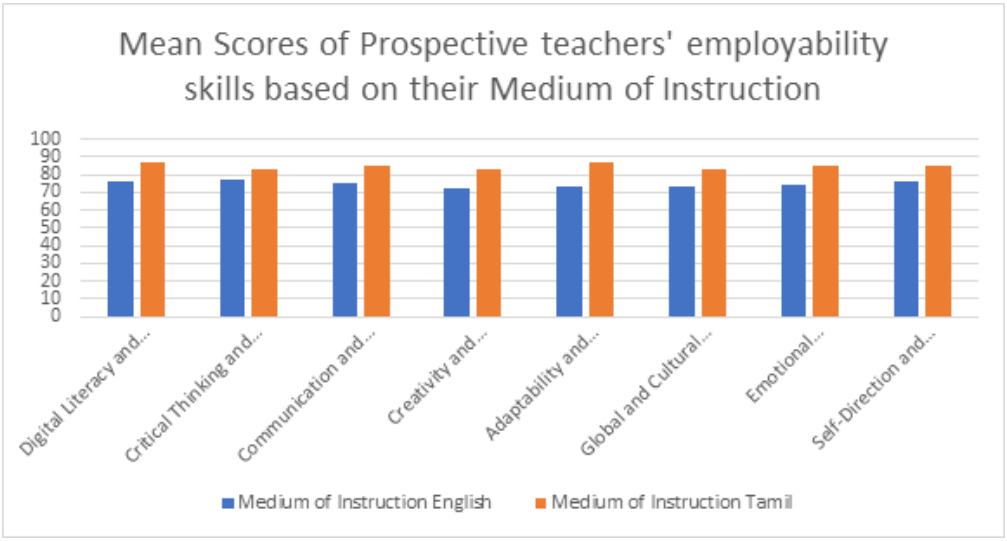


The data clearly support the hypothesis (Ho3) that the prospective teachers from several key subjects will have somewhat diverse employability abilities. In comparison to students from the arts discipline, students from the science discipline consistently showed higher mean scores across all eight employability abilities. For instance, the mean score for Digital Literacy and Technology Integration was 79.58 for science students and 72.22 for Arts students. Similarly, science students' mean score in creativity and innovation was 85.87, much higher than the Arts students' 69.73. This pattern implies that the science discipline's curriculum and pedagogy might be better suited to fostering the development of these particular employability abilities.A. This may be because the science curriculum frequently places a strong emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability—skills that this study specifically measures as employability skills.

HO4: The prospective teachers from the English medium will show a higher level of employability skills compared to those from the Tamil medium of instruction

Table 4: Mean Scores of Prospective teachers' employability skills based on their Medium of Instruction

Variable	Sub Sample	N	Digital Literacy and Technology Integration	Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving	Communication and Collaboration	Creativity and Innovation	Adaptability and Flexibility	Global and Cultural Awareness	Emotional Intelligence and Social Skills	Self-Direction and Lifelong Learning
Medium of Instruction	English	23	76.37	77.68	75.36	72.52	73.76	73.39	74.26	76.66
	Tamil	25	87.2	82.8	85.06	82.72	87.2	83.52	84.8	84.93



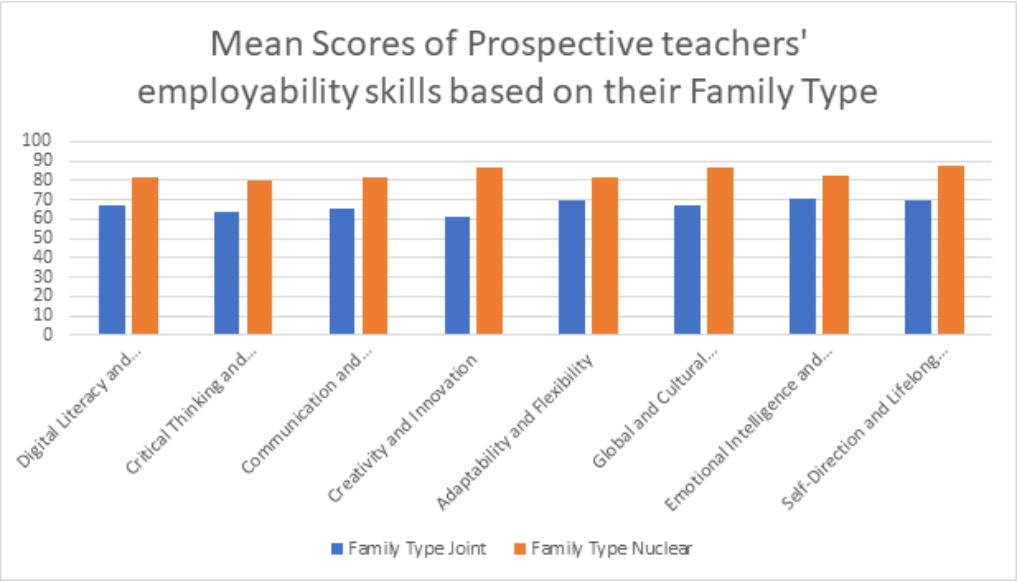
The results defy the stated hypothesis (Ho4) based on the data presented in Table 4, which shows the mean employability skill scores of prospective teachers according to their medium of instruction. According to the theory, aspiring teachers who speak English will have more employability abilities than those who speak Tamil. The data, however, indicates the reverse. When compared to their English-medium peers, prospective teachers from the Tamil medium consistently scored higher across all eight employability abilities. For example, Tamil-medium students achieved an average of 87.2 in Digital Literacy and Technology Integration, compared to 76.37 for English-medium students.

Other qualities like adaptability and flexibility, where Tamil-medium students scored 87.2 compared to English-medium students' 73.76, also show this pattern. This surprising outcome can be explained by the fact that Tamil-medium students, who frequently work in bilingual or multilingual settings, acquire greater flexibility and problem-solving abilities to deal with various linguistic and cultural situations.

HO5: Prospective teachers who come from a nuclear family background will show more employability skills than those coming from joint families.

Table 5: Mean Scores of Prospective teachers' employability skills based on their Family Type

Variable	Sub Sample	N	Digital Literacy and Technology Integration	Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving	Communication and Collaboration	Creativity and Innovation	Adaptability and Flexibility	Global and Cultural Awareness	Emotional Intelligence and Social Skills	Self-Direction and Lifelong Learning
Family Type	Joint	11	66.66	63.33	65.75	61.45	69.39	66.90	70.90	69.69
	Nuclear	36	81.11	79.62	81.48	86.33	81.11	86.55	82.31	87.66

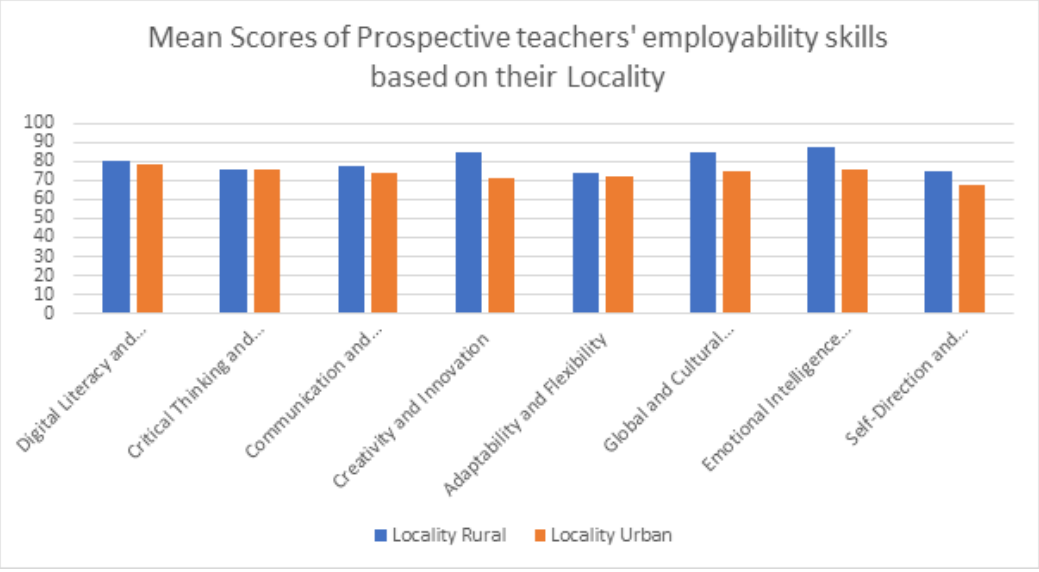


There is a noticeable difference between individuals from nuclear and joint families, according to the data in Table 5, which examines the mean employability skill scores of prospective teachers based on their family type. The statistics confirm the hypothesis (Ho5), which states that potential teachers from nuclear family structures will have better employability abilities than those from joint family structures. In every one of the eight employability abilities, prospective teachers from nuclear families consistently outperformed those from joint households. For example, nuclear family members scored an average of 81.11 in Digital Literacy and Technology Integration, compared to 66.66 for joint family members. In a similar vein, nuclear families scored 86.33 on the Creativity and Innovation scale, whereas joint families scored 61.45. This trend holds for every skill, suggesting that family type has a big role. People from nuclear families may have more possibilities to make independent decisions and solve problems, which are important aspects of employability skills, which could be one explanation for this. Compared to people in larger, joint family contexts, members of smaller families may be expected to take on greater responsibilities and acquire self-direction and adaptation more easily. Their higher mean ratings indicate that they may become more proactive and independent as a result.

HO6: Prospective teachers from urban geographical locales will have a higher employability skills level than rural prospective teachers.

Table 6: Mean Scores of Prospective teachers' employability skills based on their Locality

Variable	Sub Sample	N	Digital Literacy and Technology Integration	Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving	Communication and Collaboration	Creativity and Innovation	Adaptability and Flexibility	Global and Cultural Awareness	Emotional Intelligence and Social Skills	Self-Direction and Lifelong Learning
Locality	Rural	32	80.31	76.04	77.81	84.87	73.64	85.12	87.37	74.79
	Urban	17	78.23	75.88	73.92	70.82	72.35	74.58	76.0	67.25



The results defy the stated hypothesis (Ho6) based on the data in Table 6, which compares the mean employability skill scores of aspiring teachers according to their locality. According to the hypothesis, students from urban areas will have more employability abilities than students from rural areas. Nonetheless, the research indicates that rural pupils routinely outperformed their urban counterparts in the majority of employable abilities. For instance, the mean score for Digital Literacy and Technology Integration was 80.31 for rural students and 78.23 for urban students. Rural students scored 84.87 in Creativity and Innovation, whereas urban students scored 70.82, demonstrating this pattern. One explanation for this unexpected result might be that rural pupils are forced to be more inventive and adaptive since they frequently face resource limitations. As they come up with creative solutions to problems, this could strengthen their problem-solving abilities. Additionally, rural kids scored higher in social skills and emotional intelligence

(87.37) than urban students (76.0), which may be attributed to the close-knit communal aspect of rural places. This implies that rural environments may unintentionally be more conducive to the development of these particular employability skills than metropolitan ones.

Conclusion

The article concludes that employability skills are the "soft skills that give life to knowledge," essential for professional effectiveness and career advancement. Ultimately, the development of these competencies is crucial not only for the teachers' employment but for student empowerment; teachers must model these skills to prepare the next generation for an uncertain future.

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