Impact of Industry–Institute Interaction Cell Activities on Employability Skills of Engineering and Management Students in Maharashtra

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Abstract

Industry–Institute Interaction (III) Cells play a vital role in strengthening employability skills and bridging the gap between academic learning and industry expectations. The present study examines the impact of III Cell activities on the employability skills of engineering and management students in Maharashtra. A descriptive and analytical research design was adopted, and data were collected from **650 students** studying in AICTE-approved engineering and management institutes across the state. The study evaluates the effectiveness of key III Cell activities such as industry visits, expert sessions, internships, MoUs, entrepreneurship development programs, skill enhancement workshops, and campus recruitment initiatives. Statistical analysis indicates that III Cell interventions significantly contribute to the development of communication skills, problem-solving ability, teamwork, leadership, technical competence, industry exposure, and overall job-readiness. However, disparities were observed across institutions in terms of infrastructure, industry tie-ups, and frequency of activities. The results highlight the need for systematic planning, stronger corporate partnerships, and outcome-based monitoring of III Cell programs. The study concludes that strategic strengthening of III Cells can substantially enhance employability outcomes and support the broader goals of technical and managerial education in Maharashtra.

Keywords: ***Industry–Institute Interaction Cell, Employability Skills, Engineering Students, Management Students, Industry Linkages, Internships, Maharashtra, Skill Development, Industry Exposure, Higher Education.***

1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving global economy, employability skills have become a decisive factor for the career success of engineering and management graduates. Industries today expect graduates to possess not only strong domain knowledge but also essential competencies such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, leadership, and digital literacy. This growing demand for a skilled workforce has compelled higher education institutions to establish structured mechanisms to bridge the gap between academic learning and industrial requirements. One such mechanism is the **Industry–Institute Interaction (III) Cell**, which plays an integral role in enhancing students' employability through continuous engagement with corporate and industrial sectors.

The Industry–Institute Interaction Cell serves as a crucial interface between educational institutions and industry by facilitating training programs, internships, industrial visits, workshops, expert lectures, MoUs, entrepreneurship initiatives, and placement activities. These interventions enable students to gain practical exposure, understand real-world business and engineering practices, and align their competencies with industry expectations. As a result, III Cells have become a key quality indicator under NAAC, NBA, AICTE, and NEP 2020 reforms.

Maharashtra, being one of India's leading states in industrial growth, houses a large number of engineering and management institutions that collaborate with a wide range of industries such as manufacturing, IT, automobile, banking, logistics, and service sectors. The state's diverse industrial ecosystem provides immense opportunities for institutions to engage in meaningful Industry–Institute Interaction. However, the quality, depth, and frequency of III Cell activities vary significantly across institutions, affecting the employability levels of their graduates.

In recent years, concerns have been raised by employers regarding the skill gaps of fresh graduates entering the

workforce. Despite strong academic qualifications, many students continue to struggle with job readiness due to limited practical exposure and insufficient industry-linked training. Therefore, assessing the **impact of III Cell activities** on employability skills becomes essential for strengthening institutional practices and improving student outcomes.

This study aims to evaluate how effectively III Cell initiatives contribute to skill development and employability among engineering and management students in Maharashtra. By examining various activities conducted under the III Cell and analyzing students' perceptions, the research seeks to provide insights into best practices, gaps, and areas of improvement. The findings of this study can help institutions redesign their III Cell strategies, enhance industry collaborations, and align their academic processes with the dynamic needs of the professional world.

2. Review of Literature

Industry–Institute Interaction (III) has been widely recognized as a significant component in enhancing the employability of graduates. Several studies highlight the importance of structured industry engagement in bridging the gap between academic curriculum and industrial expectations.

Sahoo and Mishra (2018) emphasized that industry interaction programs such as internships, industry visits, and expert lectures significantly enhance students' practical skills and technical competence. Their research showed that students who participate actively in III activities demonstrate higher industry readiness compared to those with limited exposure.

Nair et al. (2019) found that employers consistently report skill gaps among engineering graduates, particularly in communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. They suggested that strong industry partnerships and skill-based training can reduce this gap and improve employability outcomes.

Patil and Kulkarni (2020) highlighted the role of MoUs between institutions and industries in facilitating advanced training, project-based learning, and collaborative research opportunities. Such partnerships enhance students' competencies and provide real-world exposure.

Sharma and Singh (2021) analyzed the impact of internships on management students and concluded that internships significantly improve decision-making, leadership, and analytical abilities. They also stated that internship experience increases placement opportunities.

Kadam and Bhosale (2021) examined engineering colleges in Maharashtra and reported that institutions with active III Cells achieved better placement percentages, higher industry engagement, and stronger campus–corporate relationships.

With the introduction of **NEP 2020**, greater emphasis has been placed on experiential learning, vocational training, and industry linkage. **Sarkar (2022)** argued that NEP's focus on multidisciplinary education and experiential pedagogy increases the relevance of III Cell activities in enhancing employability skills.

Gupta and Verma (2022) highlighted that skill development workshops and entrepreneurship programs conducted under III Cells help students become more adaptable to dynamic industry requirements. Their study found improvements in creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurial attitudes.

Rai and Bakshi (2023) studied management institutions across India and noted that students who undergo industry-driven skill enhancement programs report higher self-confidence, job readiness, and professional grooming.

Deshmukh (2023) reinforced that the employability of engineering graduates depends not only on academic inputs but also on extracurricular and co-curricular activities facilitated by III Cells, including hackathons, industrial projects, and professional certification programs.

Overall, existing literature suggests that:

- Industry–Institute Interaction plays a crucial role in employability enhancement.
- Practical exposure and real-time learning improve job readiness.
- There exists a consistent skill gap that needs structured intervention.
- III Cells must adopt a systematic and collaborative approach to industry engagement.

The literature strongly supports the need for assessing how III Cell activities impact employability skills, especially in a diverse and industrially advanced state like Maharashtra.

3. Research Gap

A detailed review of scholarly studies reveals that Industry–Institute Interaction (III) is widely recognized as an essential component in enhancing employability skills among students. However, several important gaps remain unaddressed in the existing body of literature:

1. Limited Studies Focused on Maharashtra

While multiple studies discuss industry–academia linkages at a national level, **very few studies specifically examine the effectiveness of III Cell activities in Maharashtra**, a state with one of the highest concentrations of engineering and management institutions in India.

2. Lack of Comprehensive Assessment of III Cell Activities

Existing research tends to focus on **one or two activities** such as internships or industry visits. There is a lack of comprehensive studies covering the **entire spectrum of III Cell interventions**, including:

- Expert sessions
- Workshops
- MoUs
- Entrepreneurship programs
- Placement activities
- Skill development initiatives
- Industrial projects

3. Insufficient Focus on Employability Skills

Most studies emphasize placement statistics, but **few examine how III Cells contribute to specific employability skills**, such as:

- Communication
- Problem-solving
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Technical competency
- Industry exposure

There is a clear need for a study linking III Cell activities with measurable employability outcomes.

4. Gap in Comparative Analysis Between Engineering & Management Students

Existing literature rarely provides a **comparative assessment** of III Cell effectiveness across engineering and management disciplines, despite differences in skill demands and industry expectations.

5. Lack of Empirical Evidence with Large Primary Data

Few studies use **large sample sizes with primary survey data**. Many rely on qualitative insights or small samples, limiting generalizability.

There is a need for **empirical research with a robust sample** to capture realistic perceptions of students.

6. No Standard Framework for Measuring Impact

There is no widely accepted model for measuring the **overall impact of III Cell activities** on employability development.

Most studies lack a systematic evaluation method.

- **Identified Research Gap**

There is **no comprehensive, empirical study** that evaluates the impact of a wide range of III Cell activities on the employability skills of both engineering and management students in Maharashtra, using a sizeable sample and structured analysis.

4. Objectives of The Study

The present study aims to systematically evaluate the role and effectiveness of Industry–Institute Interaction (III) Cell activities in enhancing the employability skills of engineering and management students in Maharashtra. The specific objectives are as follows:

4.1 Primary Objective

1. **To assess the impact of III Cell activities on the employability skills of engineering and management students in Maharashtra.**

4.2 Secondary Objectives

2. **To examine student participation levels in various III Cell activities such as internships, industrial visits, workshops, expert lectures, MoUs, and placement programs.**
3. **To evaluate students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of III Cell interventions in developing key employability skills**, including:
    - Communication skills
    - Teamwork and collaboration
    - Leadership ability
    - Problem-solving and analytical skills
    - Technical competency
    - Industry exposure
    - Job readiness
4. **To compare the effectiveness of III Cell activities between engineering and management students.**
5. **To identify the challenges faced by institutions in implementing effective III Cell activities.**
6. **To suggest strategies for strengthening Industry–Institute Interaction to improve employability outcomes.**

5. Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the objectives and review of existing literature, the following hypotheses have been formulated to guide the empirical analysis.

5.1 Primary Hypothesis

H1: *Industry–Institute Interaction (III) Cell activities have a significant positive impact on the employability skills of engineering and management students in Maharashtra.*

H0: *Industry–Institute Interaction (III) Cell activities do not have a significant impact on the employability skills of engineering and management students in Maharashtra.*

5.2 Secondary Hypotheses

H2: *There is a significant relationship between student participation in III Cell activities and their level of industry exposure.*

$H0_2$: *There is no significant relationship between participation in III Cell activities and industry exposure.*

H3: *III Cell interventions significantly enhance soft skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving among students.*

$H0_3$: *III Cell interventions do not significantly enhance soft skills among students.*

H4: *There is a significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of III Cell activities between engineering and management students.*

$H0_4$: *There is no significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of III Cell activities between engineering and management students.*

H5: *Skill development workshops, internships, and industry visits significantly contribute to job readiness and placement outcomes.*

$H0_5$: *Skill development workshops, internships, and industry visits do not contribute significantly to job readiness and placement outcomes.*

6. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a systematic and empirical research design to assess the impact of Industry–Institute Interaction (III) Cell activities on the employability skills of engineering and management students in Maharashtra.

6.1 Research Design-

The study follows a **descriptive and analytical research design**, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative elements.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data, and statistical tools were applied to evaluate the relationship between III Cell activities and employability skills.

6.2 Population of the Study-

The population includes students studying in:

- AICTE-approved **Engineering colleges**

- AICTE-approved **Management institutes**
- Universities and affiliated colleges across Maharashtra

6.3 Sample Size-

A total of **650 students** were surveyed using a structured questionnaire.
The sample includes:

- **Engineering students:** 400
- **Management students:** 250

The sample size is adequate for generalization and statistical analysis.

6.4 Sampling Technique-

A combination of the following sampling methods was used:

- **Stratified sampling** – to include students from both engineering and management streams.
- **Convenience sampling** – to collect responses from accessible institutions.
- **Purposive sampling** – to ensure participation of students who have attended at least one III Cell activity.

This hybrid approach helps in obtaining reliable and representative data.

6.5 Sources of Data-

6.5.1 Primary Data

Collected through a structured questionnaire comprising:

- Demographic details
- Participation in III Cell activities
- Perception of effectiveness
- Skill development evaluation
- Challenges and suggestions

6.5.2 Secondary Data

Collected from:

- Journals and research papers
- AICTE, NAAC & NBA guidelines
- Institutional reports
- Websites and policy documents
- Books on employability and industry–academia linkages

6.6 Data Collection Tool-

A **five-point Likert scale** was used:

1 – Strongly Disagree
2 – Disagree
3 – Neutral
4 – Agree
5 – Strongly Agree

The questionnaire included **36 items** across major dimensions:

- Industry Exposure
- Soft Skills
- Technical Skills
- Internship Effectiveness
- Placement Preparedness
- Overall Impact of III Cell

6.7 Reliability and Validity-

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability:

The reliability score for the questionnaire was:

- **α = 0.87** (indicating high internal consistency)

Validity:

Content validity was ensured through review by:

- Two academic experts in management
- One senior faculty member from engineering
- One industry HR manager

6.8 Tools and Techniques Used for Analysis

The data was analyzed using:

- Percentage Analysis

- Mean Score Analysis
- Standard Deviation
- Cross-tabulation
- Correlation Analysis
- Chi-square Test
- Hypothesis Testing (H1 to H5)

Tables were prepared to interpret the responses effectively.

6.9 Scope of the Study-

The study covers:

- III Cell activities conducted in Maharashtra
- Engineering and management students
- Evaluation of employability outcomes
- Institutional challenges and student participation levels

7. Data Analysis

7.1 Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 650)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	372	57.23
	Female	278	42.77
Program	Engineering	402	61.85
	Management (MBA)	248	38.15
Year of Study	First Year	102	15.69
	Second Year	198	30.46
	Third Year	176	27.07
	Final Year	174	26.76
Participation in IIIC Activities	Yes	528	81.23
	No	122	18.77

Interpretation:
Most respondents are Engineering students (61.85%). A high proportion (81.23%) has participated in Industry–Institute Interaction Cell activities.

7.2 Reliability Test (Cronbach's Alpha)

Table 2: Reliability of Constructs

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
IIIC Activity Effectiveness	10	0.892
Employability Skills	12	0.914
Student Industry Exposure	06	0.873

Interpretation:
All constructs show strong internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.70$).

7.3 Perception of IIIC Activities (Mean Score Analysis)

Table 3: Students' Perception of IIIC Activities

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
IIIC activities improve technical skills	4.21	0.81	High agreement
Industrial visits enhance practical understanding	4.34	0.74	Very high agreement
Expert talks are useful	4.18	0.82	High agreement
Internship support provided by IIIC is effective	4.09	0.88	High agreement
IIIC helps in industry networking	4.13	0.79	High agreement

(5-point Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

Interpretation:
Students strongly perceive IIIC activities as highly beneficial, especially industrial visits and expert sessions.

7.4 Employability Skills Score (Descriptive Analysis)

Table 4: Employability Skills Mean Scores

Skill Category	Mean	Interpretation
Communication Skills	4.05	High
Problem-Solving Skills	4.12	High
Teamwork & Collaboration	4.17	Very High
Industry Readiness	3.98	Moderate–High
Technical Competency	4.14	High

Interpretation:
Teamwork and technical competency received the highest improvement through IIIC-linked activities.

7.5 Correlation Analysis

Table 5: Correlation between IIIC Activities & Employability Skills

Variables	Pearson r	Sig. (p-value)	Relationship
IIIC Activities ↔ Employability Skills	**0.672**	0.000	Strong positive
IIIC Activities ↔ Industry Exposure	**0.703**	0.000	Strong positive
Industry Exposure ↔ Employability Skills	**0.689**	0.000	Strong positive

Interpretation:
IIIC activities have a significant and strong positive relationship with employability skills.

7.6 Hypothesis Testing (t-Test / ANOVA)

H1: IIIC activities significantly enhance employability skills.

Table 6: One-Sample t-Test

Variable	Test Value	t-value	p-value	Result
Employability Skills	3 (neutral)	28.45	0.000	**H1 Accepted**

Interpretation:
Employability skill scores are significantly higher than neutral value (3), confirming IIIC's positive impact.

H2: There is a significant difference in employability skills between Engineering and Management students.

Table 7: Independent Sample t-Test

Program	Mean	t-value	p-value	Result
Engineering	4.11			
Management	4.08	1.17	0.241	**Not Significant**

Interpretation:
No significant difference is found—IIIC activities benefit both Engineering and Management students equally.

H3: Students participating in IIIC activities show higher employability skills than non-participants.

Table 8: Group Comparison

Group	Mean Employability Score	t-value	p-value	Result
Participants (n=528)	4.18			
Non-participants (n=122)	3.74	6.81	0.000	**Significant**

Interpretation:
Students attending IIIC activities have significantly higher employability skill levels.

8. Findings

Based on the analysis of responses from **650 Engineering and Management students** across Maharashtra, the following key findings were derived:

8.1 Participation in IIIC Activities

- A large majority of students (**81.23%**) reported active participation in Industry–Institute Interaction Cell (IIIC) activities.
- This indicates that IIIC interventions have wide reach and acceptance among students.

8.2 Effectiveness of IIIC Activities

- Students rated IIIC activities highly, especially:
  - **Industrial visits (Mean = 4.34)**
  - **Expert lectures (Mean = 4.18)**
  - **Technical skill enrichment sessions (Mean = 4.21)**
- These activities were perceived as strongly beneficial for industry exposure and practical understanding.

8.3 Reliability of the Research Instrument

- All constructs—Effectiveness of IIIC activities, Employability Skills, and Industry Exposure—showed **high reliability** (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.87), ensuring consistency of results.

8.4 Improvement in Employability Skills

- Students reported high development in:
  - **Teamwork & Collaboration (Mean = 4.17)**
  - **Technical Competency (Mean = 4.14)**
  - **Problem-Solving Skills (Mean = 4.12)**
  - **Communication Skills (Mean = 4.05)**
- The overall employability score was significantly above the neutral level, confirming meaningful skill enhancement.

8.5 Strong Positive Relationships

- IIIC activities showed strong and statistically significant correlations with:
  - **Employability Skills (r = 0.672)**
  - **Industry Exposure (r = 0.703)**
- This demonstrates that IIIC interventions directly contribute to improving students' readiness for industry.

8.6 Hypotheses Testing Outcomes

- **H1 Accepted:** IIIC activities significantly enhance employability skills ($p < 0.001$).
- **H2 Rejected:** There is **no significant difference** in employability skills between Engineering and Management students, indicating equal benefits.
- **H3 Accepted:** Students who participated in IIIC activities scored **significantly higher** in employability skills (4.18) than non-participants (3.74).

8.7 Program-Wise Impact

- Engineering and Management students display **similar perceptions**, proving the universal relevance of IIIC activities across disciplines.

8.8 Industry Exposure as a Mediating Factor

- A strong correlation (r = 0.689) between Industry Exposure and Employability Skills indicates that **IIIC initiatives indirectly improve employability by enhancing exposure to industry practices, tools, and expectations.**

8.9 Overall Impact

- Data clearly shows that the IIIC is functioning as a **critical bridge between academia and industry**, significantly influencing students' industrial knowledge, practical understanding, and job readiness.

9. Conclusion

The present study examined the impact of Industry–Institute Interaction Cell (IIIC) activities on the employability skills of Engineering and Management students in Maharashtra. Based on the responses of 650 students and the statistical analysis conducted, the study concludes that IIIC activities have a **significant and positive influence** on enhancing students' industry readiness.

The findings highlight that activities such as industrial visits, expert lectures, internships, workshops, and hands-on training sessions play a crucial role in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical industry expectations. Students reported strong improvement in essential employability skills, including teamwork, communication, technical competence, problem-solving, and analytical thinking.

Correlation and hypothesis testing further confirmed that IIIC activities significantly enhance employability skills and industry exposure. Notably, no substantial difference was observed between Engineering and Management students in terms of skill development, indicating that IIIC activities are equally beneficial across disciplines.

Overall, the study concludes that an effectively functioning Industry–Institute Interaction Cell serves as a vital academic–industry linkage mechanism that improves practical learning, professional orientation, and overall employability of students. Strengthening IIIC activities can contribute greatly to producing industry-ready graduates equipped with relevant skills and competencies.

10. Suggestions

Based on the key findings, the following suggestions are proposed to strengthen Industry–Institute Interaction Cell (IIIC) activities and improve employability outcomes for students:

10.1 Strengthen Industry Collaboration

- Establish long-term partnerships and MoUs with reputed industries across sectors such as IT, manufacturing, automotive, banking, and services.
- Create an Industry Advisory Board to provide guidance on curriculum updates, skill requirements, and training needs.
- Promote collaborative research, student internships, and consultancy projects with industry partners.

10.2 Increase Frequency of IIIC Activities

- Conduct regular industrial visits, hands-on training programs, internship drives, and skill enhancement workshops.
- Introduce structured semester-wise IIIC activities for every student.
- Integrate micro-internships and short-term industry training into the academic calendar.

10.3 Improve Quality of Internships

- Ensure internships are meaningful, supervised, and aligned with students' specialization and career goals.
- Develop a standardized internship evaluation framework involving industry mentors.
- Introduce paid or industry-sponsored internship opportunities wherever possible.

10.4 Focus on Soft Skill and Personality Development

- Conduct professional grooming sessions on communication, leadership, critical thinking, teamwork, and interview skills.
- Promote group projects, role plays, case studies, and simulation exercises.
- Organize English communication labs and digital skill enhancement workshops.

10.5 Encourage Student–Industry Projects

- Facilitate real-time industrial problem-solving through final-year projects and mini-projects.
- Encourage interdisciplinary teams to work on industry-assigned challenges or hackathons.
- Provide incentives for innovative and industry-relevant project work.

10.6 Strengthen Placement Readiness Programs

- Conduct pre-placement training (aptitude, reasoning, GD, mock interviews) in collaboration with HR professionals.
- Maintain a strong alumni network to mentor current students.
- Invite recruiters regularly for campus placements and hiring assessments.

10.7 Use Technology for IIIC Operations

- Develop a digital portal for IIIC to manage activities, documentation, internship tracking, and industry tie-ups.
- Encourage students to take online certification courses on emerging technologies (AI, IoT, analytics, cloud, etc.).
- Utilize virtual internships and webinars for broader exposure.

10.8 Address Institutional Challenges

- Improve infrastructure, training facilities, and laboratory resources wherever required.
- Appoint a dedicated IIIC coordinator with industry experience.
- Ensure budget allocation for industry-linked programs in every academic year.

10.9 Outcome-Based Monitoring

- Conduct periodic assessment of students' employability skills before and after IIIC interventions.
- Use feedback from industry experts to improve the quality of activities.
- Implement measurable KPIs for IIIC performance (number of MoUs, internships, workshops, placements, etc.).

10.10 Promote Entrepreneurship and Innovation

- Collaborate with MSMEs, incubators, and startup mentors for EDPs and startup-oriented training.
- Establish Innovation and Entrepreneurship Cells (IIC) with active industry involvement.
- Support student startups through mentoring, seed funding, and incubation facilities.

11. Limitations of the Study

Despite the comprehensive methodology, the study is subject to the following limitations:

1. **Sample Coverage Limited to Maharashtra**

   The study focuses only on engineering and management institutions in Maharashtra; results may not represent the entire country.

2. **Use of Self-Reported Data**
   Responses are based on students' perceptions, which may involve biases such as overestimation or underreporting.
3. **Limited Comparison Across Institutions**
   Variation in infrastructure, faculty involvement, and industry partnerships across institutions was not measured in depth.
4. **Non-Probability Sampling Methods Used**
   Convenience and purposive sampling limit the ability to generalize results with complete accuracy.
5. **Activity Quality Not Uniform Across Institutions**
   The study does not evaluate the qualitative differences in internships, workshops, or IIIC programs offered by various institutions.
6. **Time Constraint**
   The data was collected during a specific period and may not reflect long-term changes in IIIC activities or employability trends.

12. Future Scope

The study provides a strong foundation for further research. Future researchers may explore the following areas:

1. **A Comparative Study Across Multiple States**

   Conduct a multi-state comparative analysis to examine variations in IIIC effectiveness across India.

2. **Longitudinal Studies**
   Track students over several semesters or academic years to measure long-term employability improvements.
3. **Employer Perspective Analysis**
   Include HR managers and recruiters to evaluate employability skills from an industry viewpoint.
4. **Impact of Digital Tools and Virtual Internships**
   Assess how online training, virtual internships, and AI-based learning tools influence employability.
5. **Institutional Benchmarking**
   Develop a standardized model or index to benchmark IIIC performance across institutions.
6. **Faculty–Industry Interaction**
   Examine how faculty training, industry sabbaticals, and consultancy projects strengthen IIIC outcomes.
7. **Discipline-Specific Skill Gap Studies**
   Separate studies for core engineering branches, IT, management specializations, and emerging fields.
8. **Post-Placement Success Measurement**
   Evaluate the long-term career success, job retention, and progression of students who benefited from IIIC activities.

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