

Bridging the Skills Gap: Policy Implementation and Graduate Employability in Government Colleges of Teacher Education in Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This policy analysis evaluates curriculum reforms aimed at enhancing graduate employability in Gondar, Begemder, and Debre Berhan Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs) in Ethiopia's Amhara Region, which faces significant socio-economic challenges. Despite these reforms, critical skills gaps persist among graduates. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, data were gathered from 358 participants, including 278 graduates and 80 employers from local schools and education offices, selected through stratified random sampling. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Findings reveal moderate curriculum alignment with regional educational needs (mean = 3.32) and significant deficiencies in practical skills, particularly digital literacy (mean = 2.62). Regression analysis indicates that curriculum relevance ($\beta = 0.532$, $p < 0.001$) and

school partnerships ($\beta = 0.162$, $p < 0.001$) significantly predict employability, explaining 37.8% of the variance. Drawing on recent international studies (Lee & Wang, 2024; Melesse et al., 2022), recommendations highlight a hybrid approach to improve education through centralized guidance and strengthened college-school collaborations.

Keywords: Teacher Education Reform, Graduate Employability, Skills Gap, Amhara Region, Colleges of Teacher Education, Education Labor Market, Educational Policy

1. Introduction

The network of government-run Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs) in the Amhara Regional State has been a cornerstone of the region's strategy to develop human capital for its primary and secondary education sectors. These ten institutions, directly overseen by the Amhara Education Bureau, have experienced significant expansion to meet the growing demand for qualified teachers across the region (Amhara Education Bureau, 2023). This expansion, driven by the regional government's commitment to educational development (Herut et al., 2025), has been critical for improving educational access. However, this rapid growth has been shadowed by the persistent challenge of ensuring the employability and classroom readiness of graduates, a situation further complicated by ongoing regional instability, which has disrupted educational activities for millions (Ayenew, 2025).

The gap between the outputs of these CTEs and the actual needs of the region's schools poses a significant challenge. Despite considerable investment, school principals and district education offices frequently report trouble finding graduates who possess the essential practical teaching skills and competencies (Yizengaw, 2023; Herut et al., 2025). This disconnect not only squanders valuable regional resources but also jeopardizes the quality of basic education throughout Amhara. In response to these challenges, the Amhara Education Bureau has implemented national curriculum reforms, notably those outlined in the 2019 Higher Education Proclamation, within its CTEs. These reforms emphasize critical thinking, entrepreneurship, and technical competencies, including digital literacy for teaching (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia [FDRE], 2019). The goal is to address concerns regarding the relevance of graduate skills for the modern classroom (Herut et al., 2025). However, implementation within the CTEs has been hampered by institutional capacity constraints, funding limitations, and the profound disruption caused by the regional conflict (Tesfaye et al., 2025; Ayenew, 2025). The historical ineffectiveness of curriculum implementation bodies in the Amhara region, due to budget shortages and insufficient understanding, points to long-standing structural barriers (Mekonnen, 2007).

The three CTEs included in this study, Gondar, Begemder, and Debre Berhan, represent key institutions for training the region's educators, providing insights into how institutional maturity and specialization affect reform implementation. These colleges face unique challenges, including resource constraints, infrastructure limitations, and varying levels of institutional capacity, which interact with national policies to create a complex implementation environment (Ayenew, 2025). Understanding how curriculum reforms unfold in this specific context is essential for developing effective strategies to improve teacher graduate employability within the Amhara region's own educational ecosystem.

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives: human capital theory (Tomlinson, 2017) and policy implementation theory (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984). Human capital theory emphasizes the economic returns to educational investments, positing that skills and knowledge acquired through education enhance productivity and employability. From this perspective, the skills gap among teacher graduates represents a failure to adequately develop the human capital required by the regional school system. Policy implementation theory

provides a lens for understanding the challenges of translating policy intentions into practice within the CTEs. This perspective highlights the complex interplay of factors that shape implementation outcomes, including institutional capacity, resource availability, stakeholder interests, and the disruptive contextual factors of the region. By examining curriculum reforms through this dual theoretical lens, the study seeks to identify not only what skills gaps exist but also why reforms have struggled to address them effectively within the Amhara CTEs.

Despite substantial policy attention and reform efforts, graduate employability remains a persistent challenge in the Amhara CTEs. Existing research has identified skills mismatches and policy-practice disconnections at the national level, but limited attention has been given to how these challenges manifest and might be addressed within the specific context of the region's own teacher education colleges. This study addresses this gap by examining curriculum reform implementation in three government Colleges of Teacher Education in the Amhara Regional State.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global Perspectives on Teacher Education Reform and Employability

The relationship between teacher education and employability has received increasing attention globally, driven by pressures to improve educational quality and outcomes (UNESCO, 2022). There has been a notable shift toward competency-based teacher education, emphasizing the development of practical pedagogical skills and the ability to apply theoretical knowledge in diverse classroom contexts (Voorhees, 2001). This approach recognizes that teacher employability requires not only subject knowledge but also the capacity to manage a classroom, adapt teaching methods, and address individual student needs (Caena, 2024).

The discourse on teacher employability has evolved from a narrow focus on employment rates to a broader conception that encompasses the development of capabilities enabling graduates to become effective, reflective practitioners (Tomlinson, 2017).

Recent studies in international education further underscore that employability is not a fixed outcome but a process shaped by diverse antecedents, including institutional support and the ability to navigate complex labor markets (Lee & Wang, 2024). This includes attention to both content knowledge (disciplinary mastery) and pedagogical skills (instructional techniques, assessment literacy) that are essential for successful teaching. Research across various contexts has highlighted the importance of embedding practical teaching experiences and school partnerships throughout the curriculum rather than treating them as an add-on (Bridgstock, 2009).

2.2 Teacher Education Reform in the Ethiopian Context

Ethiopian teacher education has undergone significant reforms aimed at enhancing relevance and responsiveness to developmental needs. The transition from traditional, theory-heavy curricula to more flexible, modular approaches that seek to address both local needs and global imperatives has been a key feature of these reforms (World Bank, 2019). However, implementation challenges such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and resistance

to change have often constrained the effectiveness of these reforms, particularly in regional CTEs.

In Ethiopia specifically, curriculum reforms have sought to balance national standards with local relevance. The modular approach adopted in teacher education institutions represents an attempt to create more integrated learning pathways and skill development (MoE, 2018). However, studies have highlighted challenges in the CTEs, including inadequate faculty preparation in practical pedagogy, limited teaching resources, and misalignment between curriculum objectives and assessment practices (Kassaw et al., 2024; Herut et al., 2025). The heavy reliance on teacher-centered instructional methods in Amhara Region CTEs has been a persistent barrier to developing graduates' higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills (Amhara Education Bureau, 2023). These implementation challenges mirror those found in other Ethiopian educational sectors. For instance, a study of a Private-Public Development Partnership (PPDP) in the TVET sector found that an over-emphasis on developing the intended curriculum, without adequate consideration of the situational and contextual possibilities for its enactment, led to significant constraints, including high instructor turnover and a disconnect between training and the broader labor market (Melesse et al., 2022).

2.3 Graduate Employability in the Amhara CTE Context

Research on graduate employability from the Amhara CTEs has identified several persistent challenges. Employer surveys in the regional education sector consistently report deficiencies in graduates' practical teaching skills, problem-solving abilities in the classroom, and adaptability to new technologies and teaching methods (Girma & Asres, 2025; Yizengaw, 2023). These skills gaps are particularly pronounced in areas such as ICT-integrated teaching and inclusive education, which are prioritized in the region's educational strategy. The rapid expansion of the CTEs has strained their capacity, leading to issues such as instructor overload, large class sizes, and shortages of practical training facilities, which directly impact the quality of graduate preparation (Amhara Education Bureau, 2023).

The historical ineffectiveness of curriculum implementation bodies in the Amhara region, due to budget shortages and insufficient understanding, points to long-standing structural barriers that continue to affect the CTEs (Mekonnen, 2007). The ongoing conflict in the region has further exacerbated these challenges, disrupting teaching practicums and straining the entire educational ecosystem (Ayenew, 2025).

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods policy analysis approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to provide comprehensive insights into the implementation and outcomes of curriculum reform within the government Colleges of Teacher Education. The mixed-methods design was selected to enable both breadth of coverage through the quantitative component and depth of understanding through the qualitative component (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This approach is particularly appropriate for examining complex policy implementation processes, as it allows for the integration of diverse

perspectives and the exploration of both what is happening and why.

The research was conducted in three government Colleges of Teacher Education in the Amhara Regional State: Gondar College of Teacher Education, Begemder College of Teacher Education, and Debre Berhan College of Teacher Education. These institutions were selected to represent the region's diverse institutional contexts, including variations in age, size, specialization, and geographical location. This diversity enables a comparative analysis of how different institutional characteristics affect reform implementation within the CTE system.

3.2 Sampling and Participants

The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representative coverage across institutions and the selected academic programs. The sample size was determined based on established methodologies for higher education research in the Ethiopian context (Fenta et al., 2022). From the total population of recent graduates (2023-2025 cohorts) from the selected programs across the three colleges, a final sample of 278 graduates was selected. The distribution across colleges and programs was proportionate to the size of their recent graduate cohorts.

Table 1. Sampling Distribution across Teacher Education Colleges and Selected Programs

Teacher Education College	Selected Programs	Graduates	Employers	Total
Gondar College of Teacher Education	BA in English Language Education, Educational Planning and Management, Special Needs Education, and Amharic Education	98	22	120
Begemder College of Teacher Education	BA in English Language Education, Educational Planning and Management, Special Needs Education, and Amharic education	90	28	118
Debre Berhan College of Teacher Education	BA in English Language Education, Educational Planning and Management, Special Needs Education, and Amharic education	90	30	120
Total		278	80	358

Additionally, 80 employers were recruited from schools, district education offices, and organizations identified as key recruiters of graduates from these specific programs, using databases from the Amhara Region Education Bureau. The employer sample included representatives from primary and secondary schools, district education offices, and non-governmental organizations in the education sector, ensuring diverse perspectives on graduate employability within the regional education system.

The sampling strategy ensured representation across the selected teacher education disciplines. This approach aligns with methodologies used in recent higher education research in Ethiopia, maintaining methodological rigor while capturing diverse perspectives on curriculum relevance and employability within the field of teacher education.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data collection utilized multiple instruments to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research questions. The primary quantitative instrument was a structured questionnaire adapted from established tools in educational policy and employability research (Fenta et al., 2022). The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale across three domains: curriculum alignment (22 items), skills gaps (12 items), and policy impact (8 items).

The curriculum alignment scale assessed perceptions of the relevance of curriculum content, teaching methods, and assessment practices to workplace requirements in schools. The skills gaps scale focused on specific competencies where deficiencies were commonly reported in previous research, including digital literacy for teaching, pedagogical problem-solving, communication, and teamwork. The policy impact scale examined perceptions of how various policy initiatives influenced curriculum and teaching practices within the CTEs.

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 18 participants (12 graduates and 6 employers) to provide contextual depth to the quantitative findings. Interview protocols were developed to explore participants' experiences and perceptions in greater detail, particularly regarding the factors that facilitated or hindered effective curriculum implementation within the CTEs.

Data collection occurred between April and July 2025, utilizing both online platforms and in-person administration to ensure accessibility and optimize response rates. The research team received training in data collection protocols to ensure consistency across different modes of administration.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 28, employing descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression to examine relationships between variables. Preliminary analyses included checks for normality, homogeneity of variance, and multicollinearity to ensure that the assumptions of the statistical tests were met. Factor analysis was conducted to verify the construct validity of the measurement scales.

Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using NVivo software, following a systematic process of coding, category development, and theme identification (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis focused on identifying patterns in participants' experiences and perceptions, with particular attention to variations across different institutional contexts within the CTE system. Methodological triangulation enhanced validity by integrating different data sources and analytical approaches (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The quantitative and qualitative components were designed to complement each other, with the qualitative data helping to explain and contextualize the quantitative findings specific to the Amhara CTEs.

4. Results

4.1 Perceptions of Curriculum Alignment

Analysis of the survey data revealed a moderate perceived alignment between reformed curricula and the needs of the regional school system, with a mean score of $M = 3.32$ and a standard deviation of $SD = 0.68$ on a five-point scale. The positive mean difference of 0.32 ($p < .001$) indicates a statistically significant recognition of improvement compared to previous curriculum iterations. However, the moderate mean score suggests considerable room for enhancing curriculum relevance within teacher education colleges in the Amhara Region.

Table 2. One-Sample t-Test for Curriculum Alignment and Skills Gap (N = 358)

Variable	M	SD	Mean Difference [95% CI]	t(357)	p	Cohen's d
Alignment	3.32	0.68	0.32 [0.24, 0.40]	9.45	< .001	0.47
Skills Gap	2.75	0.65	-0.25 [-0.32, -0.18]	-7.32	< .001	-0.38

Source: Field Survey (2025).

Variations were observed across institutions, with Gondar College of Teacher Education reporting the highest alignment score ($M = 3.45$) and Begemder College of Teacher Education the lowest ($M = 3.18$). These differences may reflect disparities in institutional resources, implementation capacity, and the strength of existing partnerships with schools.

4.2 Persistent Skills Gaps

Digital literacy for teaching emerged as the most significant skills gap ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 0.72$), with a strong negative mean difference of -0.38 ($p < .001$). Pedagogical problem-solving skills also showed notable deficiencies ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.67$). Both skill areas demonstrated significant positive correlations with employment outcomes ($r = .52$ for digital literacy; $r = .48$ for problem-solving; $p < .001$), underscoring their critical importance for employability in the education sector.

Table 3. Paired t-Test and Correlation for Key Skills

Skill Area	M	SD	Mean Difference [95% CI]	t(357)	p	Correlation (r) with Employment
Digital Literacy	2.62	0.72	-0.38 [-0.45, -0.31]	-10.56	< .001	.52***
Problem-Solving	2.88	0.67	-0.25 [-0.32, -0.18]	-7.32	< .001	.48***

Source: Field Survey (2025).

Employers particularly emphasized deficiencies in applied digital skills for teaching, including

the ability to use educational technology, create digital learning resources, and integrate technology into lesson delivery. Problem-solving gaps were most evident in graduates' capacity to tackle complex classroom challenges, adapt teaching methods to diverse learners, and implement practical solutions in real-world educational contexts.

4.3 Relationship between Curriculum Relevance and Employment

A regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between curriculum reform implementation and employability outcomes within the CTEs. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(2,355) = 108.45$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 37.8% of the variance in employability outcomes ($R^2 = .378$).

Table 4. Multiple Regression Predicting Graduate Employability

Criterion	Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	R^2
	Constant	1.345	0.210		6.40	< .001	
Employability	Curriculum Reform	0.548	0.048	0.532	11.42	< .001	0.378
	School Partnership	0.175	0.044	0.162	3.98	< .001	

Source: Field Survey (2025).

Curriculum reform demonstrated the strongest predictive power ($\beta = .532$, $p < .001$), followed by partnerships with schools ($\beta = .162$, $p < .001$). These findings underscore the significant impact of relevant curriculum design and active engagement with schools on graduate employment success within the regional education system.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings reveal significant implementation challenges in translating national curriculum reforms into improved employability outcomes within the government Colleges of Teacher Education in the Amhara Region. The moderate alignment score ($M = 3.32$) suggests that while policy intentions are partially being realized, substantial gaps remain in achieving optimal curriculum relevance for the regional school system. This aligns with studies that identify a lack of coordination between the teacher education system and the practical needs of schools as a primary barrier to enhancing employability (Shimekit & Oumer, 2021). This finding resonates with recent international research which suggests that the antecedents of employability are complex and require a curriculum that is responsive to both labor market demands and the development of transferable skills (Lee & Wang, 2024). The pronounced digital literacy gap for teaching ($M = 2.62$) represents a critical concern, particularly in light of Ethiopia's educational digital transformation and the growing importance of technology in classrooms.

The significant predictive power of curriculum reform for employability ($\beta = .532$) validates the policy emphasis on curriculum modernization within the CTEs. However, the

complementary role of school partnerships ($\beta = .162$), while statistically significant, appears underdeveloped compared to the potential impact of such collaborations. This finding reflects the challenges of establishing strong college-school collaboration in the Amhara region, characterized by infrastructural deficiencies, logistical challenges, and knowledge gaps (Tesfaye et al., 2025).

Similar implementation gaps between intended and enacted curriculum have been documented in other Ethiopian educational partnerships, where an over-reliance on formal curriculum documents and a lack of engagement with local actors, including instructors, constrained outcomes (Melesse et al., 2022). These challenges are magnified in the Amhara region, where the ongoing conflict has disrupted educational activities for millions of students and strained the entire education system (Ayenew, 2025), creating an environment where even well-designed policies face monumental implementation hurdles within the CTEs.

5.2 Practical Implications

For CTE leaders in the Amhara Region, the findings emphasize the importance of prioritizing digital literacy for teaching and pedagogical problem-solving skills through curriculum integration and faculty development initiatives. Establishing dedicated school liaison offices and structured teaching practicum programs could enhance practical learning experiences. The observed institutional variations suggest that targeted interventions may be necessary, tailored to specific institutional contexts and challenges. Recent initiatives, such as the planned training for teachers in the region on the revised curriculum (Amhara Education Bureau, 2025), are a step in the right direction but must be pursued with an awareness of the volatile operational context.

For the Amhara Education Bureau, the results highlight the need to balance expansion with quality, potentially through targeted funding for curriculum modernization and infrastructure development specifically for the CTEs. The moderate explanatory power of the regression model ($R^2 = .378$) indicates that factors beyond curriculum design and school partnerships also influence employability outcomes, suggesting the need for comprehensive strategies that address multiple barriers simultaneously. This includes developing conflict-sensitive implementation frameworks that allow teacher education activities to continue amid instability.

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study demonstrates that curriculum reforms in Amhara Region Government Colleges of Teacher Education are making incremental progress in addressing graduate employability within the regional education sector, yet substantial implementation challenges persist. The findings suggest that limited success is primarily due to gaps in policy implementation rather than deficiencies in policy design. Key challenges include persistent skills gaps in digital literacy for teaching and pedagogical problem-solving, limited engagement with schools, and resource constraints that hinder effective execution. These challenges are set against a backdrop of regional conflict that severely disrupts educational continuity and implementation

capacity across the CTE system.

6.2 Policy Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

Institutional Empowerment and Curriculum Flexibility:

The Amhara Education Bureau should grant CTEs greater autonomy to adapt national curriculum frameworks to local educational needs. This could include flexibility in up to 30% of curriculum content to allow for localization and specialization based on institutional strengths and regional school priorities.

Strengthened College-School Linkages:

Given the significant relationship between partnerships with schools and employability outcomes, structured collaboration mechanisms should be institutionalized. These could include mandatory representation from practicing teachers and school administrators on curriculum review committees, structured and supervised teaching practicums, and joint initiatives targeting specific challenges in regional schools.

Practice-Focused Learning Experiences:

Curriculum implementation in CTEs should emphasize practical teaching experiences and feedback from the field through enhanced project-based learning, classroom case studies, and teaching simulation exercises that foster problem-solving competencies. This approach requires substantial investment in teaching methodology development and learning resources that support practice-oriented teacher education.

Digital Infrastructure and Competency Development:

Addressing the digital literacy gap for teaching requires coordinated investment by the Amhara Education Bureau in ICT infrastructure, digital learning resources, and faculty development in technology-integrated pedagogy for the CTEs. Specific initiatives could include establishing digital competence centers focused on educational technology, integrating digital teaching skills across the curriculum, and providing targeted support for students and faculty to build digital capabilities for the modern classroom.

Conflict-Sensitive and Resilient Implementation:

Policy implementation frameworks must be adapted to function effectively within the Amhara region's challenging context. This includes developing flexible delivery models for teacher training, decentralizing decision-making to institutional levels, and ensuring that funding mechanisms are robust enough to withstand disruptions, thereby securing the pipeline of qualified teachers for the region.

6.3 Concluding Remarks

As the Amhara Regional State continues its educational development journey, aligning its Colleges of Teacher Education with the needs of the regional school system remains essential

for maximizing human capital investment and achieving sustainable educational development. This study contributes to evidence-based policy refinement and institutional practice improvement, ultimately supporting the transformation of Amhara Region Government Colleges of Teacher Education into more effective engines for producing competent, employable teachers. Future success will depend not only on sound policy design but also on building implementation systems capable of functioning resiliently within the region's complex and dynamic environment.

Conflicts of Interest/Competing Interests

The author declares that there are no competing interests.

Ethics Approval

The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the University of Gondar Institutional Review Board (Ref. No: UoG/ED/456/2025; Date: 20/03/2025).

Consent to Participate

Verbal informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Availability of Data and Materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Authors' Contributions

Sisay Fekadie Molla: Data collection, writing the draft of the study, reviewing the manuscript, and communicating with journals about the manuscript.

Aragaw Shibabaw Molla: Data collection, writing the draft of the study, and reviewing the manuscript.

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