

Students' and Lecturers' Perceptions of Employability Skills Development in Vietnamese Higher Education

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Abstract

Graduate employability is often discussed as a curriculum goal, but students and lecturers may not experience the same learning environment in the same way. This mixed-methods study examines whether student-lecturer perception gaps exist in employability skills development at an anonymised Vietnamese university. Survey data were collected from 486 students and 93 lecturers, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 45 students and 8 lecturers. The survey compared perceptions across six domains, namely problem-solving and adaptability, human skills, ICT skills, personal organisation and time management, leadership, and communication. The findings show that both groups generally evaluated employability skills development positively, but significant gaps appeared in five of the six domains and in the overall career preparation rating. Lecturers rated problem-solving and adaptability, ICT skills, communication, and overall career preparation more positively than students, while students rated human skills and time management more positively. Interview data suggest that these gaps were shaped by different understandings of practical learning, the visibility of skill development, and the balance between lecturer support and student autonomy. The study argues that employability activities need to be made more visible, meaningful, and connected to students' future professional lives.

Keywords employability skills, graduate employability, student perceptions, lecturer perceptions, Vietnamese higher education

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INTRODUCTION

Graduate employability has become one way through which higher education explains its value to students, families, employers, and policymakers. The expectation is now familiar. Graduates should not leave university with disciplinary knowledge alone. They are also expected to communicate, solve problems, use technology, work with others, adapt to uncertainty, and keep learning after graduation (Harvey, 2001; Small et al., 2018; Yorke, 2006). Digitalisation, globalisation, and labour-market instability have made this expectation sharper. Recent literature continues to highlight technological literacy, analytical thinking, resilience, flexibility, leadership, and lifelong learning, alongside long-standing capacities such as communication and teamwork (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; Masdonati et al., 2022; World Economic Forum, 2025).

In Vietnam, the link between university learning and workplace readiness is still questioned, although university enrolment has expanded and many institutions have tried to improve training quality. Employers continue to ask whether graduates can actually work after graduation without

substantial additional training. For universities, employability does not simply mean helping students obtain a job after graduation. What matters more is supporting them in building capacities they can use after the first job begins.

Perceptions matter in this process. Students and lecturers share classrooms, courses, assignments, presentations, and projects, but they may not attach the same meaning to them. Research on learning environments has demonstrated that students' perceptions are closely tied to their approach to learning and the benefits they derive from it (Lizzio et al., 2002; Trigwell & Prosser, 1991). A lecturer may design a group project to develop teamwork, communication, leadership, and problem-solving. A student may complete the same project mainly as a required academic task. When the link with future work is not made clear, part of the intended learning can be lost.

The challenge, therefore, is not always a lack of employability activities. The more difficult issue is whether those activities are perceived in the same way. For example, a lecturer may believe that communication, adaptability, or ICT skills are already built into a course. However, a student may not recognise the same outcome, or may judge it against a different standard. Such gaps matter for teaching because they show where the intended curriculum and the experienced curriculum do not fully meet.

This study investigates those gaps at an anonymised Vietnamese university. It does not measure actual competence or employment outcomes. Instead, it examines perceived employability skill development, meaning the extent to which students and lecturers think university courses and learning experiences support six domains, namely problem-solving and adaptability, human skills, ICT skills, personal organisation and time management, leadership, and communication. The author argues that the success of any attempt to develop employability skills depends on the extent to which employability messages are shared by the two groups who meet most directly in everyday teaching and learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Graduate Employability in Higher Education

Research on employability confirms that the term carries more than one assumption. In some policy and institutional discussions, it is still associated with whether graduates obtain employment after university. That view has become narrow in recent literature reviews. A graduate's employment outcome is determined by economic conditions, recruitment practices, social networks, and opportunities, as well as by individual capacities. For this reason, employability is better understood as a set of knowledge, skills, attributes, dispositions, and adaptive capacities that help graduates enter and develop within changing work contexts (Harvey, 2001; Yorke, 2006; Yorke & Knight, 2004). This broader view shifts attention from short-term employment rates to the learning processes through which students build communication, self-management, problem-solving, adaptability, and professional confidence.

Knight and Yorke's USEM model connects employability with understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs, and metacognition (Knight & Yorke, 2002). They argue that students need to understand what they can do, judge their own development, and learn how to keep improving. From the career

construction perspective, Savickas and Porfeli (2012) make a related point by emphasising adaptability, future orientation, and the capacity to handle transitions and uncertainty. More recent stakeholder-focused reviews add another layer. Employability is interpreted differently by universities, students, employers, and policy actors, and these differences shape how responsibility for employability is assigned (Cheng et al., 2022).

The changing nature of work makes this broader view difficult to ignore. Digitalisation, automation, artificial intelligence, and economic uncertainty have also changed what graduates are expected to bring into work. Recent discussions highlight technological literacy, analytical thinking, resilience, flexibility, leadership, and lifelong learning as important skill areas (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2025). These trends support a view of employability as long-term preparedness, not immediate job matching.

Employability Skill Development through University Learning Experiences

Higher education institutions have been attempting to support employability through course-embedded activities such as projects, case studies, group assignments, and presentations, as well as co-curricular activities such as internships, workshops, clubs, and employer engagement. Active and experiential learning at universities is often presented as one route to this connection. Project-based learning, for example, asks students to work with others on realistic tasks, manage time, solve problems, use evidence, communicate decisions, and present outcomes. Reviews and meta-analyses suggest that project-based learning in higher education can enhance student outcomes and transferable skills, especially when projects are linked to workplace-relevant contexts (Guo et al., 2020; Zhang & Ma, 2023). However, projects that appear realistic on paper may feel less attractive to students if they cannot see how the projects relate to future work. Thus, curriculum design and interpretation need to be considered together. A group assignment can support teamwork, but students still need lecturers' guidance on how to collaborate with teammates or deal with task distribution. A presentation can develop communication skills, but feedback has to go beyond content accuracy.

What makes employability skill development challenging is that such skills are often developed implicitly at universities. Lecturers may assume that students are learning communication through presentations, leadership through group work, or adaptability through problem-solving tasks. While some students make those connections, others may complete the task and move on without much reflection. Mismatched perceptions therefore seem to have become one obstacle in enhancing employability skills in higher education institutions.

Student and Lecturer Perceptions of Employability Skill Development

Perceptions matter because teaching and learning are never experienced in exactly the same way by all participants. From a lecturer's position, employability may be embedded in course objectives, assessment tasks, group projects, feedback practices, and the general demands of academic work. Students may acknowledge the value of these same activities only when they feel well-instructed and connected to future work. This is consistent with stakeholder-oriented employability research, which shows that debates about employability involve not only skills, but also meanings, responsibilities, and expectations (Cheng et al., 2022).

Students' perceptions influence how they invest effort in learning. If they see a presentation as useful practice for professional communication, they may approach it differently. If they see it only as a compulsory classroom performance for grading, its pedagogical and practical value may be weaker. Perception does not replace actual learning, but it affects whether students recognise learning as essential and transferable. Lecturer perceptions are also significant because their beliefs about student responsibility and workplace relevance determine how employability is enacted in classrooms. Recent work on stakeholder perceptions shows that different groups may not prioritise the same skills or judge preparedness in the same way. Soupeze (2023), for example, reports perception differences among students, academics, and industry professionals in engineering.

The present study focuses on students and lecturers, since they are the two most direct stakeholders in everyday teaching and learning activities. If their perceptions differ, the gaps may reveal where employability messages are not being communicated clearly enough, or where learning experiences do not feel as useful to students as lecturers intend.

Vietnamese Higher Education Context

Vietnam provides a meaningful context for examining employability skill development since the issue concerns both educational and economic aspects. Higher education has expanded and diversified in response to reform, internationalisation, and demand for skilled graduates. At the same time, the connection between university training and labour-market needs still raises questions. Previous studies have reported that Vietnamese employers expect graduates to possess not only professional knowledge, but also communication skills, teamwork, problem-solving ability, foreign language competence, digital literacy, and the capacity to keep learning in changing work environments (Tran, 2012).

Research on graduate employability in Vietnam has addressed several related issues. Tran (2012) argues that Vietnamese higher education has faced persistent challenges in preparing graduates for contemporary labour-market demands, partly because of traditional teaching practices and limited university-industry connections. Bui et al. (2017) found that many Vietnamese students were uncertain about their English competence and their ability to perform career-related tasks in English, suggesting a need for stronger alignment between language learning and employability preparation. Pham (2021) similarly argues that Vietnamese university programmes need to strengthen generic skills, hands-on experience, and university-industry partnerships. More recently, Do et al. (2023) examined Vietnamese university students' acquisition and development of graduate employability capital, showing that employability preparation involves not only human capital, but also social, cultural, psychological, and identity-related resources.

Taken together, these Vietnamese-context studies show that employability is already a visible concern in higher education, but they approach the issue from different angles. Tran (2012) foregrounds the long-standing problem of university-industry alignment. Bui et al. (2017) and Pham (2021) draw attention to English, generic skills, hands-on experience, and partnerships with industry. Do et al. (2023) confirm that students' employability preparation also involves forms of capital beyond disciplinary knowledge. These studies help establish the local relevance of the present research. They also show that the problem is not only whether universities mention

employability in policy or programme documents; the more difficult question is how employability is experienced in teaching, assessment, extracurricular activities, internships, and student-lecturer interaction.

Much of the existing literature in Vietnam has focused on employability skills, employer expectations, English as an employability capacity, or students' employability capital. Less attention has been given to direct comparisons between students' and lecturers' perceptions of how university learning experiences support employability skill development. The author argues that such a comparison is critical because it brings the issue down to the level where employability is actually taught and experienced in courses, assignments, feedback, guidance, and opportunities to connect learning with future work.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study conceptualises employability skills development as a multidimensional process shaped by students' university learning experiences. Based on the literature and the adapted survey instrument, six domains were examined, namely problem-solving and adaptability (ADAPT), human skills (HUMAN), ICT skills (ICT), personal organisation and time management (TIME), leadership (LEAD), and communication (COM).

The six domains were selected for both theoretical and empirical reasons. They reflect a view of employability as a combination of knowledge, transferable skills, self-management, efficacy, adaptability, and the capacity to respond to changing work demands. The domains were derived from prior employability skills research and then adjusted to fit the focus of this study. Problem-solving and adaptability were combined because both concern students' capacity to respond to tasks, uncertainty, and change. Human skills captured interpersonal and teamwork-related capacities. ICT skills were retained because digital competence has become central to both learning and work. Personal organisation and time management represented self-management; leadership concerned responsibility and influence in group processes. Communication was kept separate because it was closely linked to classroom presentations and listening.

The study does not treat employability as a direct measure of employment outcomes or actual workplace competence. Instead, it focuses on perceived employability skill development, meaning how students and lecturers evaluate the extent to which university courses and learning experiences support students in developing these six skill domains.

The study was guided by the following research questions.

RQ1. How do students and lecturers perceive the extent to which university learning experiences support students' employability skill development?

RQ2. To what extent do students' and lecturers' perceptions differ across key domains of employability skills?

RQ3. How do qualitative interview findings help explain the perception gaps, if any, between students and lecturers?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods design in which survey data were complemented by interview data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The survey identified how students and lecturers evaluated employability skill development across six domains. The interviews then provided more detail about what participants meant when they talked about practical learning, well-supported skills, underdeveloped skills, and responsibility for career preparation. Data collection was sequential, with the survey administered first, followed by interviews. This design suited the purpose of the study. Perceived employability skill development can be compared quantitatively, but it is also shaped by the meanings that students and lecturers attach to courses and extracurricular activities.

Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at a Vietnamese university where employability skills development had become an important concern in undergraduate education. To preserve institutional anonymity, the university is referred to throughout the article as the case university. A total of 486 students and 93 lecturers completed the survey. A convenience sampling strategy was used for the survey; the questionnaire was distributed through accessible classes at the case university. Third- and fourth-year students were chosen because they had accumulated more experience of university courses and were closer to the transition to work. Lecturers were invited because they were directly involved in undergraduate teaching and could evaluate how their courses supported students' employability skills development. In addition, 45 students and 8 lecturers participated in semi-structured interviews. The interview participants were selected from survey respondents who indicated their willingness to be interviewed, so the qualitative data could provide further explanation of the patterns identified in the survey.

Table 1. *Participants in the Study*

Participant Group	Survey Participants	Interview Participants
Students	486	45
Lecturers	93	8
Total	579	53

Survey Instrument

The survey questionnaire was designed to explore students' and lecturers' perceptions of employability skills development. It was informed by previous employability skills research and by an existing employability skills instrument used in a Malaysian graduate employability study (Gurcharan Singh & Garib Singh, 2008). The original instrument covered several areas, including communication, ICT, interpersonal skills, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, adaptability, creativity, and time management. These areas were reviewed and reorganised for the present study into six domains that were relevant to the case university and to the focus on perceived employability skills development. Since participants might have different levels of English proficiency, the questionnaire was presented bilingually in Vietnamese and English.

The main part of the questionnaire consisted of six sections corresponding to six employability skill domains, namely problem-solving and adaptability, human skills, ICT skills, personal organisation and time management, leadership, and communication. A four-point Likert scale was used to avoid a neutral midpoint. For students, the items asked them to evaluate the extent to which the courses they were studying helped them develop the listed skills. For lecturers, the items asked them to evaluate the extent to which the courses they were teaching helped students develop those skills. An additional overall rating item (G36) asked participants to evaluate the extent to which the university had supported students in getting ready for their future careers.

Before the final data collection, the questionnaire was piloted with students and lecturers. The pilot was used to check item clarity, relevance to the local higher education context, and the consistency of the Vietnamese and English versions. The final version retained 35 items across six skill domains, together with one overall career preparation item. The internal consistency of the six scales was acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha values all above .70. These reliability results supported the use of the scales in the present study, although further construct validation would be useful in future research.

Table 2. *Survey Constructs and Reliability*

Construct	Skill domain	No. of Items (Item labels)	Cronbach's Alpha
ADAPT	Problem-solving and adaptability	9 (A1-A9)	.808
HUMAN	Human skills	6 (B10-B15)	.751
ICT	ICT skills	5 (C16-C20)	.851
TIME	Personal organisation and time management	6 (D21-D26)	.803
LEAD	Leadership skills	5 (E27-E31)	.831
COM	Communication skills	4 (F32-F35)	.797

Interviews and Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insight into participants' perceptions of employability skill development. The interview questions focused on how students and lecturers understood employability skills, which skills they believed were well supported by university learning experiences, which skills needed further development, and what could be done to enhance students' preparation for future work. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, recorded with consent, transcribed, and translated into English where necessary for analysis and reporting. To protect confidentiality, students and lecturers were coded using labels such as S1, S2, L1, and L2. Quotations included in the findings were selected because they represented recurring themes across the interview data rather than isolated opinions.

Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis began with repeated reading of the transcripts, followed by initial coding of statements related to employability skills, learning experiences, lecturer support, student autonomy, practical learning, opportunity access, and career preparation. These codes were compared across student and lecturer interviews and then grouped into broader themes that helped explain the quantitative patterns.

During theme development, attention was paid to both convergence and divergence between the two groups. Integration occurred at the interpretation stage. Survey results identified where perception gaps existed, while interview themes helped explain how those gaps were experienced and why they mattered.

The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were generated to identify general patterns across the six skill domains. Reliability analysis examined the internal consistency of each scale. To compare students' and lecturers' perceptions, independent-samples t-tests were used for each employability skill domain and for the overall career preparation rating. Given the unequal group sizes, Welch's t-test results are reported. Cohen's d was calculated to indicate the size and direction of differences. For both scale-level and item-level analyses, t-values and Cohen's d were reported in the direction of lecturer ratings minus student ratings; positive values therefore indicate higher lecturer ratings, whereas negative values indicate higher student ratings.

The qualitative data were analysed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interview transcripts were read several times before initial codes were generated from repeated ideas related to employability skills, practical learning, lecturer support, student responsibility, opportunity access, and career preparation. These codes were compared across student and lecturer interviews and then grouped into broader themes that helped explain the quantitative patterns. During theme development, attention was paid to both convergence and divergence between the two groups. Integration occurred at the interpretation stage. Survey results identified where perception gaps existed, while interview themes helped explain how those gaps were experienced and why they mattered.

Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw. Interview data were anonymised, and codes were used instead of real names when reporting findings.

FINDINGS

Overall Positive but Uneven Patterns of Perceived Employability Skill Development

The survey results showed that both students and lecturers held generally positive views of employability skill development at the case university. Across the six domains, mean scores were above the midpoint of the four-point scale. Overall, the findings do not indicate a lack of employability provision. Rather, they suggest that both groups recognised that university learning experiences offered students opportunities to develop relevant skills for employment.

The patterns, however, were not uniform. Students gave relatively high ratings to human skills and ICT skills, while their ratings were lower for communication and personal organisation/time management. Lecturers were particularly positive about ICT skills, communication skills, and problem-solving/adaptability. A similar pattern appeared in the overall career preparation item. Students rated the university's support for career preparation at 6.70 out of 10, whereas lecturers gave a higher mean rating of 7.42. This difference is important because it shows that the perception gap was not limited to individual classroom skills. It also appeared in participants' broader judgement of how well the university prepared students for future careers.

Student-Lecturer Differences Across Skill Domains

To examine whether students and lecturers differed significantly in their perceptions, independent-samples t-tests were conducted for the six employability skill domains and the overall career preparation rating. Welch's t-test results are reported because of the unequal group sizes. Cohen's d was calculated to indicate the direction and size of the difference. Positive values indicate higher lecturer ratings, while negative values indicate higher student ratings.

Table 3. *Student-Lecturer Differences in Perceived Employability Skill Development*

Domain	Students M (SD)	Lecturers M (SD)	t(df)	p	Cohen's d
Problem-solving and adaptability	2.89 (0.44)	3.06 (0.36)	4.02 (147.63)	< .001	0.40
Human skills	3.11 (0.48)	2.99 (0.46)	-2.22 (134.97)	.028	-0.24
ICT skills	3.12 (0.59)	3.38 (0.43)	5.01 (167.60)	< .001	0.46
Personal organisation and time management	2.85 (0.56)	2.67 (0.47)	-3.30 (146.91)	.001	-0.33
Leadership skills	2.95 (0.57)	2.91 (0.52)	-0.73 (136.40)	.466	-0.08
Communication skills	2.78 (0.56)	3.05 (0.41)	5.55 (168.11)	< .001	0.50
Overall career preparation rating	6.70 (1.55)	7.42 (0.91)	6.10 (210.21)	< .001	0.49

Note. Welch's t-values and Cohen's d are reported in the direction of lecturer ratings minus student ratings. Positive values indicate higher lecturer ratings, whereas negative values indicate higher student ratings.

Significant student-lecturer differences were found in five of the six skill domains and in the overall career preparation rating. The largest lecturer-higher difference was in communication skills, where the effect size reached $d = 0.50$. This gap was worth considering because communication was one of the most visible areas of university learning. Students gave presentations, joined discussions, worked in groups, and expressed ideas in class. From the lecturer perspective, these activities could reasonably be interpreted as evidence of communication development. Students, however, appeared to evaluate communication against a more demanding standard.

Lecturers also rated ICT skills more positively than students did, with an effect size of $d = 0.46$. The same lecturer-higher pattern appeared in problem-solving and adaptability, $d = 0.40$. These differences were not large, but they were consistent and educationally meaningful. They suggest that lecturers may have viewed students' use of digital tools, problem-solving tasks, case-based activities, and presentations as signs of employability skill development. Students may have been more cautious because they compared these classroom experiences with what they expected professional work to require.

The overall career preparation rating followed a similar pattern, $d = 0.49$. This is noteworthy because it extends the perception gap beyond specific skill domains. Lecturers did not simply rate one or two classroom skills more positively; they also evaluated the university's general contribution to career readiness more favourably than students did. This result later became important in interpreting the interview data, where students repeatedly linked employability preparation with clearer guidance, more authentic experience, and more visible connections between learning activities and future work.

Two domains followed the opposite direction. Students rated human skills higher than lecturers did, although the effect size was small, $d = -0.24$. This may reflect students' self-appreciation of their involvement in activities such as teamwork, class relationships, club participation, and informal social learning. Students also rated personal organisation and time management more positively than lecturers did, $d = -0.33$. The direction of this difference suggests that students and lecturers may have relied on different evidence, and students were more lenient in some way. Students may have valued their attempts to balance deadlines, examinations, extracurricular activities, and sometimes part-time work. Meanwhile, lecturers may have judged students' personal organisation and time management through punctuality, attendance, class participation, and task completion. Leadership was the only domain in which the difference was not statistically significant, $d = -0.08$, suggesting broad similarity between the two groups' perceptions in this area.

Item-Level Differences

The scale-level results show where the main differences are, but selected item-level findings clarify how the gaps were formed. Five items were especially useful in interpreting the student-lecturer differences, namely A6, B11, C20, D24, and F32. These items were selected because they represented the domains where the two groups showed either a clear gap or an unexpected direction of difference.

Table 4. *Selected Item-Level Differences from the Survey*

Item	Skill domain	Students M	Lecturers M	Welch t(df)	p	Cohen's d
A6. Students are creative and make suggestions to improve the job.	Problem-solving/adaptability	2.85	3.29	7.68 (184.17)	< .001	0.66
B11. Students enjoy working as part of a team.	Human skills	2.73	3.23	7.26 (177.40)	< .001	0.64
C20. Students have ICT knowledge and skills in handling presentations.	ICT skills	2.98	3.55	9.22 (176.08)	< .001	0.81
D24. Students are able to arrive at the university on time.	Time management	2.83	2.45	-4.68 (158.49)	< .001	-0.44
F32. Students are able to make effective presentations.	Communication	2.61	3.13	9.26 (229.43)	< .001	0.71

Note. Welch's t-values and Cohen's d are reported in the direction of lecturer ratings minus student ratings. Positive values indicate higher lecturer ratings, whereas negative values indicate higher student ratings.

Item A6 helps explain the lecturer-higher gap in problem-solving/adaptability. Lecturers may have seen classroom tasks, cases, and assignments as evidence of students' creativity, while students were less certain that such activities prepared them to act creatively in professional settings. The presentation-related items were especially sharp. In ICT, C20 showed the largest gap within the domain. Lecturers gave a mean of 3.55 for students' ICT knowledge in handling presentations, while students gave 2.98, $t(176.08) = 9.22$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.81$. In communication, F32 showed a similar pattern. Students rated their ability to make effective presentations at 2.61, whereas lecturers rated it at 3.13, $t(229.43) = 9.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.71$. These two items help explain why communication and ICT were lecturer-higher at the scale level. Presentations are common tertiary-level tasks, and they are widely used at the case university. Lecturers may view them as opportunities for students to practise digital preparation, verbal explanation, and audience engagement. Students may judge the same tasks against a more professional standard. Being able to prepare slides and speak in class may not be the same as being ready to communicate in workplace settings. This interpretation is consistent with the scale-level finding that communication showed the largest gap, $d = 0.50$.

Human skills were less straightforward. Students rated the overall domain higher than lecturers, but B11 moved in the opposite direction. Lecturers were more positive about students' enjoyment of teamwork ($M = 3.23$) than students were ($M = 2.73$), $t(177.40) = 7.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.64$. This distinction suggests that students did not necessarily reject their interpersonal development; they may have felt socially capable and experienced in working with others. At the same time, they may have found some forms of teamwork stressful, uneven, or dependent on the contribution of other group members. This finding prevents a simplistic interpretation of the human skills result. Students' higher rating of human skills did not mean that all forms of collaborative learning were experienced positively.

Item D24 helps explain the student-higher gap in personal organisation and time management. Students rated their ability to arrive at university on time more positively ($M = 2.83$) than lecturers did ($M = 2.45$), $t(158.49) = -4.68$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.44$. This difference may look minor, but it shows how the same skill domain can be judged from different positions. Students may associate time management with managing study schedules, deadlines, examinations, or extracurricular commitments. Lecturers may interpret time management more narrowly through observable classroom behaviours. The item-level finding supports the broader argument that perception gaps are shaped not only by different opinions, but also by different sources of evidence.

Qualitative Explanations for the Perception Gaps

The interview findings help explain why the survey showed generally positive perceptions alongside significant student-lecturer gaps. Students and lecturers did not define employability in completely different ways. Both groups referred to disciplinary knowledge, transferable skills, personal qualities, and the capacity to adapt to future work. The difference lay more in how they evaluated the learning experiences through which these skills were expected to develop.

Students commonly described employability skills as abilities needed by employers and used in actual work. They mentioned communication, teamwork, problem-solving, planning, presentation, leadership, and technology-related competence. S22 distinguished general skills such as planning, self-management, communication, and information searching from more position-specific skills

such as leadership and negotiation. S5 made a similar point in relation to technology, arguing that students need to “master technology” and know how to use computers in order to develop their careers. Lecturers used a similarly broad vocabulary, but they tended to connect these skills more directly to teaching activities, course design, and assessment tasks.

The first explanatory theme was a difference in how participants defined practical learning. Lecturers often treated case studies, projects, presentations, discussions, role plays, and problem-solving tasks as practical because these activities required students to apply knowledge, cooperate with peers, search for information, and then present outcomes. L8 reported this directly.

Personally, I like to break down group projects into smaller parts that students can work on throughout the semester. By the end, both individuals and groups have a finished product. This way, students can search for information, make practical contacts, interview experts, engage in discussions, and make presentations. It's a great way to help them develop their employability skills, like teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. (L8)

Students did not necessarily reject classroom-based practical activities, but they often applied a more workplace-oriented standard. They wanted more exposure to real work and more guidance drawn from lecturers' professional experience. S8's comment reflected this concern. Students were asked to do group presentations, but “nearly learned nothing after that” when lessons were not reviewed clearly by the lecturers. S1 also wanted more regular talks with lecturers because such conversations could help students understand “real-life work”, identify “missing skills”, and practise them more purposefully. This contrast helps explain the lecturer-higher gaps in communication, ICT, and problem-solving/adaptability. Lecturers saw the pedagogical intention of classroom tasks, while students judged whether these tasks made them feel more prepared for work.

The second theme was the visibility of skill development. Some students clearly recognised the employability value of embedded classroom activities. S3, for example, stated that teamwork was practised regularly because lecturers assigned group work with “clear objectives and guidance”. The student described how group members divided tasks, delegated responsibilities, reported progress, kept minutes, and worked “more efficiently and professionally”. S2 similarly connected group assignments and moot courts with professional skill development and the “real world of work”.

During class time, lecturers very often assign group work with clear objectives and guidance. We need to solve some certain academic tasks in groups. This helps promote teamwork skill because we need to divide the whole assignment and then delegate smaller tasks to all team members. When working together, we all need to report to keep track and make minutes of work. In this way, we work more efficiently and professionally. (S3)

This recognition, however, was not uniform. The contrast between S3 and S8 is analytically important. For S3, group work made teamwork and professionalism visible because the task had clear objectives, guidance, and a work process. For S8, presentations without sufficient review did not lead to positive outcomes. As such, the issue was not simply whether students had group work or presentations. It was whether students could see what employability skills were being developed, receive feedback on those skills, and connect them with future professional situations.

The third theme concerned the balance between lecturer support and student autonomy. Students wanted more explicit guidance, more practical tasks, and more career-related activities. Lecturers, however, often emphasised that students needed to become more independent. L6 warned that some students relied too much on lecturers or supervisors for “direction and guidance”, which could limit their ability to “take initiative” and work independently. L2 similarly argued that students should not rely only on classroom teaching but should be more autonomous to enrich their experiences.

Students also acknowledged their own responsibility. S5 stated that “the most important component is the students themselves”, because students needed to know what they had and what they lacked. S2 also linked motivation to the university environment, classmates, school, and clubs. This support-autonomy tension may concern the amount and type of structured supervision students need before they can act independently. This helps explain why lecturers rated overall career preparation from university learning more positively than students did. Lecturers may have seen available opportunities and expected students to use them. In contrast, students may have wanted more guidance on how to use those opportunities to become more career-ready.

Finally, the interviews pointed to a gap between the provision of employability-related opportunities and students’ active use of them. Lecturers referred to practice periods, companies, expert seminars, internships, and stricter internship standards. Students also mentioned career talks, professional seminars, workshops, and practical skills classes. S35 noted that students may not know which skills were important, so sharing sessions were needed to raise awareness. S26 added that students should participate actively in career talks and seminars, ask questions, and use these activities to gain knowledge and skills. These comments suggest that opportunity provision alone is insufficient. Students need to understand the rationale of an opportunity to develop employability skills and what they are expected to do with it.

Overall, the interview data explain the gaps found from the survey. They revealed that students and lecturers evaluated employability development from different angles. Lecturers focused more on curriculum intentions, pedagogical design, and available activities. Students paid more attention to authenticity, feedback, guidance, and perceived relevance to future work. The same activity, such as a project, presentation, seminar, internship, or group task, could mean different things to the two groups. This finding is central to the study because it shows that perception gaps are not merely statistical differences. They are indicators of how employability development is experienced and interpreted in everyday university learning.

DISCUSSION

This study reported gaps in how students and lecturers at the same university perceived employability skill development. The survey results showed where the gaps were, while the interviews helped clarify them. The findings support several discussion points.

First, both students and lecturers were generally positive, but the pattern was not similar. In other words, the case university was not failing to support employability. The more interesting finding is that students and lecturers were reading that support differently. This interpretation is consistent with stakeholder-oriented views of employability and with research showing that students’ perceptions of the learning environment matter for learning (Cheng et al., 2022; Lizzio et al., 2002).

Lecturers may see a presentation, a case analysis, or a group project as a carefully designed opportunity to practise communication and problem-solving. Students may ask whether the activity increased their perceived ability to communicate in workplace settings. The answers are not always the same. The communication gap is the clearest example.

Second, practical learning produced a similar pattern. Lecturers described projects, role plays, case studies, mock trials, and expert interviews as practical. Students often looked for closer contact with work, such as company visits, internships, industry talks, lecturers' work experience, and tasks that felt less like classroom performance. Project-based and active learning can support transferable skills (Guo et al., 2020; Zhang & Ma, 2023), but this study shows a necessary condition. Students need to experience the activity as authentic enough to invest effort in it.

Third, employability may sit within a hidden curriculum between lecturers and students. Many skills are expected to develop through ordinary academic routines, including meeting deadlines, preparing presentations, managing group tasks, doing research, joining clubs, and participating in class. Some students in the interviews recognised this clearly, while others did not. This uneven recognition matters because if students cannot see what a task has developed, they may be less able to transfer that learning into internships or early employment.

Finally, the support-autonomy balance deserves more attention. Students wanted clearer guidance and more workplace-oriented support, while lecturers wanted them to take more initiative. Both views are justified if we agree that employability cannot be left entirely to individual effort.

These findings suggest that perception gaps can be used as curriculum evidence. If lecturers intend for a task to develop a certain employability skill, students need to understand that intention, practise the skill, receive feedback on it, and see how it develops throughout and beyond the course. The issue is not simply whether employability activities are present. It is also whether their purpose and value are visible to students.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings point to several practical implications for curriculum developers, lecturers, career services, and industry partners.

For curriculum developers and programme teams, employability skills should be made more explicit across courses. Many lecturers may already embed communication, teamwork, ICT use, problem-solving, and adaptability in their teaching, but students may not always recognise these activities as career preparation. Programme teams could map where key skills are introduced, practised, assessed, and reflected on. This makes the transferable value of academic tasks more explicit to students.

For lecturers, the results suggest the need to make the link between classroom tasks and professional practice clearer. After a presentation, group project, case analysis, or field-related activity, students could be asked to briefly reflect on their experiences and how they relate to future work. Feedback from lecturers should address process skills such as collaboration, planning, problem-solving, and professional behaviour, not only disciplinary content. Lecturers are also encouraged to balance their

support with student autonomy. Early guidance can help students understand workplace expectations and identify missing skills. Over time, students should be encouraged to become more self-directed.

For career services and employability support units, co-curricular opportunities need to be organised as part of a visible developmental pathway. Career talks, workshops, competitions, internships, professional seminars, and student clubs may support employability, but students need to understand how to use them. These units could work more closely with faculties to connect such activities with programme outcomes, specific skill domains, and students' own areas for improvement.

For employers and industry partners, the findings suggest a role beyond offering internships or recruitment events. Employers can help universities design more authentic cases, provide feedback on student presentations or projects, contribute to seminars, and clarify the kinds of communication, ICT, problem-solving, and teamwork practices expected in the workplace. Such involvement would make classroom activities more authentic and transferable.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single university context. Although the findings provide useful insight into student-lecturer perception gaps in Vietnamese higher education, they should not be generalised broadly to all universities or disciplines. Second, the study relied on self-reported perceptions. The survey and interviews examined how students and lecturers perceived employability skill development, but they did not measure students' actual competence or employment outcomes. Future studies could combine perception data with performance-based assessments, portfolios, employer evaluations, internship feedback, or graduate employment tracking. Third, the study did not include employer perspectives. Since employability is shaped partly by labour-market expectations, future research should include employers, alumni, internship supervisors, or career service staff. Finally, future research could further validate the instrument through exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis and more detailed modelling.

CONCLUSION

This study examined whether there are student-lecturer perception gaps in employability skill development at an anonymised Vietnamese university. Both groups generally agreed that university learning experiences supported employability skills, but they did not evaluate this support in the same way. Lecturers were more positive about problem-solving/adaptability, ICT, communication, and overall career preparation. Students were more positive about human skills and time management. Leadership was the only category where no significant difference was found. The interview findings revealed that lecturers appeared to associate employability skills with classroom tasks, projects, presentations, and institutional opportunities. Meanwhile, students looked more closely at whether these experiences felt authentic and relevant to their future careers. In several cases, the same activity could be understood differently by the two groups.

The central argument of the study is that employability skills development is not achieved by adding activities to the curriculum alone. It depends on whether students understand what skills are being developed, practise them in credible ways, receive useful feedback, and connect the experience with

future professional life. For universities, the task is therefore not only to provide employability opportunities, but to make them visible, meaningful, and usable for students.

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