

Employability Unleashed: Bridging the Gap between Academics and Industry using the AIM-Bridge Framework

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Abstract:

The persistent disconnect between academic learning and industry expectations continues to challenge graduate employability in an increasingly dynamic and technology-driven labour market. This paper proposes the **AIM-Bridge Framework (Academia–Industry Mentorship Bridge)** as an integrated approach to strengthening employability through structured collaboration between higher education institutions and industry stakeholders. The framework combines outcome-based curriculum design, AI-enabled personalized learning, experiential education, industry mentoring, project-based learning, internships, continuous skill assessment, and career readiness interventions to develop technical, digital, analytical, and professional competencies. It further emphasizes the integration of emerging technologies, lifelong learning, and feedback-driven curriculum enhancement to ensure alignment with evolving workforce demands. The study presents a conceptual model illustrating how the AIM-Bridge Framework can reduce skill mismatches, enhance graduate preparedness, improve employer satisfaction, and foster sustainable academia–industry partnerships. The proposed framework offers practical implications for policymakers, educational institutions, employers, and researchers seeking to build a future-ready workforce and promote inclusive economic growth through employability-focused higher education.

Keywords: *Employability, LDMI, Skill Wallet, Industry feedback, Applied Learning, Gap Analysis*

Submitted: May 20, 2026

Revised: June 30, 2026

Accepted: July 10, 2026

Published: July 15, 2026

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.21448118](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21448118)



1. Introduction:

Graduate employability has become a strategic priority for higher education institutions as industries increasingly demand graduates equipped with technical expertise, digital literacy, problem-solving ability, adaptability, and interpersonal competencies. Despite curriculum reforms, a persistent gap remains between academic outcomes and workplace expectations, resulting in skill mismatches and reduced employment readiness (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2021). Rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and digital transformation have further reshaped workforce requirements, compelling universities to adopt innovative, industry-aligned pedagogical approaches (World Economic Forum, 2025). The proposed AIM-Bridge Framework (Academia–Industry Mentorship Bridge) seeks to bridge this divide by integrating AI-supported personalized learning, experiential education, industry mentoring, project-based learning, internships, and continuous competency assessment. By fostering sustained collaboration between academia and industry, the framework aims to enhance graduate employability, promote lifelong learning, and develop future-ready professionals capable of meeting evolving organizational and societal needs in the era of Industry 5.0 (UNESCO, 2023). Traditional methods such as internships, workshops, and curriculum updates provide partial support but often fail to offer continuous, real-time exposure to industry challenges and applied learning experiences. As a result, students lack practical exposure and struggle to meet industry standards. To address this issue, the present study proposes an innovative AIM-Bridge Framework, designed to establish a dynamic connection between academics and industry. Through approaches such as Live Digital Mirror Industry (LDMI), students engage in real-time industry tasks within classroom

settings, guided by industry experts and supported through teamwork. A Skill Wallet System tracks the competencies developed by each student. Feedback System ensures continuous evaluation and improvement through structured industry feedback. The ultimate aim of this framework is to enhance employability by fostering critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and job readiness through continuous real-world learning.

2. Rationale of Study

The growing disparity between academic learning outcomes and industry expectations has become a significant concern for higher education institutions, employers, and policymakers worldwide. Although universities have introduced outcome-based education, internships, and skill development initiatives, many graduates continue to lack industry-relevant competencies such as digital literacy, critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and adaptability required in the AI-driven economy (OECD, 2023). The emergence of artificial intelligence, Industry 5.0, and rapidly evolving workplace technologies has further intensified the need for an integrated framework that systematically connects academic institutions with industry through mentorship, experiential learning, AI-enabled personalized learning, and continuous competency assessment. The proposed AIM-Bridge Framework (Academia–Industry Mentorship Bridge) addresses this need by providing a structured model for aligning curriculum, pedagogy, and industry engagement to enhance graduate employability and workforce readiness. The framework is expected to support educational institutions, employers, and policymakers in developing sustainable academia–industry partnerships while reducing skill mismatches and fostering future-ready human capital (UNESCO, 2023).

3. Literature Review:

Many graduates and postgraduates strive to secure employment even after completing their degrees. Unemployment is increasing, which indicates a clear gap between academics and industry. Kshirasagar-Krishan-Rao (2026) shows that although graduates possess degrees, they often lack practical expertise and communication skills, highlighting the mismatch between academic offerings and workplace requirements. Jackson and Tomlinson (2021) argued that graduate employability extends beyond academic qualifications and encompasses the development of transferable skills, professional identity, adaptability, and career self-management. Their study emphasized that stronger collaboration between higher education institutions and employers is essential for preparing graduates to meet contemporary labour market expectations.

Crompton and Burke (2023) reviewed the application of artificial intelligence in higher education and found that AI enhances personalized learning, adaptive assessment, student engagement, and learning analytics. The authors concluded that AI-supported teaching and learning can significantly improve students' employability by fostering digital competencies and lifelong learning skills. World Economic Forum (2025) highlighted that technological disruption, artificial intelligence, automation, and green transitions are reshaping global workforce requirements. The report identified analytical thinking, AI literacy, resilience, creativity, and continuous learning as the most critical competencies for future employment, reinforcing the need for stronger academia–industry collaboration.

Alam et al. (2024) examined the role of generative AI in higher education assessment and reported that AI-enabled learning environments can improve problem-solving, creativity, and personalized feedback when implemented responsibly. The study recommended integrating AI into curriculum design to better align educational outcomes with industry expectations. Risika and Bannigol (2024) indicate in their research that there is a clear gap between academics and industry. To address this gap, it is necessary to align syllabi with industry needs, introduce practical exposure at workplaces, and help students acquire the skill sets required for employment.

4. Objectives of the Study:

- To identify the gap between academics and industry expectations
- To identify Key Employability Skills
- To design and implement the AIM-Bridge Framework
- To enhance employability through real-time task-based learning
- To evaluate the effectiveness of LDMI in improving student performance
- To assess the role of Skill Wallet in tracking competency development
- To analyze the impact of continuous industry feedback on student readiness

5. Research Methodology

Research Design: This study follows a **qualitative research approach** based on **secondary data analysis** and **conceptual development of AIM framework**. The objective is to explore the gap between academic learning and industry expectations and to propose a structured solution in the form of the AIM-Bridge Framework with LDMI, Skill Wallet, Feedback system as its components. This framework develops a structured framework tries to solve employability challenges.

Data Sources: The study relies on secondary data collected from credible and diverse sources including peer-reviewed journals, industry reports etc.

Motive	Observations from Literature	Inference
Academic Outputs	Curricula are largely theory-focused, minimal exposure to practical skills and projects implementation.	Graduates often lack workplace-ready technical and soft skills.
Industry Requirements	Employers prioritize critical thinking, problem-solving, adaptability, and digital literacy.	There is a mismatch between what academia provides and what the workplace demands.
Skill Gaps	Various studies reveals lacunas in communication, teamwork, real-time problem-solving, and role-wise technical skills.	These gaps leads to unemployment and underemployment.
Existing Development Programs	Internships, workshops, and training programs exist but often lack structure, proper role allocation, methods measurable outcomes.	Ineffectiveness of current programs highlights the need for a structured and monitored employability ecosystem.

A **thematic analysis approach** was used to understand the collected data. The process includes: **Data Familiarization** – Studying literature and reports carefully, **Coding** – Identifying repetitive concepts such as skill gaps, lack of practical exposure, and needs for industry collaboration, **Theme Development** – Grouping codes into broader themes, including: Skill Gap between Academia and Industry, Lack of Real-Time Industry Exposure, Need for Continuous Skill Tracking, Importance of Structured Feedback, **Interpretation** – Review key challenges result employability.

• Benchmarking Analysis

A **benchmarking analysis** was conducted to find: academic curriculum components against Industry-required skills. This approach helped identify critical gaps, particularly required technical competency, soft skills, problem-solving abilities, practical and role-based experience.

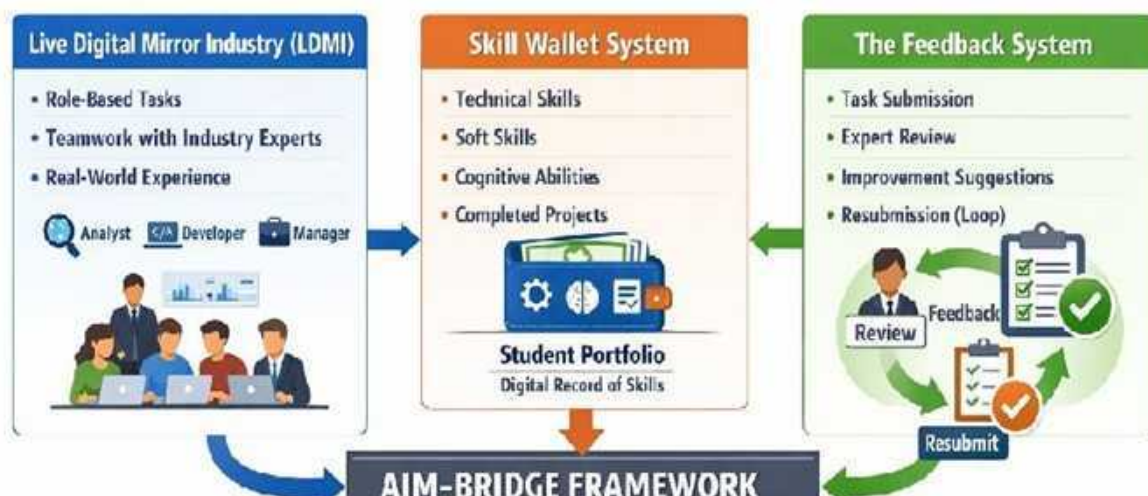
Skills	Academic Emphasis	Industry Expectation	Gap
Technical skills	Moderate	High	Medium
Soft skills	Low	High	High
Critical thinking	Low	High	High
Adaptability	Minimal	High	High
Digital literacy	Moderate	High	Medium

6. Discussion and Analysis

• Conceptual Framework Development

Based on perceptions derived from thematic and benchmarking analysis, the **AIM-Bridge Framework** was developed.

Figure 1: AIM-Bridge Framework



The AIM-Bridge Framework tries to assess addresses the lacunas of traditional education systems by integrating real-time industry exposure and academics. The LDMI approach simulates real work environments, providing students to gain hands-on experience as if they are working in Industry by enriching practical knowledge. The Skill Wallet System ensures transparency and measurable skill development, while the Feedback System enforces continuous learning and refinement. This framework environment enhances communication and teamwork skills, which are important for employability.

7. Findings of Study:

- The students participating in LDMI showed **higher engagement levels** compared to traditional learning methods.

- Skill Wallet data indicated **progressive improvement in both technical and soft skills**. Industry feedback revealed that students developed **better practical understanding and adaptability**. The study indicates that the students experienced the **confidence and teamwork ability**.
- This AIM-Bridge Framework was designed and conceptually applied through the incorporation of LDMI, Skill Wallet, and Feedback system Industry tasks integrated into syllabus (Internal/College level/Bridge Course).

8. Conclusion

This study infers that the **AIM-Bridge Framework** is a constructive concept for bridging the gap between academia and industry. By uniting real-time industry interaction at operational level, Roles(task)wise learning, and continuous skill tracking, this framework significantly improves employability of degree holders. The model not only enhances technical competencies but also develops much needed skills like communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. Thus, implementing such industry-integrated learning frameworks at educational institutions at least as Bridge courses can result in job ready students and will definitely improve employment.

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