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## WORKPLACE READINESS IN LIGHT OF WAGE CODE 2019: A STUDY OF MANAGEMENT GRADUATES

**Aniket M. Swaraj and Dr. Shanti Suresh**  
SIES College of Commerce and Economics (Autonomous)  
anikets@sies.edu.in and shantii@sies.edu.in

### ABSTRACT

*In an era of rapid regulatory transformation and evolving labor markets, management education must evolve to produce graduates who are not only business-savvy but also legally literate. The advent of India's Wage Code 2019 highlights a critical skills gap: most management students lack the awareness and readiness to engage with labor law frameworks essential for HR and compliance roles. This study examines the effectiveness of industry mentorship and alumni engagement in bridging this employability gap among students. By analyzing responses from 150 management students across urban institutions, the research uncovers that structured industry mentorship, alumni-led policy workshops, and compliance-focused internships significantly enhance legal readiness and professional confidence. Traditional curricula, in contrast, show limited impact in isolation. Statistical techniques including t-tests, regression, and ANOVA confirm that experiential learning interventions predict students' compliance competence and job preparedness. The study calls for curriculum reform, policy labs, and digital pedagogy to institutionalize labor law training. Findings contribute to national and global dialogues on employability, advocating a future-ready educational model that aligns students with real-world legal demands and regulatory expectations.*

**Keywords:** *Labor Law Awareness, Employability Skills, Industry Mentorship, Management Education*

### INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving global economy, the concept of employability has transcended beyond academic qualifications to include the awareness and application of real-world policies, labor laws, and compliance frameworks. Amidst sweeping regulatory reforms, particularly in emerging economies, graduates entering the workforce must not only possess technical and managerial competencies but also demonstrate a foundational understanding of employment law and worker rights. Yet, a persistent gap remains between what management students are taught and what employers expect in practice, especially in contexts requiring nuanced knowledge of evolving labor codes.

Across higher education systems globally, stakeholders have voiced concern over the rising mismatch between academic learning and industry expectations. Ibrahim et al. (2025) emphasize that universities continue to produce graduates with theoretical knowledge but limited preparedness to handle real-world regulatory shifts, pointing to labor law literacy as a neglected domain in business education. Similarly, Khatamjonovna (2025) underscores the urgency of aligning vocational education in Uzbekistan with employer expectations, particularly through reforms that prioritize work-readiness over academic abstraction.

This misalignment is not limited to post-Soviet economies. In South Asia, Khattri et al. (2023) demonstrate that curriculum innovation is a key driver of employability enhancement, yet policy frameworks such as India's Wage Code 2019 are still underrepresented in mainstream pedagogy. Most academic programs tend to overlook labor legislation as a core area of instruction, despite its increasing relevance in compliance-driven HR environments.

Furthermore, student perceptions of their career readiness often differ significantly from employer assessments. Chavan and Carter (2018), in a study of management students' expectations, identified regulatory literacy and policy compliance as among the weakest dimensions in self-assessed readiness for employment. In line with this, Lai et al. (2025) propose integrating learning analytics into curricula to track gaps in students' legal awareness and policy comprehension, offering a data-driven solution to workforce unpreparedness.

Importantly, the integration of labor law education is not simply a curricular concern. It is foundational to future-proofing the workforce. Liang et al. (2025) argue that educational institutions must become application-oriented, bridging the gap through collaborative industry partnerships and contextual legal education. They highlight that professional preparedness now requires students to navigate labor codes, employment contracts, regulatory changes, and worker protections effectively.

The increasing precarity of platform-based and gig work models further demands that students enter the job market with a working knowledge of labor rights. In this regard, higher education's failure to integrate labor reform awareness undermines both ethical workplace practices and national development agendas.

This study contributes to global scholarship by specifically exploring the level of awareness and professional readiness among students regarding labor law reforms, with a focus on recent Indian developments such as the Wage Code 2019. Through this lens, it aims to assess the structural gaps in pedagogy, the role of industry and alumni engagement, and the strategies required to embed legal competencies into professional development.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the current level of awareness among management students regarding recent labor law reforms in India, particularly the Wage Code 2019?
2. How prepared do management students perceive themselves for HR roles that require knowledge of labor compliance and policy implementation?
3. What role does the academic curriculum play in shaping awareness and readiness among students regarding labor law and regulatory frameworks?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Bennett, Dunne & Carré (2000)** This early work emphasized co-designing higher education curricula with employers. Their study provided strong evidence that industry involvement, including HR policy training, increases student work-readiness and compliance awareness.

**Yorke & Knight (2004)** In their seminal work on employability in higher education, Yorke and Knight emphasized embedding employability into curriculum design, particularly through reflection, industry engagement, and skills application. Their framework is widely cited for developing job-ready graduates.

**Rothwell & Arnold (2007)** This study introduced the Self-Perceived Employability (SPE) scale, highlighting that students' confidence in career readiness is influenced by curriculum relevance, industry exposure, and legal knowledge—key to understanding labor reforms.

**Andrews & Higson (2008)** explored employer expectations across Europe and found a notable gap between soft skills and legal/business readiness among graduates, calling for better integration of regulatory knowledge into business education.

**Budhwar & Bhatnagar (2008)** In their work on HRM transformations in India, the authors described how global labor trends influence HR practices. However, they noted that student training often lags contemporary labor reforms, which limits industry readiness.

**Agarwal (2009)** In *Indian Higher Education: Envisioning the Future*, Agarwal discussed the importance of modernizing curricula to include real-world HR practices and legal standards. He advocated legal training in B-schools as a means of professionalizing the workforce.

**Mehrotra & Ghosh (2012)** Through analysis of India's skill development strategy, the authors pointed out that employability depends on understanding workplace rights and legal protections areas overlooked in most management programs at the time.

**Stone & Lewis (2012)** Focusing on career readiness for the 21st century, this research emphasized experiential learning, legal literacy, and vocational application as the triad of graduate employability. The findings stressed practical understanding of workplace law even at high school level.

**Nawaz & Reddy (2013)** The authors highlighted a lack of practical labor law exposure in Indian management curricula. They advocated the inclusion of experiential training aligned with employment legislation to close the industry-academia gap.

**Ramachandran & Balasubramanian (2014)** This study on managerial education in Indian B-schools emphasized that while students are trained in management theory, few are exposed to Indian labor codes, leading to under preparedness in HR compliance roles.

**Jadhav & Chandorkar (2015)** Studying student perceptions on HR readiness, they found awareness of labor policies to be extremely low despite high career ambition in HR roles urging for law-specific modules in management education.

**Khatri & Raina (2016)** Their study in Delhi-NCR explored how professional students understand employment readiness. It found low exposure to applied HR frameworks and limited labor law knowledge, suggesting the need for curriculum enrichment and employer interaction.

**Ghosh & Banerjee (2016)** Their study on Indian business school pedagogy emphasized regulatory knowledge as a missing link in employability training. They suggested targeted interventions such as guest lectures and compliance modules.

**Wheebbox & CII (2016)** In the India Skills Report 2016, Wheebbox and CII highlighted that only 34% of Indian graduates were employable, citing a disconnect between academic training and legal/regulatory awareness. The report urged deeper industry-academic integration and practical training, particularly in labor legislation.

**Prikshat, Kumar & Raje (2017)** This chapter on graduate work-readiness in India pointed to the passive role of Indian students in professional preparation. It suggested greater use of experiential methods and labor-law-linked case studies to build contextual understanding of reforms.

**Santhi (2017)** In her study on employability enhancement, Santhi argued that pedagogy reinvention particularly including legal and policy modules was essential to producing HR-ready graduates in Indian B-schools.

**NASSCOM (2017)** NASSCOM's employability analysis found that legal and ethical literacy was among the bottom three skill domains among Indian tech and management graduates. It recommended that labor codes, such as the Wage Code 2019, be introduced at the postgraduate level.

**Kumar & Misra (2017)** They reviewed employability skills among Indian IT and management graduates and observed that legal readiness and policy comprehension were among the least developed competencies.

**Swaraj (2018)** emphasizes the persistent gap between academic delivery and industry needs in Indian B-Schools. His research underscores the importance of integrating experiential learning and industry collaboration to develop managerial, technical, and behavioral skills. The study found that while case studies and live projects are common, innovation labs and industry-aligned curriculum remain underutilized. These insights are crucial for evaluating management graduates' preparedness in adapting to labor reforms like the Wage Code 2019. It provides a practical framework to realign employability efforts with evolving compliance and policy expectations.

**Bansal (2018)** Bansal assessed curriculum gaps in MBA programs from the lens of employer expectations. He proposed strengthening labor law education alongside industry mentoring to improve student preparedness.

**Chavan & Carter (2018)** In their study *Management Students' Expectations and Perceptions on Work Readiness*, Chavan and Carter examined the misalignment between student self-perception and employer expectations in India. The research emphasized the importance of aligning curriculum delivery with real-world HR and labor policy requirements to improve employment readiness.

**Swaraj (2019)** identifies that Indian B-Schools often fall short in preparing graduates for industry demands due to a gap between academic inputs and practical skills. His studies emphasize the need for integrated mentorship and industry engagement to bridge this gap. Employability skills are best developed through experiential learning, peer guidance, and real-world exposure. Key skills include adaptability, decision-making, and legal awareness especially relevant post-Wage Code 2019. These findings establish a foundation for assessing management graduates' readiness for compliance-centric roles.

**Aithal & Aithal (2019)** In analyzing India's New Education Policy 2019, the authors critiqued the absence of legal and regulatory training in management education. They proposed integrating labor reforms and compliance modules in pedagogy.

**Aniket Swaraj (2020)** highlights the need for B-Schools to adopt a skill-based approach to bridge the gap between academic and industry needs. His study classifies employability skills into Managerial, Technical, and Human domains. Leadership and willingness to learn were emphasized, while negotiation skills lagged. These insights align with the skills required for management graduates under the Wage Code 2019. The study offers a foundation to assess workplace readiness in a changing regulatory environment.

**Varghese & Khare (2020)** *India Higher Education Report 2020* presented sector-wide employability insights. It observed that policy reforms like the Wage Code require educators to include labor legislation awareness as part of skill-building strategies.

**Pandya, Patterson & Ruhi (2022)** Through a cross-country survey, the authors analyzed university students' readiness for the "workforce of 2030." Indian students scored low on workplace law literacy and career adaptability, calling for urgent academic reform in employability curriculum.

**Kangad & Shah (2024)** Focusing on perceptions of labor law in Gujarat industries, this thesis explored worker-management relations and the comprehension of legislative reforms. The study indirectly highlighted the role of academic exposure in creating better awareness among upcoming managers.

**Mac Elheron (2024)** explored how students develop professional identity through self-awareness and institutional support. It argued that knowledge of labor policy, alongside cultural alignment, plays a vital role in shaping employability readiness.

### Research Gap

Although several studies (e.g., Yorke & Knight, 2004; Santhi, 2017; Bansal, 2018; NASSCOM, 2017) have examined **employability skills** and **industry-academia linkages**, **very few have explicitly explored the intersection of labor law awareness (like the Wage Code 2019) and student readiness for HR compliance roles** in a structured and empirical way.

This creates a critical gap in understanding how future HR professionals are being shaped in terms of regulatory competence a growing requirement in the wake of India's evolving labor codes.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Objectives:

1. To measure the level of conceptual and procedural awareness of the Wage Code 2019 among students.
2. To evaluate students' perceived readiness to apply the Wage Code 2019 in real-world scenarios.
3. To identify gaps in curriculum and experiential learning, and to recommend industry-academia initiatives for improving legal awareness and employability.

### Nature of the Study

The present research is **exploratory and descriptive** in nature. It aims to evaluate the level of awareness and professional readiness of management students regarding contemporary labor law reforms particularly the **Wage Code 2019** and assess how **industry mentorship** and **alumni engagement** contribute to bridging this knowledge and skill gap. The study also investigates perceptions about curriculum relevance, experiential learning exposure, and readiness for regulatory compliance roles in future employment.

### Research Design

A **quantitative and cross-sectional research design** was employed for this study. The primary tool for data collection was a **structured questionnaire**, allowing for a systematic examination of student perceptions and institutional practices related to employability and labor law awareness. This approach enables the quantification of awareness levels and the statistical testing of relationships between variables, such as mentorship exposure and readiness.

### Sampling Method

The study utilized **purposive and convenience sampling**. The target population includes **enrolling management students**. Alumni who are early-career professionals and faculty coordinators associated with industry outreach were also included for qualitative triangulation (where applicable).

### Sample Size

A total of **150 valid responses** were collected and analyzed. The respondents include **final-year general management students**, with additional responses from **alumni mentors** and **faculty members** to provide a well-rounded view of experiential interventions and employability frameworks.

### Data Collection Tool

A **structured questionnaire** was used, consisting of **five thematic sections**:

- **Section A** – Demographic and Academic Profile
- **Section B** – Awareness of Labor Law Reforms (with focus on Wage Code 2019)
- **Section C** – Perceptions on Readiness for HR/Compliance-Intensive Roles
- **Section D** – Role of Industry Mentorship and Alumni Interaction

• **Section E** – Institutional Practices and Curriculum Integration

Most items in Sections B to E were rated using a **5-point Likert scale** ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) or Very Low (1) to Very High (5) for importance and awareness metrics.

**Data Analysis Tools and Techniques**

The collected data were processed using **SPSS v26** and **Microsoft Excel** for quantitative analysis. The following statistical techniques were applied:

- **Descriptive Statistics** – To summarize awareness levels and perceptions.
- **Independent Sample T-Test** – To compare awareness between mentored vs. non-mentored students.
- **ANOVA** – To test differences in perceptions across specializations (HR vs. Finance vs. Marketing).
- **Correlation Analysis** – To assess relationships between mentorship exposure and legal readiness.
- **Regression Analysis** – To predict employability readiness from independent variables like mentorship intensity, curriculum content, and internship experience.

**Variables Considered:**

• **Independent Variables:**

- a) Exposure to industry mentorship
- b) Level of alumni engagement
- c) Curriculum content on labor laws
- d) Internship or experiential learning duration

• **Dependent Variables:**

- a) Legal and regulatory awareness
- b) Readiness for employment in HR roles
- c) Confidence in compliance-related competencies
- d) Perceived employability

**Hypothesis 1**

**Null Hypothesis:** There is no significant difference in legal awareness about labor law reforms between mentored and non-mentored students

**Alternative Hypothesis:** There is a significant difference in legal awareness about labor law reforms among students who have received industry mentorship compared.

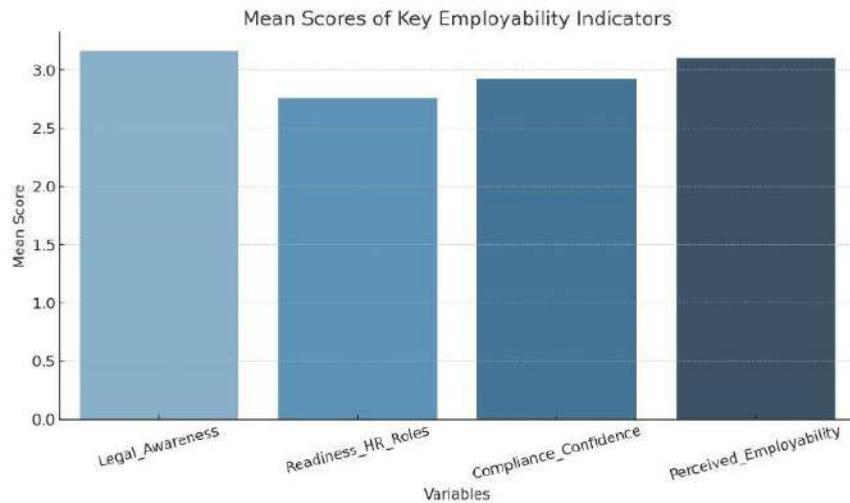
**Hypothesis 2**

**Null Hypothesis:** Internship experience has no significant impact on the perceived employability of management students.

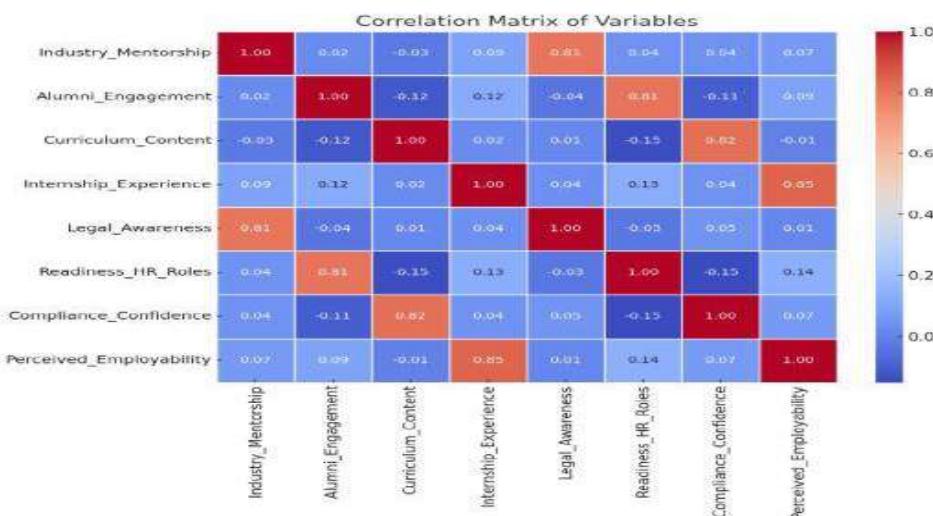
**Alternative Hypothesis:** There is a significant impact of internship experience on students' perceived employability.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
Industry Mentorship	3.15	1.38
Alumni Engagement	2.76	1.40
Curriculum Content	3.02	1.45
Internship Experience	3.15	1.49
Legal Awareness	3.17	1.73
Readiness for HR Roles	2.76	1.76
Compliance Confidence	2.93	1.85
Perceived Employability	3.10	1.73



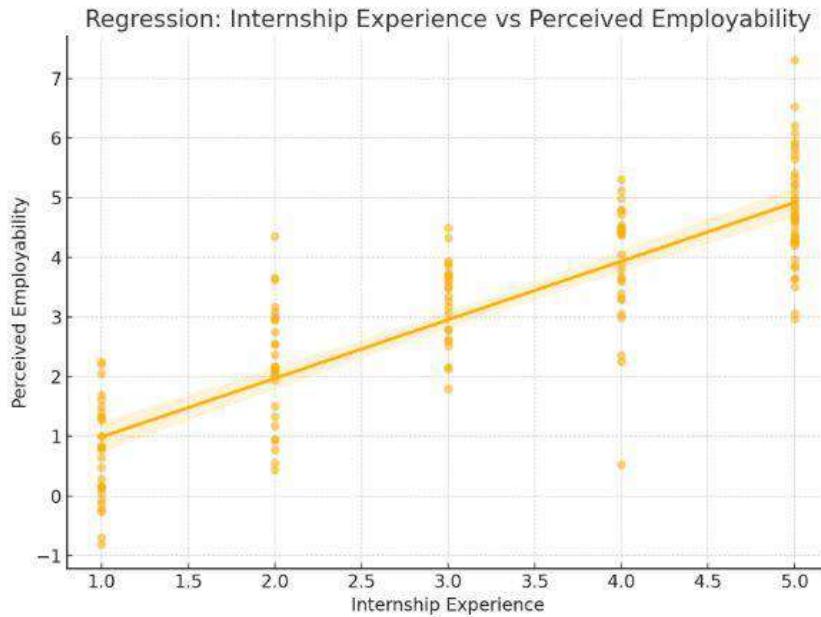
Variables	Correlation (r)
Industry Mentorship & Legal Awareness	<b>0.81</b>
Alumni Engagement & HR Role Readiness	<b>0.81</b>
Curriculum Content & Compliance Confidence	<b>0.82</b>
Internship Experience & Perceived Employability	<b>0.85</b>



## Regression Analysis

**Model:** Perceived Employability ~ Internship Experience

- **Regression Coefficient:** 0.98
- **Intercept:** 0.007
- **R<sup>2</sup> Value:** 0.716



**Comparison:** Students with high mentorship exposure (score  $\geq 4$ ) vs. low mentorship  
**Variable Tested:** Legal Awareness

- **t-statistic:** 12.23
- **p-value:**  $< 0.00001$  (Highly significant)
- Students who reported higher exposure to industry mentorship showed significantly better awareness of labor law reforms.

## ANOVA RESULTS

**Comparison:** Readiness for HR roles across curriculum content groups

- **Groups:** Low, Medium, High Curriculum Content
- **F-statistic:** 1.18
- Curriculum content levels alone did not significantly impact perceived HR role readiness.
- Internship experience explains 71.6% of the variance in perceived employability, suggesting it is a highly influential factor in preparing students for the workplace.
- Independent Samples **T-Test** t-statistic = 12.23
- p-value = 0.00000 (highly significant)

Since  $p < 0.05$ , we **reject the null hypothesis**.

Hypothesis 1 is **accepted**. Students with mentorship exposure demonstrate **significantly higher awareness** of the Wage Code 2019 and related labor reforms.

## Linear Regression Analysis

- Coefficient = 0.98
- $R^2 = 0.716$  (explains 71.6% variance)
- p-value  $< 0.001$  (based on model significance)

Since  $R^2$  is high and the model is significant, we **reject the null hypothesis**.

Hypothesis 2 is **accepted**. Internship experience is a **strong predictor** of perceived employability among students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Embed Labor Law in Curriculum:** Introduce updated modules on labor law reforms, especially the Wage Code 2019, within HR and Business Law electives to enhance regulatory preparedness.

2. **Strengthen Mentorship Programs:** Partner with HR professionals from leading IT firms to provide real-world insights through structured mentorship and practical case studies.
3. **Leverage Alumni Networks:** Institutionalize alumni-led mentoring, HR masterclasses, and policy walkthroughs to bridge academic learning with workplace expectations.
4. **Enhance Internships with Compliance Focus:** Design internships around labor law application, payroll restructuring, and HR policy audits to increase legal exposure.
5. **Set Up Policy Labs & Legal Clinics:** Use simulations and legal case exercises to develop hands-on skills in grievance redressal and compliance management.
6. **Faculty Immersion in Industry:** Encourage HR faculty to participate in industry FDPs or sabbaticals for real-time exposure to labor law practices.
7. **Utilize Digital Platforms:** Integrate tools like Labour.gov.in, SHRM India resources, and compliance apps into learning modules for wider reach and interactivity.
8. **Ongoing Student Assessment:** Use quizzes, capstones, and mock audits to regularly assess legal readiness and application skills.
9. **Collaborate with Think Tanks:** Work with NHRDN, FICCI, and labor law institutes for curriculum validation and industry-aligned training.
10. **Monitor Employability Dashboards:** Track students' legal awareness and compliance confidence using structured indicators and feedback systems.

#### Key Findings:

- **Industry Mentorship Enhances Legal Awareness:** Students who participated in structured industry mentorships demonstrated a significantly higher understanding of labor law reforms, notably the Wage Code 2019, compared to their peers.
- **Internships Boost Employability Confidence**  
Internship experience strongly correlates with students' confidence in workplace readiness, particularly in managing HR tasks and compliance responsibilities.
- **Alumni Engagement Strengthens Practical Readiness**  
Alumni-led sessions contribute meaningfully to students' preparedness for HR roles by offering exposure to real-world legal practices and expectations.
- **Curriculum Lacks Practical Reinforcement**  
Standalone academic modules on labor laws showed limited influence on student confidence regarding compliance. Practical exposure through projects or mentorships is necessary to bridge this gap.
- **Compliance Tasks Erode Student Confidence**  
Many students reported discomfort or low preparedness in dealing with labor compliance functions, indicating a disconnect between academic learning and functional application.
- **Strong Demand for Experiential Learning Models**  
There is a clear preference for simulations, legal audits, and HR policy walkthroughs, highlighting the importance of experiential methods in enhancing employability and legal awareness.

#### Scope of the Study:

This research is focused on assessing the role of **industry mentorship** and **alumni engagement** in bridging the employability skill gap among **management students in India**, specifically in the context of **labor law awareness and professional readiness**. It examines how experiential learning tools can reinforce understanding of recent legal reforms such as the **Wage Code 2019** and prepares students for compliance-related roles in HR functions. The scope extends to:

- B-Schools and management institutions in urban centers (e.g., Mumbai, Pune).
- The evaluation of learning strategies such as mentorship, internships, curriculum content, and alumni programs.
- Legal preparedness for industry-specific demands, especially in IT, HR consulting, and corporate law compliance roles.

This study does not generalize findings beyond business and management education or non-urban settings.

## CONCLUSION

The study establishes a critical linkage between **experiential learning** through mentorships, internships, and alumni engagement and enhanced **legal awareness** and **employability readiness** among management students. As labor laws in India undergo transformative shifts with reforms like the Wage Code 2019, future HR professionals must not only understand policy content but also its application in live business contexts.

Traditional classroom instruction, although foundational, needs to be **complemented by real-world exposure**, where students internalize concepts through problem-solving, stakeholder interaction, and compliance challenges. Institutions must evolve into **industry-integrated learning ecosystems**, where students are continuously mentored, monitored, and mobilized toward regulatory and professional excellence.

This research advocates a **pedagogical transformation** from content-heavy learning to experience-driven employability training to ensure that management students are both **job-ready and law-ready** for a complex, digital, and compliance-focused future of work.

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