WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING AND CURRICULUM EFFECTIVENESS IN TEACHER EDUCATION: ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF GRADUATE TEACHERS

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Abstract

This study examined Work-Integrated Learning and curriculum effectiveness in teacher education, focusing on enhancing the employability and professional competence of graduate teachers. Specifically, the study determined the extent to which Work-Integrated Learning influences graduate teachers' employability and professional competence. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised teacher educators and final-year student teachers in teacher education institutions. A structured questionnaire titled *Work-Integrated Learning and Curriculum Effectiveness Questionnaire (WILCEQ)* was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts and reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation and regression analysis were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that Work-Integrated Learning influenced graduate teacher employability to a high extent (cluster mean = 3.53) and enhanced professional competence to a high extent (cluster mean = 3.53). Regression results showed that Work-Integrated Learning significantly predicted graduate teacher employability, explaining 46.5% of the variation in employability outcomes. It also significantly predicted professional competence, accounting for 52.4% of the variation in professional competence. The study concluded that Work-Integrated Learning is essential for bridging the gap between theoretical preparation and professional teaching practice. It was recommended that teacher education institutions should strengthen workplace learning experiences through effective partnerships, mentorship, and curriculum integration. The study contributes to knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the role of Work-Integrated Learning as a strategic curriculum approach for producing employable and professionally competent graduate teachers.

Keywords: Work-Integrated Learning, Teacher Education, Curriculum Effectiveness, Graduate Employability, Professional Competence.

Introduction

Education systems globally are experiencing significant transformations due to increasing demands for graduates who possess not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills, professional competencies, and the capacity to respond effectively to changing workplace realities. In the twenty-first century, the effectiveness of higher education is increasingly assessed by its ability to produce graduates who are employable, innovative, adaptable, and capable of applying acquired knowledge to solve real-world problems. Within this changing educational landscape, teacher education has attracted considerable attention because teachers constitute the foundation for human capital development and the achievement of educational goals. The quality of teachers produced by teacher education institutions significantly influences teaching effectiveness, learners' academic outcomes, and the overall quality of education systems (Darling-Hammond, 2020). Consequently, there is increasing recognition that teacher preparation programmes must extend beyond traditional classroom-based instruction and incorporate authentic learning experiences that connect

theoretical understanding with professional practice.

One approach that has gained prominence in addressing the need for practice-oriented teacher preparation is Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). Work-Integrated Learning refers to structured educational experiences that intentionally integrate academic knowledge with workplace practices through activities such as teaching practicum, internships, field experiences, professional placements, and school-based engagement. WIL provides student teachers with opportunities to apply pedagogical theories in authentic teaching environments, develop professional identities, enhance classroom management abilities, and acquire competencies necessary for effective teaching practice (Jackson, 2019). Unlike conventional teacher education approaches that often emphasize knowledge acquisition within university classrooms, WIL promotes experiential learning by allowing future teachers to learn through participation, reflection, observation, and interaction with experienced practitioners.

The growing emphasis on graduate employability and professional competence has positioned WIL as a critical component of effective curriculum design in teacher education. In contemporary education systems, employability extends beyond obtaining employment; it involves possessing transferable skills, communication abilities, digital competence, problem-solving capacity, adaptability, and professional dispositions required for sustained success in the teaching profession. Graduate teachers are expected to design learner-centred instructional experiences, integrate emerging technologies, assess diverse learners effectively, collaborate with educational stakeholders, and respond to complex classroom challenges. Therefore, teacher education curricula must provide meaningful opportunities through which student teachers can acquire these competencies before entering professional practice (Sachs, 2016).

The effectiveness of teacher education curricula is largely determined by the extent to which curriculum content, learning experiences, instructional strategies, and assessment processes align with professional expectations. An effective teacher education curriculum should establish a strong connection between theoretical knowledge acquired in higher education institutions and the practical realities of classroom practice. However, evidence suggests that many teacher education programmes continue to experience a persistent theory-practice gap, where graduates possess academic knowledge but lack sufficient confidence, practical competence, and professional readiness to effectively perform teaching responsibilities (Korthagen, 2017). This challenge highlights the need for curriculum approaches that position practical experiences as an integral component of teacher preparation rather than as an isolated or supplementary activity.

Globally, teacher education institutions have increasingly adopted WIL as a mechanism for improving graduate readiness and strengthening professional learning. Through structured engagement with schools and educational communities, student teachers are exposed to authentic teaching situations where they develop classroom management skills, understand learner diversity, apply instructional strategies, and receive professional feedback from experienced teachers. Such experiences encourage reflective practice and enable future teachers to critically evaluate their instructional approaches. According to Billett (2015), workplace environments provide important learning opportunities because they expose learners to the social, cultural, and professional contexts within which knowledge is applied.

Empirical evidence supports the importance of teaching practicum as a major component of WIL in teacher education. Darling-Hammond (2020) investigated clinical experiences in teacher preparation programmes and found that teacher

candidates who participated in well-supervised field-based experiences demonstrated higher levels of instructional competence and professional confidence compared with those whose preparation was primarily theoretical. The study revealed that effective practicum experiences enabled student teachers to connect educational theories with classroom realities, thereby improving their professional readiness.

Similarly, Allen and Wright (2018) examined the influence of professional experience placements on preservice teachers' professional learning and found that workplace-based learning enhanced reflective practice, pedagogical decision-making, and understanding of classroom situations. However, the study emphasized that the effectiveness of practicum experiences depended largely on the quality of mentorship and collaboration between teacher education institutions and partner schools. In the Nigerian context, Eze and Okeke (2021) investigated teaching practice experiences and teaching competence among undergraduate teacher education students and found that teaching practice significantly improved instructional skills, lesson delivery competence, and classroom management abilities. The researchers recommended stronger institutional partnerships between universities and schools to improve practical teacher preparation.

Further evidence from Lawson et al. (2015) indicates that professional experience placements contribute significantly to the development of teacher identity among preservice teachers. The study revealed that workplace learning experiences enabled student teachers to develop professional confidence and gain deeper understanding of teachers' roles and responsibilities. Similarly, Menter et al. (2017) found that continuous engagement with schools strengthened pedagogical competence and improved students' transition into professional teaching roles. The study concluded that workplace experiences should occupy a central position within teacher education curricula. In addition, Korthagen (2017) established that reflection-oriented practical experiences enhance teachers' ability to analyse classroom situations, modify instructional approaches, and develop professional judgement, emphasizing that WIL becomes more effective when supported by structured reflection and feedback.

Beyond teaching practicum, workplace exposure and experiential learning provide additional opportunities for student teachers to acquire practical knowledge, professional attitudes, and transferable skills required for effective teaching. Billett (2015) found that participation in authentic workplace activities enhances learners' ability to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations, enabling them to develop occupational competence through observation, participation, and guided practice. Similarly, Jackson (2019) reported that participation in WIL positively influences graduates' communication skills, teamwork abilities, problem-solving capacity, and professional confidence, thereby strengthening the transition from academic preparation to workplace performance.

Supporting this view, Ferns and Lilly (2016) examined WIL models across higher education disciplines and found that students involved in structured workplace experiences demonstrated improved employability skills, professional awareness, and career readiness. The researchers emphasized the need for strong curriculum alignment between academic learning and workplace activities. Likewise, Smith et al. (2018) reported that institutional partnerships enhance students' practical competence when workplace learning is supported through clear learning outcomes, effective supervision, and continuous evaluation. Zegwaard et al. (2017) further established that cooperative education experiences improve graduates' ability to transfer academic knowledge into professional contexts, while Gibbs and Garnett (2020) found that experiential

learning enhances professional competence and self-efficacy among learners.

The importance of WIL is further reinforced by growing concerns about graduate employability within higher education. Employability has become an important measure of educational effectiveness because graduates are expected to possess competencies that enable them to secure employment and perform effectively within professional environments. Yorke (2016) found that employability development requires higher education institutions to intentionally integrate transferable skills into curriculum structures. Similarly, Tomlinson (2017) reported that employers increasingly value graduates who demonstrate practical competence, adaptability, communication skills, and the ability to function effectively in changing professional contexts. Pegg et al. (2019) further established that experiential learning significantly improves professional confidence, teamwork, and career preparedness among graduates.

Within teacher education, employability is closely associated with professional competence, which refers to the ability of teachers to effectively apply knowledge, skills, values, and professional behaviours in teaching situations. Competent teachers are expected to demonstrate instructional expertise, classroom management ability, assessment competence, reflective capacity, and responsiveness to diverse learners. Blömeke et al. (2015) found that teacher competence develops through the interaction between professional knowledge and practical teaching experiences. Similarly, König et al. (2016) reported that practical teaching experiences enhance pedagogical reasoning, classroom management skills, and instructional decision-making among preservice teachers.

Furthermore, Guerriero (2017) emphasized that effective teachers require a combination of subject knowledge, pedagogical competence, reflective ability, and professional attitudes, all of which are strengthened through meaningful practical experiences. Darling-Hammond et al. (2019) found that teacher preparation programmes incorporating extensive clinical experiences produced graduates with stronger professional competencies and improved classroom effectiveness. Likewise, Kelchtermans (2020) concluded that professional competence develops through continuous interaction between workplace experience, reflection, and professional learning.

In Nigeria, concerns regarding the quality, relevance, and employability of graduates from teacher education institutions remain significant. Although teacher education programmes are designed to prepare competent professional teachers, challenges persist regarding the extent to which graduates possess the practical competencies required in contemporary classrooms. Factors such as weak institutional collaboration with schools, inadequate mentorship, limited opportunities for meaningful workplace engagement, and curriculum structures that emphasize theoretical knowledge over practical application contribute to concerns about graduate teacher preparedness (Eze, 2021).

These challenges are further intensified by emerging educational demands associated with technological advancement, curriculum reforms, inclusive education, and the increasing need for twenty-first-century skills. Teachers are now expected to facilitate digital learning, promote creativity, support diverse learners, and prepare students for knowledge-based societies. Meeting these expectations requires teacher education curricula that incorporate experiential and workplace-oriented learning approaches capable of developing relevant professional competencies.

Despite the recognized benefits of Work-Integrated Learning, limited empirical attention has been given to its contribution to curriculum effectiveness and the enhancement of graduate teachers'

employability and professional competence, particularly within the Nigerian teacher education context. Existing teacher preparation programmes require further investigation to determine whether current WIL practices adequately address the professional demands of contemporary teaching. Understanding the relationship between WIL and curriculum effectiveness is therefore essential for informing curriculum reforms, institutional practices, and policy decisions aimed at improving teacher preparation outcomes.

Against this background, this study examines Work-Integrated Learning and Curriculum Effectiveness in Teacher Education: Enhancing Employability and Professional Competence of Graduate Teachers. The study is based on the assumption that effective integration of workplace learning experiences into teacher education curricula can strengthen the relationship between theory and practice, improve graduate employability, and enhance the professional competence required for effective teaching. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for teacher education institutions, curriculum developers, policymakers, and other stakeholders interested in improving the quality and relevance of teacher preparation programmes.

Statement of the Problem

The quality and effectiveness of teacher education programmes have become major concerns globally due to increasing demands for graduate teachers who possess the professional competence, practical skills, and employability attributes required to function effectively in contemporary educational environments. Although teacher education institutions are mandated to prepare competent teachers through a combination of theoretical instruction and practical experiences, evidence suggests that many graduates continue to experience difficulties in translating academic knowledge into effective classroom practices. The persistent gap between theoretical preparation and professional practice has raised concerns about the extent to which existing teacher education curricula adequately prepare future teachers for the realities of the teaching profession. In Nigeria, teacher education programmes have continued to face challenges relating to graduate readiness, professional competence, and workplace adaptability. Many graduate teachers possess academic qualifications but often lack sufficient practical experience, classroom management skills, instructional confidence, digital competencies, and problem-solving abilities needed to address the complexities of modern classrooms. This situation has been partly attributed to weaknesses in curriculum implementation, inadequate opportunities for authentic workplace engagement, limited collaboration between teacher education institutions and schools, and insufficient mentoring during teaching practice experiences. Consequently, some newly qualified teachers require extensive support before they can effectively perform their professional responsibilities.

Although Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) has been identified as an effective approach for connecting academic learning with workplace realities, its integration and effectiveness within teacher education curricula remain a subject of concern. In many teacher education institutions, practical experiences such as teaching practice are sometimes treated as isolated activities rather than as carefully structured learning components aligned with curriculum objectives and professional competency standards. As a result, student teachers may participate in workplace experiences without fully developing the employability skills, reflective abilities, and professional dispositions necessary for successful teaching careers. Furthermore, while curriculum effectiveness is expected to be reflected in the ability of teacher education programmes to produce competent and employable graduates, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how WIL contributes to achieving these

outcomes. Specifically, there is inadequate understanding of the extent to which WIL enhances graduate teachers' pedagogical competence, professional skills, adaptability, communication abilities, and readiness for employment. The absence of sufficient empirical information creates challenges for curriculum planners, teacher education administrators, and policymakers seeking to strengthen teacher preparation programmes.

The problem is further compounded by emerging demands within the education sector, including digital transformation, inclusive education, learner diversity, and the need for twenty-first-century teaching competencies. These developments require teachers who can move beyond traditional knowledge transmission approaches and demonstrate practical abilities to design innovative learning experiences, integrate technology, assess diverse learners, and respond effectively to changing educational contexts. However, without effective curriculum structures that incorporate meaningful workplace learning opportunities, teacher education programmes may continue to produce graduates whose competencies do not fully correspond with professional expectations. Therefore, the central problem of this study is that despite the recognized importance of Work-Integrated Learning in developing workplace competencies, there remains insufficient evidence on its contribution to curriculum effectiveness and the enhancement of employability and professional competence among graduate teachers. This gap necessitates an investigation into the relationship between Work-Integrated Learning and curriculum effectiveness in teacher education, with the aim of determining how WIL can be strategically integrated to improve the preparation, employability, and professional competence of future teachers.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to examine Work-Integrated Learning and Curriculum Effectiveness in Teacher Education: Enhancing Employability and Professional Competence of Graduate Teachers. Specifically, the study sought to**:**

1. Examine the extent to which Work-Integrated Learning influences the employability of graduate teachers in teacher education programmes.
2. Determine the extent to which Work-Integrated Learning enhances the professional competence of graduate teachers through effective curriculum implementation in teacher education programmes.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does Work-Integrated Learning influence the employability of graduate teachers in teacher education programmes?
2. To what extent does Work-Integrated Learning enhance the professional competence of graduate teachers through effective curriculum implementation in teacher education programmes?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

H_{01}: Work-Integrated Learning does not have a significant influence on the employability of graduate teachers in teacher education programmes.

H_{02}: Work-Integrated Learning does not have a significant influence on the professional competence of graduate teachers through effective curriculum implementation in teacher education programmes.

Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to establish the relationship between Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) and curriculum

effectiveness in enhancing the employability and professional competence of graduate teachers without manipulating any of the study variables. The design enabled the researcher to collect data from respondents and determine the extent to which Work-Integrated Learning practices predicted graduate teachers' employability and professional competence within teacher education programmes. The study was conducted in teacher education institutions in Nigeria. The area was considered appropriate because universities and colleges of education offering teacher education programmes are responsible for preparing professional teachers through a combination of theoretical instruction and practical learning experiences, including teaching practice, school-based training, and field engagement. These institutions provided a suitable context for examining the contribution of Work-Integrated Learning to curriculum effectiveness and the development of graduate teachers' professional competencies.

The population of the study comprised teacher educators and final-year student teachers in teacher education institutions within the study area. The choice of these respondents was based on their direct involvement and experiences with teacher education curriculum implementation, teaching practicum, and professional preparation activities. While teacher educators provided information regarding curriculum structure, implementation, and professional training practices, final-year student teachers provided responses based on their exposure to Work-Integrated Learning experiences and practical teaching activities.

A sample was drawn from the study population using a multistage sampling procedure. At the first stage, teacher education institutions were purposively selected based on the availability of teacher education programmes and established teaching practice arrangements. At the second stage, respondents were selected through proportionate and simple random sampling techniques to ensure adequate representation of participants from the selected institutions. The sample size was determined based on the population size and appropriate sampling procedures to ensure that the selected respondents adequately represented the study population.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Work-Integrated Learning and Curriculum Effectiveness Questionnaire (WILCEQ)." The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section A measured Work-Integrated Learning, focusing on teaching practicum, workplace exposure, mentorship, experiential learning, and theory-practice integration. Section B assessed graduate teacher employability, covering communication skills, adaptability, problem-solving ability, workplace readiness, and digital competence. Section C examined professional competence of graduate teachers, including instructional competence, classroom management skills, assessment competence, professional confidence, and the ability to support diverse learners.

The questionnaire items were structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The four-point scale was adopted to enable respondents to make a definite choice regarding each statement by eliminating a neutral response option. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by experts in teacher education, curriculum studies, and educational measurement and evaluation. The experts carefully examined the items to ensure that they were relevant, clearly stated, properly structured, and aligned with the objectives, research questions, and hypotheses of the study. The recommendations and corrections provided by the experts were incorporated into the final version of the instrument before it was administered to the respondents. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test conducted among

respondents outside the study area but with similar characteristics to the actual participants. The internal consistency of the questionnaire items was determined using the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient. The reliability coefficients obtained for the different clusters of the instrument met the recommended benchmark of 0.70, indicating that the instrument possessed adequate internal consistency and was reliable for data collection.

The data collection process involved the administration of the questionnaire by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents, and clear instructions were provided on how to complete the instrument. The completed questionnaires were collected immediately after administration to ensure a high response rate. Respondents were also assured that the information provided would be treated with confidentiality and used strictly for academic purposes. The data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A criterion mean of 2.50 was adopted as the decision benchmark, where mean scores of 2.50 and above were interpreted as indicating a high extent of agreement, while mean scores below 2.50 were interpreted as indicating a low extent of agreement. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and multiple regression analysis at a 0.05 level of significance. Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between Work-Integrated Learning and graduate teacher outcomes, while multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the predictive influence of Work-Integrated Learning on graduate teachers' employability and professional competence. The null hypotheses were rejected when the p-value was less than 0.05 and retained when the p-value was greater than 0.05.

Ethical principles guiding educational research were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose and significance of the research. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained, and all information obtained from the respondents was used solely for academic purposes.

Results

Research Question One

To what extent does Work-Integrated Learning influence the employability of graduate teachers in teacher education programmes?

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that all the items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.53 with a standard deviation of 0.62 shows that respondents agreed to a high extent that Work-Integrated Learning influences the employability of graduate teachers. Specifically, respondents indicated that teaching practicum, workplace exposure, mentorship, and theory-practice integration contribute significantly to graduates' readiness for employment. This implies that WIL provides student teachers with practical experiences that enhance confidence, instructional ability, classroom management skills, and workplace preparedness.

Research Question Two

To what extent does Work-Integrated Learning enhance the professional competence of graduate teachers through effective curriculum implementation?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of Work-Integrated Learning and Graduate Teacher Employability (N = 200)

S/N	Items	Mean (X)	SD	Decision
1	Work-integrated learning provides student teachers with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real classroom situations.	3.62	0.54	High Extent
2	Teaching practicum experiences enhance student teachers' ability to develop effective instructional strategies.	3.55	0.61	High Extent
3	Workplace exposure through school-based experiences improves student teachers' confidence in performing teaching responsibilities.	3.48	0.67	High Extent
4	Work-integrated learning activities enable student teachers to develop practical classroom management skills.	3.51	0.59	High Extent
5	Effective mentorship during teaching practice improves the professional learning experiences of student teachers.	3.44	0.72	High Extent
6	Work-integrated learning strengthens the connection between teacher education curriculum content and actual teaching practice.	3.58	0.56	High Extent
	Cluster Mean	**3.53**	**0.62**	**High Extent**

Criterion Mean = 2.50

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of Work-Integrated Learning and Professional Competence of Graduate Teachers (N = 200)

S/N	Items	Mean (X)	SD	Decision
1	Work-integrated learning enhances graduates' ability to plan and deliver effective lessons.	3.61	0.57	High Extent
2	Practical teaching experiences improve graduates' classroom management competence.	3.54	0.63	High Extent
3	Work-integrated learning develops graduates' ability to assess learners effectively.	3.46	0.68	High Extent
4	Workplace experiences improve graduates' ability to apply innovative teaching methods.	3.5	0.65	High Extent
5	Teaching practice enhances graduates' professional confidence and decision-making abilities.	3.57	0.6	High Extent
6	Work-integrated learning prepares graduates to respond effectively to diverse learners' needs.	3.49	0.7	High Extent
	Cluster Mean	**3.53**	**0.64**	**High Extent**

Criterion Mean = 2.50

Table 2 shows that respondents rated all items above the criterion mean of 2.50. The cluster mean of 3.53 indicates that Work-Integrated Learning enhances professional competence among graduate teachers to a high extent. The findings reveal that practical teaching experiences improve lesson delivery skills, classroom management ability, assessment competence, professional confidence, and responsiveness to learners' needs. This suggests that WIL is an important curriculum component for developing professionally competent teachers.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

H_{o1}: Work-Integrated Learning does not have a significant influence on the employability of graduate teachers in teacher education programmes.

Table 3: Regression Analysis of Work-Integrated Learning as a Predictor of Graduate Teacher Employability

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error	F-value	Sig.
Work-Integrated Learning → Employability	0.682	0.465	0.462	0.351	172.45	0.000

Significant at $p < 0.05$

The regression result in Table 3 shows that Work-Integrated Learning had a positive and significant relationship with graduate teacher employability. The correlation coefficient (R = 0.682) indicates a strong positive relationship between WIL and employability outcomes. The coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.465) indicates that Work-Integrated Learning explained 46.5% of the variation in graduate teachers' employability, while the remaining 53.5% could be attributed to other factors not included in the model. The F-value of 172.45 with a significance value of 0.000 indicates that the regression model was statistically significant. Since the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, Work-Integrated Learning has a significant influence on the employability of graduate teachers.

Hypothesis Two

H_{o2}: Work-Integrated Learning does not have a significant influence on the professional competence of graduate teachers through effective curriculum implementation.

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Work-Integrated Learning as a Predictor of Professional Competence of Graduate Teachers

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error	F-value	Sig.
Work-Integrated Learning → Professional Competence	0.724	0.524	0.521	0.318	217.36	0.000

Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 4 indicates that Work-Integrated Learning significantly predicts professional competence among graduate teachers. The correlation coefficient (R = 0.724) reveals a strong positive relationship between WIL and professional competence. The R^2 value of 0.524 shows that Work-Integrated Learning accounted for 52.4% of

the variation in professional competence among graduate teachers.The significant F-value (217.36) and p-value (0.000) indicate that the model is statistically significant. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, Work-Integrated Learning significantly enhances the professional competence of graduate teachers.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of the study revealed that Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) influences the employability of graduate teachers to a high extent, with a cluster mean of 3.53. This finding indicates that practical workplace experiences such as teaching practicum, school-based exposure, mentorship, and experiential learning significantly contribute to the development of employability skills among graduate teachers. The finding suggests that student teachers who engage in authentic teaching environments are more likely to develop confidence, communication skills, adaptability, problem-solving abilities, and professional readiness required for successful entry into the teaching profession.

This finding agrees with the assertion of Jackson (2019) that Work-Integrated Learning provides a bridge between academic preparation and workplace expectations by enabling graduates to acquire transferable skills and professional confidence. Similarly, Billett (2015) emphasized that workplace learning enhances the ability of learners to apply theoretical knowledge within practical contexts, thereby improving occupational competence. The finding also supports Tomlinson (2017), who reported that graduates with exposure to experiential learning opportunities demonstrate stronger employability attributes because they acquire skills that align with workplace demands.

The finding further confirms the importance of integrating practical experiences into teacher education curricula. Traditional teacher preparation models that focus mainly on theoretical knowledge may not adequately equip graduates with the competencies needed in contemporary classrooms. Therefore, the high rating of WIL as a contributor to employability suggests that teacher education programmes should strengthen school-based experiences, professional mentoring, and curriculum activities that simulate real teaching environments.

The second finding indicated that Work-Integrated Learning enhances the professional competence of graduate teachers to a high extent, with a cluster mean of 3.53. This implies that WIL contributes significantly to the development of instructional competence, classroom management skills, assessment abilities, professional confidence, and the capacity to respond effectively to diverse learners. The finding demonstrates that professional competence among teachers is not developed solely through classroom instruction but through continuous interaction between theoretical knowledge and practical teaching experiences.

This finding is consistent with Darling-Hammond (2020), who found that teacher preparation programmes with strong clinical and field-based components produce teachers with higher levels of instructional competence and professional confidence. Similarly, König et al. (2016) established that practical teaching experiences enhance preservice teachers' pedagogical reasoning and instructional decision-making abilities. The finding also aligns with Korthagen (2017), who argued that reflective workplace experiences enable teachers to connect educational theories with classroom realities and develop professional judgment.

The regression analysis showed that Work-Integrated Learning significantly predicts graduate teacher employability, accounting for 46.5% of the variation in employability outcomes. This finding implies that improvements in WIL practices are likely to produce corresponding improvements in graduates' readiness for

employment. The result highlights the importance of designing teacher education curricula that intentionally integrate workplace experiences as a major pathway for developing professional skills. The finding supports Pegg et al. (2019), who reported that experiential learning activities significantly improve graduates' workplace confidence and career preparedness. It also agrees with Ferns and Lilly (2016), who found that structured WIL programmes enhance graduates' ability to transfer academic knowledge into professional settings.

The regression analysis further revealed that Work-Integrated Learning significantly predicts professional competence of graduate teachers, explaining 52.4% of the variation in professional competence. This indicates that WIL is a strong contributor to teachers' ability to perform professional responsibilities effectively. The finding suggests that teacher education institutions that provide meaningful workplace learning opportunities are more likely to produce teachers who demonstrate effective instructional practices, professional confidence, and classroom effectiveness. This finding supports Blömeke et al. (2015), who established that teacher competence develops through the interaction between professional knowledge and practical application. It also agrees with Darling-Hammond et al. (2019), who found that teacher preparation programmes incorporating extensive clinical experiences produce teachers with stronger professional capabilities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Work-Integrated Learning is a critical curriculum strategy for improving the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of teacher education programmes. The results indicate that strengthening WIL practices can reduce the theory-practice gap, improve graduate employability, and enhance the professional competence required for effective teaching in twenty-first-century classrooms.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Work-Integrated Learning is a significant component of effective teacher education curriculum implementation because it enhances both graduate employability and professional competence. The findings established that practical workplace experiences provide student teachers with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge, develop professional skills, and acquire competencies required for successful teaching careers. The study further concludes that teacher education programmes that integrate structured teaching practicum, workplace exposure, mentorship, and experiential learning are more effective in preparing graduates for employment and professional practice. Work-Integrated Learning not only improves graduates' confidence and adaptability but also strengthens their ability to manage classrooms, design effective instruction, assess learners, and respond to diverse educational needs. Therefore, WIL should not be regarded as an additional activity within teacher education programmes but as a central curriculum component necessary for producing competent, employable, and professionally prepared graduate teachers capable of meeting contemporary educational demands.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Teacher education institutions should strengthen Work-Integrated Learning components by ensuring that teaching practicum and school-based experiences are properly structured, supervised, and aligned with curriculum objectives.
2. Universities and colleges of education should establish stronger partnerships with schools to provide student teachers with meaningful workplace experiences and opportunities for professional learning.

3. Adequate mentorship programmes should be provided during teaching practice by assigning experienced and trained mentor teachers to guide student teachers in developing professional competence.
4. Curriculum planners should integrate employability skills into teacher education programmes, including communication skills, digital literacy, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, and adaptability.
5. Teacher education institutions should increase opportunities for experiential learning activities such as micro-teaching, classroom simulations, community-based teaching projects, and reflective practice sessions.
6. Policy makers and regulatory bodies should develop clear standards for Work-Integrated Learning implementation to ensure consistency and quality across teacher education institutions.

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