Linking skills-based learning to career opportunities: A case of economics and business administration students in Vietnam

*1Phuong Huy Tran & 2Anh Thi Hong Nguyen
1, 2National Economics University, Hanoi, Vietnam

Abstract

Human resource is an essential factor contributing to the development of enterprises as well as the national economy. However, in Vietnam, the training of human resources still has some limitations. One of those weaknesses is that education has not been significantly associated with actual occupations. Therefore, this article was conducted to analyze why university training does not meet the requirements of enterprises, thereby proposing solutions and recommendations to deal with the problem. The obtained results indicated that students need to focus on improving their professional skills, soft skills, and attitudes at work. Secondly, there should be a change in the educational program at universities to enhance students' skills. Finally, universities and businesses need to build a solid relationship to make training programs relevant to reality activities. Thus, students, schools, companies, and authorities together need to take action to improve the quality of human resources in general, especially in the economics and business administration sectors.

Keywords: human resources, higher education, job, economics, business administration, Vietnam

Introduction

Currently, in Vietnam, higher education does not meet professional needs, and this has become a worrying problem for high-quality human resources. Higher education is an important factor in training high-quality human resources to help promote the development of society. The training that meets the needs of the community as well as businesses not only balances labor supply and demand and reduces unemployment for graduates but also helps companies reduce high costs for retraining. However, in Vietnam, in 2020, the unemployment rate in the working-age of people with a university degree or higher is 4.26%, the majority of graduates applying to businesses must be retrained. One of the main reasons for this problem is that Vietnamese students still lack many skills to meet job requirements. It can be seen that many Vietnamese students are not ready to participate in professional activities. They often do not have enough skills and find it challenging to adapt to their work and professional environment requirements. This has a significant impact on job quality and economic development in general. Besides, in the twenty-first century, humanity faces a new historical context and faces unprecedented challenges. The transition from the industrial era to the development period of science and technology, the knowledge economy, and the widespread trend of globalization has affected all fields. Therefore, the labor market and human resource needs of industries will be more volatile.

As a result, it is necessary to find out the causes so that measures to improve skills for students are vital. The article presents the current situation of high-quality labor in Vietnam as well as the reasons leading to the lack of students' ability to meet job requirements. Then, the article mentions possible solutions to solve this situation.
The reality of unemployment

Student unemployment after graduation has been a concern for many years. According to the General Statistics Office of employment in 2020, the unemployment rate in the working-age of people with university degrees or higher is 4.26%, unemployed workers in this group account for the most significant proportion (20.7%). Also, according to the General Statistics Office in 2017, among unemployed workers who have received professional or vocational training for more than three months, the unemployment rate of workers with university degrees or higher accounts for the largest market share, about 38.6% of the total number of unemployed workers in this group. Accordingly, six groups of training industries/occupations currently have the proportion of unemployed workers with professional and technical qualifications of 3 months or more in the order of "Business and management - 30.3%", "Technology - 13.4%", "Health - 10.7%", "Transport services - 9.5%" and "Science education and teacher training - 9.0%". Only about 3.6% of unemployed workers with professional and technical qualifications have two or more training degrees/certificates.

Even if they get a job, many students do not have jobs that are relevant to their majors. It has been a growing and worrying trend in Vietnam over the last few years that fresh graduates, even those with a master’s degree, fail to land a suitable job and accept working in fields that have no relation to their majors. It is not uncommon to see people with university degrees do manual work which no qualifications are needed. In 2017, approximately 100000 university graduates are doing unskilled jobs, according to the military-run Quan Doi Nhan Dan (People’s Army) newspaper. By the end of 2018, Vietnam had to see another 200000 young people become unemployed after graduation.

The situation of retraining bachelors to work in enterprises is also very common. According to the survey data from 500 enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City in the month conducted by the Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, up to 94% of the new employees are fresh graduates who need to be re-trained to meet the specific needs of the business. 92% of the contents that need re-training is on professional skills, 61% is on basic soft skills, 53% is on management and leadership skills. In this data, it is worth mentioning that soft skills and students must be trained the most in professional skills. In fact, many good graduates do not have the basic professional knowledge and skills to start working immediately.

Students’ skills are still limited. Employers need some of the skills in their employees. Firstly, employees should have good professional knowledge. Employers are often interested in the knowledge that students accumulate during their training at school because it helps them save time and training costs, depending on the level of expertise that will determine the job position and monthly income. Secondly, good foreign language ability is preferred. Vietnam is integrating into the world economy, which creates many job opportunities and poses foreign language challenges for students. Last but not least, soft skills are essential to meet the requirements of employers. Enterprises now need good communication skills, practical work handling, good adaptability in the team, etc.

However, the current higher education program has not focused on equipping learners with general knowledge and necessary social skills. Besides professional skills, employers’ essential needs in fresh graduates are foreign languages, practical experiences, and other soft skills. However, they often fail to see these conditions in graduates applying for jobs. Simple skills such as emailing, communication, simple office skills (photocopying, printing, arranging dispatches, papers) are all weaknesses that many bachelors have not realized to overcome. The knowledge learned from the lecture hall is necessary but not enough, especially in the context that many learning contents can be exploited from books and the Internet. The reception and addition of the university training curriculum with the skills required by the university is not enough. Soft skills and practical skills are indispensable. Besides, enterprises have difficulty in recruiting labor resources when graduates are not really active in their work.
The current university training programs lack practicality and focus more on theory. This is the cause of the limitations of students' skills. Vietnamese universities are not producing the educated workforce that Vietnam's economy and society demand. Surveys conducted by government-linked associations have found that as many as 50 percent of Vietnamese university graduates are unable to find jobs in their area of specialization, evidence that the disconnect between the classroom and the market's need is enormous. With up to 25 percent of undergraduate curricula devoted to required coursework laden with political indoctrination, it is little wonder that Vietnamese students are ill-prepared for either professional life or graduate study abroad.

The expansion of the training scale partly meets the learning needs of society and the demand for human resources. However, the most significant limitation of education in our country is the low quality of training. There is still a vast gap between university training development and economic development regarding human resource supply. While the real needs of the labor market and the labor force requirements have changed with the development of the economy, the training orientations at universities have not changed or altered very little change. According to a study conducted on 1180 students in Ho Chi Minh City (Huynh Van Son, 2017), many observers believe that the content of learning in schools focuses less on practice and more on theory (49.2 %), the school has not yet taken measures to educate students on skills to adapt to the work environment (32.5%), there is no link between the school and the enterprise (31.4%).

The effectiveness in the relationship between the school and the business sector is still low. Most of the current cooperation activities of schools and training institutions with various types of businesses are mainly established based on acquaintances of lecturers, faculty leaders, or former students pellets. The support of enterprises is emotional and has not shown a long-term cooperation relationship, so the acceptance of students to practice and practice is still limited. This makes it difficult for schools to ensure the excellent implementation of training goals to suit the requirements of the professional nature of the business. The effectiveness of the cooperation relationship between universities, training institutions, and enterprises in related industries is still unclear. Specifically, relevant ministries, branches, and training institutions under the ministry still do not have a specific mechanism and policy to encourage and promote practical cooperation between universities and enterprises in the implementation process vocational training program. Besides, the combination between businesses and schools is still weak. In Vietnam, visiting a person working in an enterprise is also quite complicated because of the degree requirements for the class teacher. While the school trains according to the approved program, built by the school itself, not much associated with businesses. And businesses are almost on the sidelines.

Solutions and recommendation

Developing content and methods of teaching with a focus on skills training for students

Universities need to modify their curriculums. It is necessary to study and develop a training program with skill training content suitable to the characteristics of each different industry. Enhance training of thinking ability, adaptability, and personality training to form a human being. In addition, strengthen connections with international organizations, foreign businesses, and overseas training institutions to help students have more opportunities to study and practice abroad towards building a business model in the school to improve the effectiveness of training links.

Instructors need to clearly define the necessary professional competencies to form for students and teach them to apply a combination of specialized knowledge in lessons so that students gradually form professional skills for themselves. Students should be given opportunities to practice professional skills in the teaching process, such as practicing by role-playing method or creating situations and organizing discussions for students to solve real-life problems by themselves.

Instructors must learn foreign languages actively, informatics, research documents, update new knowledge for teaching, innovate the way of testing and evaluate based on clear and specific criteria of each skill in specialized subjects. They ought to teach in the direction of combining theory and practice of professional skills in several
technical issues such as Sales Management, Human Resource Management, General Business Administration, Production Management, Management quality value.

Students are always active and self-study to develop professional skills for themselves. Make a plan that lists all the essential job skills that business administration students need to acquire and makes practical references to skills that apply to a particular job. Actively participate in practical experience activities when organized by the faculty and the school.

**Building a strong connection between universities and businesses closely**

Realizing the requirements of businesses is one of the primary conditions for developing an appropriate curriculum. However, many universities cannot still access the qualities that enterprises set of human resources regularly. Therefore, universities need to create links with businesses. To do this, universities, businesses, and governments need to implement the following solutions:

Universities set up a department in charge of association and cooperation with businesses. Promote the role of a bridge between organizations and individuals to sign cooperation agreements or buy shares to become shareholders of enterprises whose business lines are close to their training industries (in the form of separate knowledge from each school or link groups of universities with the same training); Regularly provide information about the program, curriculum, content, teaching methods as well as propose other essential needs to the business side. Periodically contact to find out to understand the human resource needs of the enterprise, thereby contributing to building output standards for the training process; Establish a satisfactory mechanism to encourage collectives and individuals on behalf of higher education institutions to sign a comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement with enterprises to create conditions for students in the process of internship and practice, career orientation as well as providing equipment for the school.

**It is necessary for enterprises to implement the following solutions:** To be more fully aware of the benefits and the inevitable trend of the enterprise-university linkage, thereby planning human resource strategies in the future. Set up a specialized review department to contribute to the development and adjustment of training programs for universities to meet the needs of employers from businesses; Actively coordinate with universities in compiling curricula, content and teaching methods, defending projects, graduation theses... so that the training program meets the needs of enterprises and society festival. The policy of bringing entrepreneurs into the university council has recently been seen as a step forward in the strategy of socializing education as well as training according to social needs.

Authorities should regularly make statistics of the supply-demand of human resources, especially high-quality human resources, to regulate the education - training field accordingly. Completing the operation mechanism of education quality accreditation centers in the spirit of competition, independence, autonomy, and self-responsibility before the law; Set up multiple channels connecting universities with businesses. Management agencies can organize forums for schools and companies to meet, such as technology exchanges and school-enterprise meetings. Change the management mechanism so that schools and businesses have more autonomy; There is a mechanism to support schools and businesses to establish joint development investment funds to increase ties, improve dynamism, and responsibilities of affiliated entities.

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**References**
