

## **Bridging the Gap between Soft Skills and Language Acquisition for Employability: Vocational Education and Training as a Case Study**

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## Abstract

Amidst recent royal and governmental amendments advocated for enhancing vocational education, His Majesty King Mohammed VI, in his latest Royal Speech, emphasized the essential and paramount role of vocational education and training (VET) in producing individuals who are adequately adept enough for various sectors of the Moroccan workforce. In line with such vision, this study seeks to thoroughly dissect how VET can bridge the gap between soft skills and language acquisition to further enhance employability. Vocational education is fundamental in equipping students with practical skills, yet the development of complementary competencies remains underexplored in academia. It is in such research gap that this study intervenes, investigating how vocational education can integrate both foreign language proficiency and soft skills to better prepare students for the demands of the modern workplace. Through a mixed case study approach, integrating both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, this scrutiny explores the effectiveness of pedagogical methods that foster these skills simultaneously. The research objectives are achieved by gathering insights from the sampled participants —both students and educators— within vocational settings, enabling this study to put to the forth the unprecedented opportunities of incorporating language learning alongside soft skills development. The research findings aim to provide guidance for VET institutions to design more holistic curricula that prepare graduates with the essential skills needed to succeed in their careers, aligning with the evolving workforce demands.

**Keywords:** Vocational Education, Vocational Training, Foreign Language Acquisition, Soft Skills Development, Employability

## Introduction

Vocational Education and Training (VET) has become a vital element in providing students with the skills required to navigate the demands of the global workforce. In Morocco, the significance of VET has been highlighted through recent royal and governmental initiatives, particularly in the Royal Speech of His Majesty King Mohammed VI. Despite its recognized importance, the interrelation between vocational training, soft skills development, and foreign language acquisition in the Moroccan context remains insufficiently explored. This challenge is compounded by the growing recognition of soft skills as a critical factor in employability, particularly in Morocco, where many graduates with impressive technical qualifications struggle to find or retain jobs. Dr. Ferrati, in an interview with *Morocco World News*, attributes this issue to the historical prioritization of hard skills over soft skills in Moroccan educational institutions, leaving graduates ill-prepared for the dynamic demands of modern workplaces. "These skills are useful across all industries and job categories," Ferrati emphasizes, advocating for their integration into university curricula to better prepare students for both academic and professional success. He highlights that incorporating soft skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and creativity into education will not only facilitate a seamless transition from school to work, but also empower graduates to thrive in competitive job markets. Meanwhile, Hager and Hyland (2003) assert, "Bridging the gap between soft skills and technical skills in vocational education is essential for fostering holistic development and ensuring that graduates can navigate both local and international labor markets effectively." In today's post-industrial economy, VET has gained renewed relevance by combining theoretical knowledge with practical application. It not only prioritizes technical proficiency but also incorporates essential soft skills, which are increasingly recognized as critical for employability in globalized labor markets (Hyland, 1999; White, 1997). The integration of language acquisition into VET broadens its scope, equipping learners with the tools needed to succeed in multilingual and multicultural workplaces (Pace, 2021). The reconceptualization of VET as a holistic practice that integrates technical, soft, and language skills can provide a solid foundation for addressing historical biases and meeting the complex demands of the 21st-century economy. It is in such critical gap in academic discourse that this study intervenes, investigating how these elements intersect and contribute to employability in the Moroccan workforce. Ultimately, this research will focus on ISTA in Narjiss, Fes, Morocco as a case study.

### **1. Statement of the Problem**

Despite its recognized potential to equip students with practical and technical expertise, Vocational Education and Training (VET) faces critical limitations due to the lack of comprehensive focus on foreign language proficiency and soft skills development. This gap leaves graduates inadequately prepared to meet the complex demands of modern, globalized job markets. In the context of Morocco and Africa more broadly, VET has only recently returned to the list of policy priorities for education after a quarter-century of neglect (McGrath, 2023). Yet, no substantial research has emerged to challenge the prevailing orthodox view that VET, whether during or after schooling, is inefficient and ineffective.

This study addresses this contradiction by evaluating the intersection of vocational training, foreign language acquisition, and soft skills development in Moroccan VET institutions. The absence of significant research exploring these connections highlights the need for a new approach to VET in Africa, one that draws on innovations in theory, policy, and practice from other regions while aligning with African development priorities. By reviewing international evidence on VET reform, reimagining its purpose, and revisiting the traditional divide between academic and vocational education, this study seeks to fill a critical gap in the academic discourse and offer a redefined framework for vocational training in Morocco and beyond.

### **2. Rationale of the Study**

As the Moroccan workforce becomes increasingly diversified and globally oriented, the need to develop a blend of technical, linguistic, and interpersonal skills has become increasingly demanded. Investigating the correlation between these competencies within VET programs is crucial for understanding their potential to address employability challenges. This research aligns with national efforts to enhance vocational training while expanding its scope to include soft skills and foreign language acquisition.

### **3. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore how VET programs integrate, or could integrate, the development of soft skills and foreign language acquisition. The research's focus on this relationship allows for a thorough exploration of the impact of both soft skills and foreign language acquisition on employability within the Moroccan context, shedding light on an underexplored, yet, critical aspect of vocational education and training.

#### **4. Research Questions**

1. How do current VET programs address the integration of soft skills and foreign language acquisition?
2. What are the experiences and perceptions of students and educators regarding the role of these competencies in employability?
3. How do the dynamics of VET, soft skills development, and language acquisition influence the readiness of graduates for the workforce?

#### **5. Literature Review**

##### **5.1. Vocational Education and Training (VET)**

Vocational Education and Training (VET) has been a cornerstone of educational systems worldwide, evolving to address the needs of diverse economies and societies. Its origins date back to the 19th century during the Industrial Revolution, a period that saw a growing need for specialized trades and industries. This demand led to the rise of vocational training, often provided through work-based learning. (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Vocational education is a multifaceted approach aimed at equipping individuals with the practical skills and knowledge necessary for success in their chosen fields, bridging the gap between academic preparation and workforce demands (Ahmad et al., 2023; Yoto, 2018). It plays a pivotal role in preparing youth for employment, enhancing adult skills, and addressing labor market needs across various industries such as agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing (Petnáčová et al., 2012; Alhaji, 2008). Further defined by UNESCO as "education and training for work," vocational education emphasizes skill development through practical experiences, fostering both employment opportunities and personal growth (Alhaji, 2008). Scholars like Dhillon (2002) define VET as "education for work," highlighting its practical orientation and direct connection to the labor market. Similarly, the Australian federal government's vocational education body describes it as "post-compulsory education and training that provides people with the skills and learning required by enterprises and industries" (Moodie, 2002). This competency-based approach aligns with the modern demands of globalized economies and industry-specific needs. Coffey (1992) complements this view by noting that vocational education historically included both formal and informal processes, where skills were passed down through apprenticeships and on-the-job learning. Additionally, the U.S. federal education code expands the definition by including a broader skill set: "competency-based applied learning that contributes to the academic knowledge,

higher-order reasoning and problem-solving skills, work attitudes, general employability skills, technical skills, and occupation-specific skills" (Moodie, 2002). This highlights the integration of both technical and soft skills within vocational education, addressing the holistic development of learners. Moreover, Stevenson (1995) draws a distinction between general education, which focuses on conceptual understanding or declarative knowledge, and vocational education, which centers on demonstrated or procedural knowledge. This view underscores the applied nature of VET, linking learning directly to performance in workplace contexts.

In conclusion, vocational education and training is a dynamic field that combines technical proficiency with broader skills to meet the evolving needs of industries and societies. These definitions collectively underline its role in bridging the gap between education and employability, providing learners with both practical expertise and the adaptability required in modern labor markets.

## **5.2. Evolution of VET and its Role in Bridging Soft Skills, Language Acquisition, and Employability**

The development of Vocational Education and Training (VET), both globally and in Morocco, illustrates its responsiveness to evolving economic and labor market demands. Initially rooted in informal, apprenticeship-style learning focused on manual trades, VET systems began to formalize during the 19th century with the advent of industrialization. In regions such as Europe, industrial growth spurred the establishment of structured national VET frameworks, often tailored to the economic conditions and societal priorities of individual countries (Wollschlager & Guggenheim, (2004). Contemporary VET has since expanded its scope beyond traditional trades to encompass sectors such as healthcare, technology, and services, reflecting the need for a workforce equipped to navigate technological advances and globalized markets (Wonacott, 2003).

In Morocco, significant reforms in vocational training underscore its importance as a strategy for tackling unemployment and advancing economic growth. Under the oversight of the Office of Vocational Training and Employment Promotion (OFPPT), VET programs aim to provide specialized skills aligned with industry requirements, particularly in high-demand sectors such as tourism, textiles, and agriculture (*Morocco Academia*, n.d.). Recent government initiatives, including the Vocational Education Strategy, have prioritized increasing the number of trained graduates, expanding the network of training centers, and

integrating competencies for emerging fields such as renewable energy. Efforts to reframe VET as a respected and viable career option mark a shift from its traditional perception as a fallback for academically weaker students *European Training Foundation*, 2002).

Modern VET programs are distinguished by their incorporation of technical training with a focus on soft skills and language proficiency, elements critical for employability in a globalized workforce (OECD, 2023). Employers increasingly highlight the importance of attributes such as effective communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, prompting VET curricula to include activities that nurture these skills (Hermans et al., 2024). Accordingly, Dr. Ferrati highlights this necessity in the Moroccan context, where graduates often struggle with employability due to a historical emphasis on hard skills at the expense of soft skills development (*Morocco World News*. n.d). Ferrati underscores the value of communication, teamwork, and creativity as indispensable assets across industries, advocating for their integration into university curricula to bridge gaps in employability. Additionally, language training has similarly become an essential component, with multilingual proficiency recognized as a key asset in enhancing career prospects and workplace adaptability (Nghia et al., 2023). Morocco's VET system aligns with this global approach, maintaining partnerships with industry and international stakeholders to ensure that training programs address current and future labor market requirements (*Morocco.com*. (n.d.).

All in all, the integration of technical expertise with essential soft skills and language abilities in VET will result in enhancing employability and equipping learners to adapt to rapidly evolving professional environments. Its evolution reflects a strategic commitment to preparing individuals for diverse career pathways, contributing to economic resilience and growth. Sustained reforms and alignment with emerging market trends will be critical in ensuring that VET systems remain effective and responsive to the needs of both learners and employers.

## 6. Research Methodology and Design

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to address the research questions. To gather insights, the initial phase involves a quantitative survey aimed at identifying broad trends and general perceptions among VET students with the results analyzed through descriptive analysis. Accordingly, 70 vocational education and training students were selected randomly from ISTA Narjis, Fes. The survey utilized a mixed design, combining open-ended and closed-ended questions, and

was administered in internet-based format using Google Forms. Originally written in English and later translated into Arabic and French, the two-page survey collected demographic information such as gender, age and academic year. Concurrently, qualitative interviews are specifically designed to be conducted with 3 VET educators at the same institute to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives. The findings from these interviews will undergo thematic analysis using Nvivo14 software. The focusing on participants from vocational institutions facilitates a comprehensive evaluation of the relationships between VET, soft skills, foreign language acquisition, and employability within the Moroccan workforce. Table 1 presents the findings from this demographic data.

**Table 1:** Distribution of Percentage for Demographics

Category	Item	Number of Participants (out of 70)	Percentage
<b>Age</b>	<b>17 – 22</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>68.6 %</b>
	<b>23 – 30</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>28.6 %</b>
	<b>Above 31</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.9 %</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>41.4 %</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>58.6 %</b>
<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Year</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>50 %</b>
	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Year</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>40 %</b>
	<b>More than 2 years</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10 %</b>

**Source:** Author

The demographic data of the study participants provides valuable insights into the context of vocational education and training (VET) at ISTA in Narjiss, Fes. The majority of participants (68.6%) are aged 17–22, reflecting a focus on younger students who are likely entering the workforce for the first time. A smaller proportion (28.6%) falls within the 23–30 age group, indicating a mix of individuals potentially seeking to enhance their skills or shift careers. The minimal representation of those above 31 (2.9%) highlights a gap in older learners' engagement with VET programs, suggesting potential areas for expanded outreach or support. The gender distribution, with 58.6% male and 41.4% female participants, indicates a moderate gender imbalance that may reflect societal trends in vocational education enrollment. This distribution invites further exploration of gender-specific experiences and how these may influence perceptions of soft skills and language acquisition in employability.



Regarding academic years, half the participants (50%) are first-year students, offering insights into early-stage experiences with VET programs. Second-year students (40%) and those with more than two years of training (10%) provide perspectives on more advanced engagement and how these programs contribute to employability over time. This balance allows the study to capture diverse experiences and identify potential gaps in curriculum delivery at various stages. In conclusion, the demographic data highlights a young, predominantly male cohort with varied levels of training experience, providing a comprehensive foundation for analyzing how VET programs integrate soft skills and language acquisition to enhance employability.

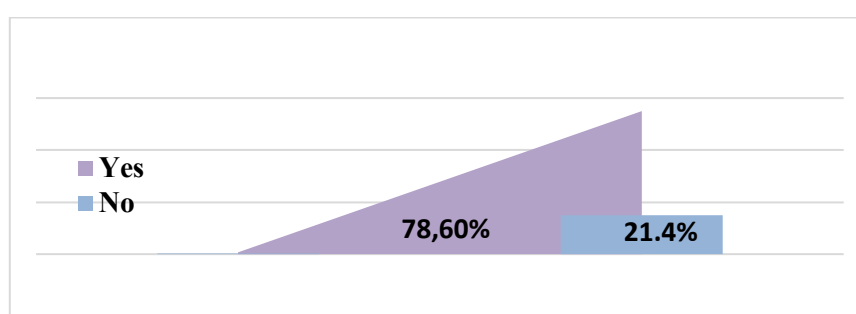
## 7. Findings and Discussions

### 7.1. Findings of the Students' Online Survey

#### 7.1.1. Technical Skills and Workforce Preparation

Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs are designed to provide learners with critical technical skills needed to thrive in today's job market. When asked, *"Do you feel that your VET program adequately prepares you with the technical skills needed for the workplace?"*, the responses reveal a predominantly positive outlook as the following graph showcases:

**Graph 1:** Perception of VET Program's Effectiveness in Preparing Technical Workplace Skills

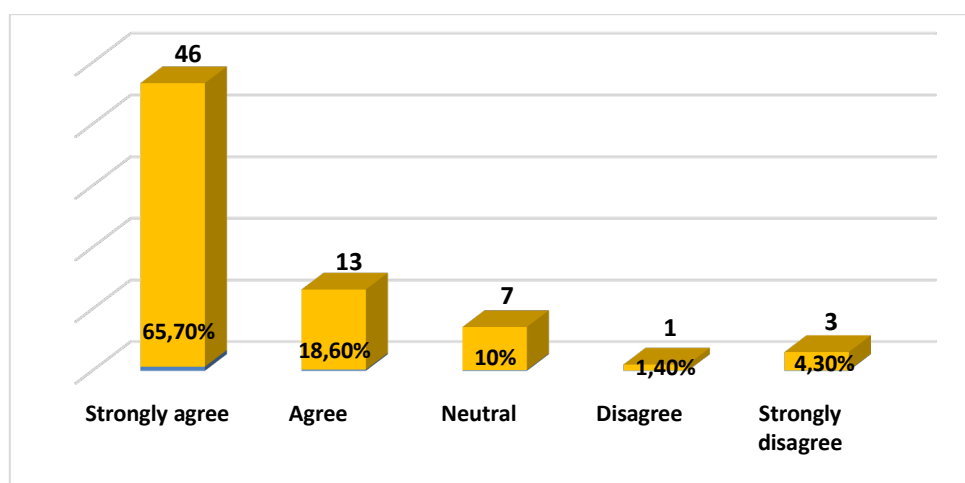


Source : Author

A survey of 70 participants showed that 77.1% believed their program successfully prepared them for workplace demands, indicating high confidence in how well the curriculum aligns with industry requirements. On the other hand, 22.9% expressed concerns about insufficient preparation, which points to potential shortcomings in incorporating relevant tools and practices from the field. Despite the overall positive sentiment, these results emphasize the importance of regular assessment and updates to ensure VET programs meet the varied needs of students and the shifting demands of employers.

Building on the predominantly positive feedback, the data also highlights areas that require attention to address the concerns of a minority. Participants were asked to rate the statement: "The skills I gain in my VET program match the expectations of employers in today's globalized job market," using a Likert scale from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." The data collected is showcased in the following graph:

**Graph 2:** Alignment of VET Program Skills with Employer Expectations in a Globalized Workforce



Source : Author

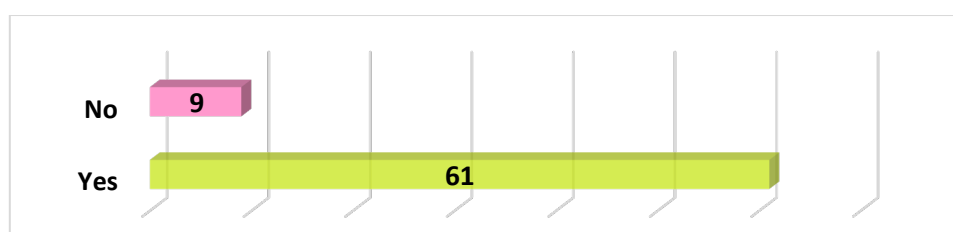
The results show a positive majority, with 46 respondents (65.7%) strongly agreeing and 13 (18.6%) agreeing, totaling 84.3% who feel their training aligns with employer needs. However, 7 participants (10%) responded neutrally, while 4 (5.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, which reflects a small but significant group who see gaps between their skills and workforce demands. These findings highlight the program's success in meeting most participants' expectations, but also emphasize the need for improvements, such as stronger collaboration with industry professionals, to better align training with current job market trends.

These findings suggest that while the VET program is perceived positively by the vast majority, there remains a need to address the concerns of the minority who feel less confident about the program's alignment with employer expectations. This could involve closer collaboration with industry professionals to ensure that training content and methods reflect the latest workforce trends and standards. Together, these insights highlight the program's overall success while emphasizing the importance of continuous improvement to meet diverse participants' needs.

### 7.1.2. Soft Skills Development

Soft skills are vital for complementing technical expertise which enable professionals to communicate effectively, collaborate in teams, and tackle problems in dynamic workplaces. As employers increasingly value these abilities, VET programs must prioritize their integration to ensure well-rounded workforce readiness. Given the growing emphasis on soft skills in today's job market, it is crucial to examine how effectively VET programs incorporate these competencies into their curricula. In this regard, participants were asked whether they had received formal training in soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, or problem-solving, as part of their VET program, and key outcomes of this study are as follows:

**Graph 3:** Provision of Formal Soft Skills Training in VET Programs



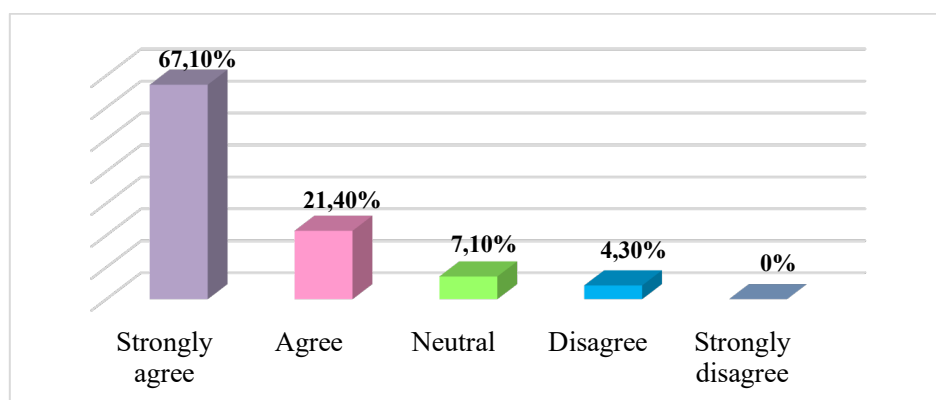
Source : Author

The results reveal that 61 out of 70 respondents (88.4%) reported receiving such training, indicating that most programs recognize the importance of developing these essential competencies. However, 9 participants (11.6%) responded "No," revealing a gap in the availability of soft skills training in some programs. This disparity suggests that while the majority benefit from these opportunities, the integration of soft skills training is not yet consistent across all programs. Interestingly, the data reinforces the significance of soft skills training in VET curricula while highlighting the need for more comprehensive and uniform implementation to ensure all participants are equipped with these essential workplace competencies.

Based on the key findings from the first question in this theme, which indicated that a considerable majority of participants (88.4%) reported receiving formal training in soft skills as part of their VET program, the next question explores the perceived effectiveness of these programs in developing one specific soft skill: communication. Communication is a cornerstone of workplace success which enables individuals to collaborate, present ideas, and navigate professional environments effectively. By examining how well VET courses foster practical communication skills, this question provides a deeper understanding of the

implementation and impact of soft skills training. Participants were presented with a statement, and asked to indicate their level of agreement on a Likert scale as the following graph demonstrates:

**Graph 4.** Effectiveness of VET Courses in Developing Workplace Communication Skills



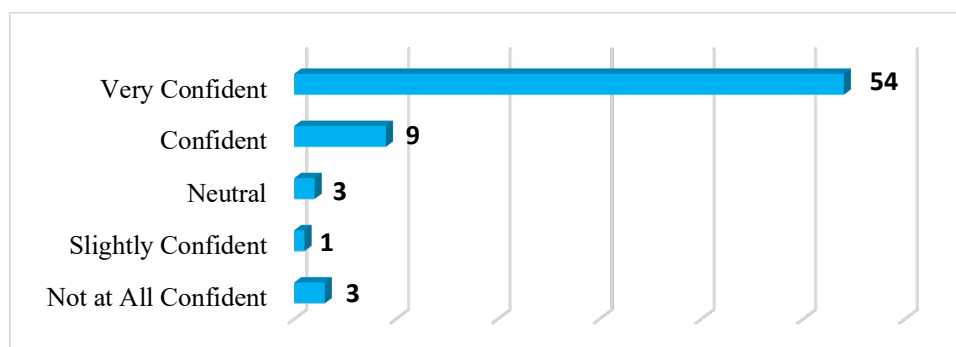
Source : Author

This analysis builds on previous findings, focusing on the effectiveness of VET programs in developing communication skills, a critical soft skill for workplace success. Survey results show that 88.5% of participants believe their courses enhance communication abilities, with 67.1% strongly agreeing and 21.4% agreeing. A small group (7.1%) expressed neutrality, and 4.3% disagreed, reflecting minimal dissatisfaction. The data highlights the success of VET programs in fostering communication skills while identifying opportunities for improvement, such as customizing training for diverse professional needs and providing personalized feedback. These findings reinforce the importance of soft skills in VET curricula and the need for continuous refinement. In general, the data emphasizes that VET programs are making significant progress in enhancing practical communication skills, a vital component of employability. These findings not only reinforce the importance of including soft skills in VET curricula, but also highlight the need to continually refine and adapt training to ensure it meets the needs of all participants.

Expanding on the examination of communication skills development, the next statement evaluates participants' overall confidence in applying both technical and interpersonal skills in a workplace setting. This component provides insights into their perceived readiness, which emphasizes the integration of hard and soft skills. This evaluation ties closely to the earlier

findings, as effective communication and formal soft skills training are integral to building confidence in workplace readiness.

**Graph 5.** Confidence in Applying Technical and Interpersonal Skills in the Workplace

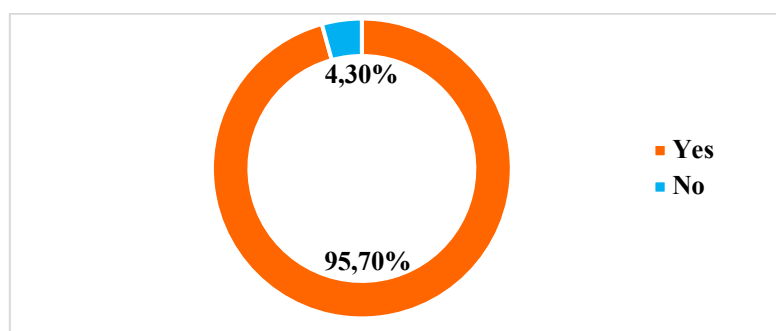


Source : Author

The results reveal a high level of confidence among participants, with 91.3% feeling either "Very Confident" (78.3%) or "Confident" (13%) in applying both technical and interpersonal skills in the workplace. This highlights the VET program's success in preparing students for diverse professional settings. However, a small minority expressed uncertainty, with 3.65% selecting "Neutral," 1.4% "Slightly Confident," and another 3.65% "Not at all Confident," pointing to potential areas for improvement. These findings emphasize the program's strong focus on technical and soft skills while suggesting a need for targeted support, such as mentorship or additional training, to boost confidence for all participants.

### 7.1.3. Language Acquisition and Employability

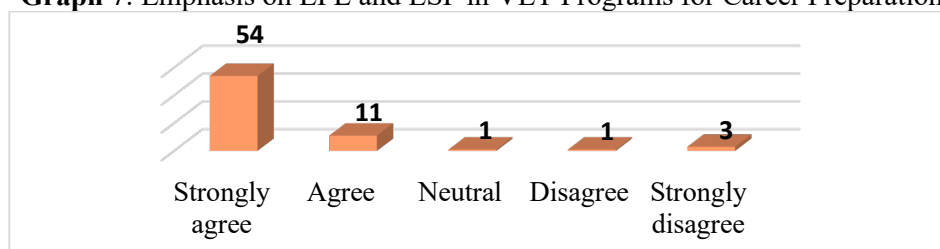
In today's global job market, English proficiency is a key factor for employability, particularly in Morocco, where multilingualism is common. Sectors like technology, tourism, and international business greatly value effective English communication. This theme examines the role of English language acquisition in vocational education and its impact on employability. Participants were asked if improving their English skills would enhance their job prospects, with responses overwhelmingly affirming its importance for career advancement, as illustrated in the accompanying graph.

**Graph 6.** Perceived Impact of English Language Skills on Employment Opportunities

Source : Author

A vast majority of participants (95.7%) believe English language skills significantly enhance employability, emphasizing its importance for accessing better career opportunities locally and internationally. Only a small minority (4.3%) disagreed, likely due to differing career paths or priorities. These findings highlight the critical role of English proficiency in vocational students' career prospects and suggest that integrating targeted English training into VET programs could further boost graduates' job market readiness.

Following the strong consensus from the previous question, where the majority agreed that improving their English skills would boost their job opportunities, it is essential to evaluate how well VET programs address this need. The inclusion of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in vocational education is crucial for empowering learners with the language skills necessary for professional success. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statement: "My VET program emphasizes the importance of EFL or ESP in career preparation," with their responses illustrated in the graph below:

**Graph 7:** Emphasis on EFL and ESP in VET Programs for Career Preparation

Source : Author

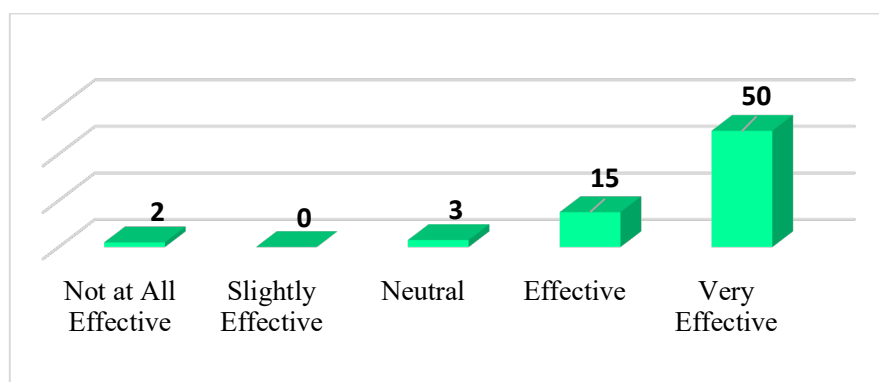
The findings show overwhelmingly positive feedback on the emphasis of English in VET programs. A total of 94.2% of participants recognized this prioritization, with 78.3% strongly

agreeing and 15.9% agreeing. Only 1.4% responded neutrally, 1.4% disagreed, and 4.3% strongly disagreed. These results highlight the success of VET programs in integrating English for career preparation, while the small percentage of neutral and negative responses suggests room for improvement, such as tailoring English instruction to industry needs and improving resource accessibility. These results reinforce the alignment between participant perceptions and institutional emphasis on English within VET programs.

#### 7.1.4. Integration of Language and Soft Skills

The integration of language acquisition and soft skills development is a critical component of modern vocational education. Combining courses like French, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) with soft skills training provides participants with a well-rounded learning experience. This approach not only enhances employability, but also prepares students to meet the diverse demands of both local and global workplaces. This section examines participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of intertwining language and soft skills training in supporting their professional growth.

**Graph 8:** Ease and Effectiveness of Integrating French, EFL, ESP, and Soft Skills Development



Source : Author

The findings reveal a largely positive view of the integration of language and soft skills in VET programs, with 71.4% of participants rating it as "Very Effective" and 21.4% as "Effective," totaling 92.8% favorable responses. This indicates widespread recognition of the benefits of this interconnected approach. However, 4.3% selected "Neutral," and 2.9% rated it as "Not at all Effective," which suggests that some participants found the integration less impactful or faced challenges with its implementation. Broadly, the data highlights the success of this integration while pointing to opportunities for refining the approach to ensure

all participants benefit fully from the combined focus on language and soft skills. This analysis highlights the value of a cohesive curriculum that merges language and soft skills training to better prepare participants for the demands of an increasingly interconnected professional world.

In conclusion, the findings from this study highlight the crucial role of VET programs in preparing participants for the modern workforce by integrating technical skills, soft skills, and language acquisition. A significant majority of participants expressed confidence in the technical skills provided by their programs, while also acknowledging the importance of soft skills, particularly communication and interpersonal abilities, in enhancing employability. English language proficiency emerged as a critical factor, with most participants recognizing its value in accessing better career opportunities and acknowledging the program's emphasis on EFL and ESP. Additionally, the integration of language acquisition and soft skills development was overwhelmingly viewed as an effective and essential enhancement to overall training. While the data reflects high levels of satisfaction and alignment with workforce demands, the small proportion of neutral or opposing responses highlights the need for continued refinement and inclusivity to ensure all participants fully benefit from these programs. In its entirety, the study draws attention to the potential of VET programs to provide a holistic, workforce-aligned education through the strategic integration of these competencies.

## **7.2. Interviews**

### **7.2.1 Analysis of Theme 1: Current State of Soft Skills Development in VET Programs**

The analysis of the coded references reveals a general consensus among educators that while soft skills are present in the current VET curriculum, they are inadequately emphasized compared to technical skills. Across the interviews, educators highlight that soft skills are often addressed indirectly or superficially through activities such as group projects or extracurricular events. However, these approaches lack structure, consistency, and explicit assessment.

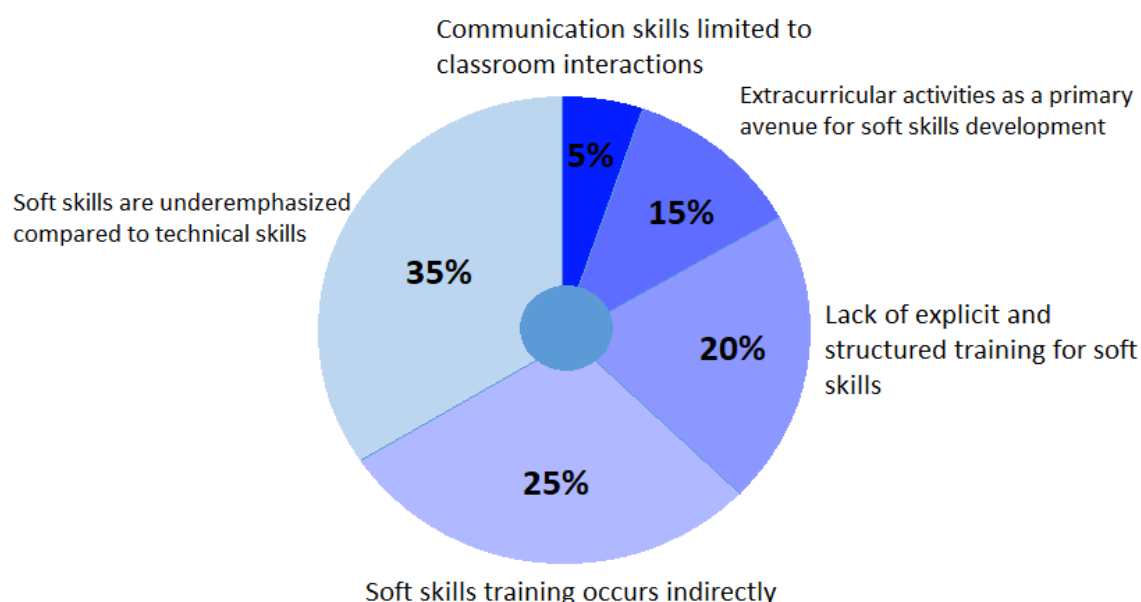
A recurring issue is the absence of dedicated training modules for essential soft skills like teamwork and communication. For instance, group work is utilized as a platform to develop teamwork, but students are not formally guided or evaluated on their collaboration skills.



Similarly, communication skills are limited to classroom interactions and basic presentations, with no systematic effort to enhance professional communication. Educators also recognize that while some initiatives—such as guest speaker events or presentations—are beneficial, these are sporadic and insufficient to create a lasting impact.

In terms of the trends and their percentages of this theme, the most noticeable pattern is the overwhelming agreement among educators that more structured and explicit integration of soft skills into the core curriculum is required. Suggestions include incorporating workshops and activities that target specific soft skills, alongside consistent evaluation mechanisms to measure progress.

**Graph 9:** Current State of Soft Skills Development in VET Programs: Curriculum Gaps and Emphasis



Source : Author

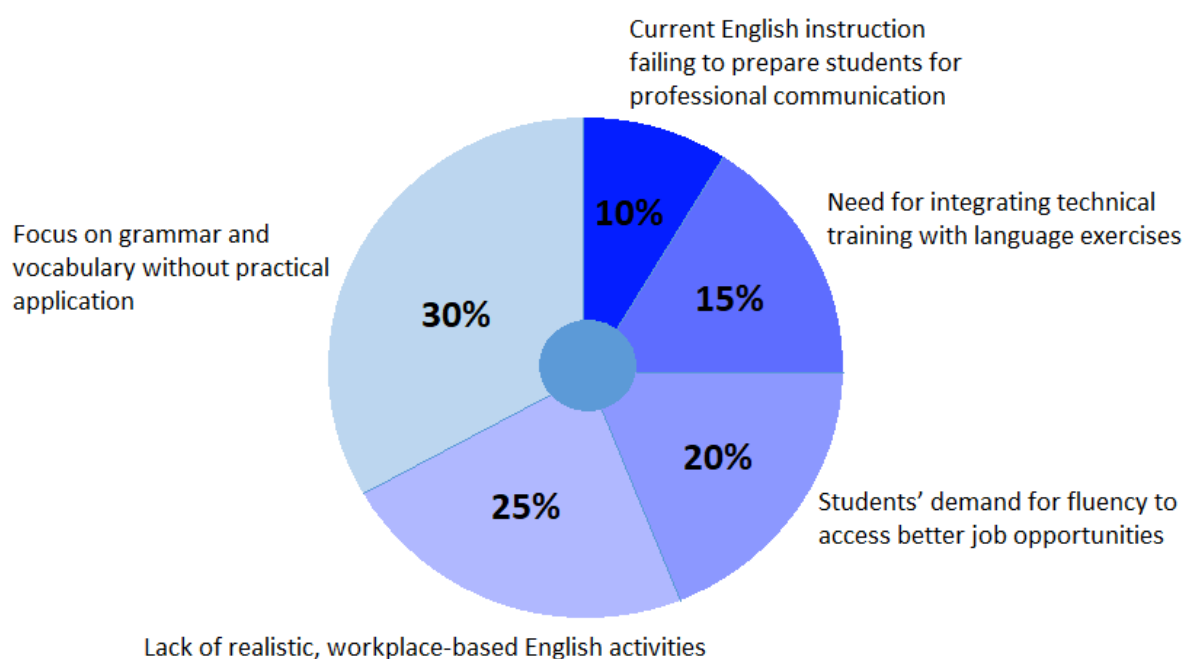
### 7.2.2. Analysis of Theme 2: Role of Language Acquisition (EFL and ESP) in VET Programs

The analysis of the coded references highlights that educators unanimously recognize the crucial role of English language acquisition, particularly EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes), in enhancing the employability of VET students. A recurring concern among educators is the theoretical and isolated nature of current

English teaching methods, which emphasize grammar, vocabulary, or technical reading without connecting these to practical, workplace scenarios.

In terms of the trends and their percentages of this theme, educators stress that while industry-specific vocabulary and technical manuals are sometimes incorporated into lessons, students lack opportunities to practice English in real-life professional contexts. For example, workplace communication activities such as role-playing, job interviews, report writing, and presenting ideas are either insufficient or absent. This creates a gap between language learning and its practical application in the professional world, leaving students unprepared to meet linguistic demands. Another noticeable pattern is the students' motivation to learn English, as they perceive it as a gateway to better-paying and globally oriented jobs. Educators agree that integrating language learning with technical training—such as writing project proposals or conducting presentations—would bridge this gap and allow students to develop both technical and communicative competencies simultaneously. The need for an integrated and interactive approach to teaching ESP is widely emphasized to align English instruction with workplace demands and soft skills development.

**Graph 10:** Role of English Language Acquisition (EFL/ESP) in VET Programs: Challenges and Workforce Readiness



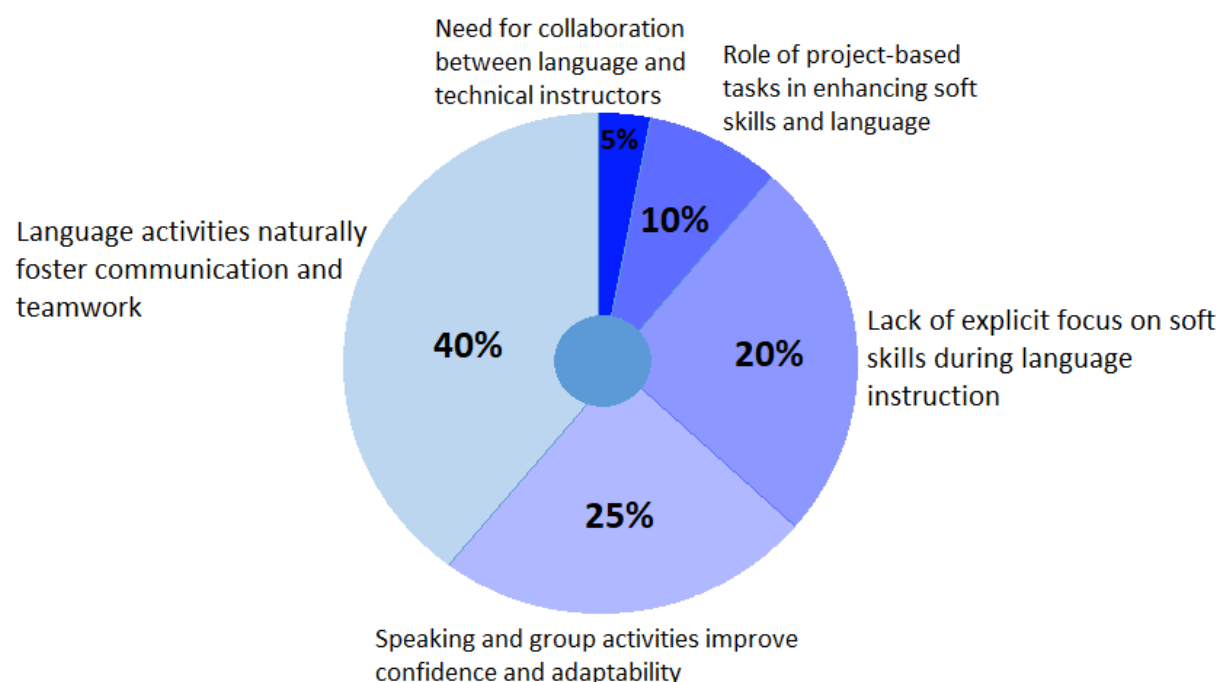
Source : Author

### **7.2.3. Analysis of Theme 3: Interconnection Between Soft Skills and Language Acquisition**

The analysis of the coded references reveals a strong consensus among educators regarding the interconnectedness between language acquisition (EFL/ESP) and the development of essential soft skills like communication, teamwork, and adaptability. All educators highlight that language learning activities—such as speaking exercises, group work, role-plays, debates, and problem-solving tasks—naturally foster interpersonal competencies alongside linguistic development.

In terms of the trends and their percentages of this theme, a recurring pattern is the dual impact of these activities, as they simultaneously enhance students' ability to communicate in English while promoting teamwork and critical thinking. For example, role-plays and presentations not only build language proficiency, but also teach students to interact effectively, collaborate, and present themselves confidently, the skills that are very crucial for employability in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Educators note that such activities also boost students' confidence and adaptability by encouraging them to express their thoughts and negotiate in a group setting. However, a common challenge identified is the lack of intentional focus on integrating soft skills into language instruction. Educators believe that while soft skills are inherently developed through language activities, these skills are not explicitly highlighted, causing students to undervalue their importance. Additionally, the need for stronger collaboration between language instructors and technical trainers is emphasized as a way to amplify the synergy between soft skills development and language acquisition, aligning these activities more closely with workplace scenarios.

**Graph 11:** Interconnection Between Language Acquisition and Soft Skills Development in VET Programs



Source : Author

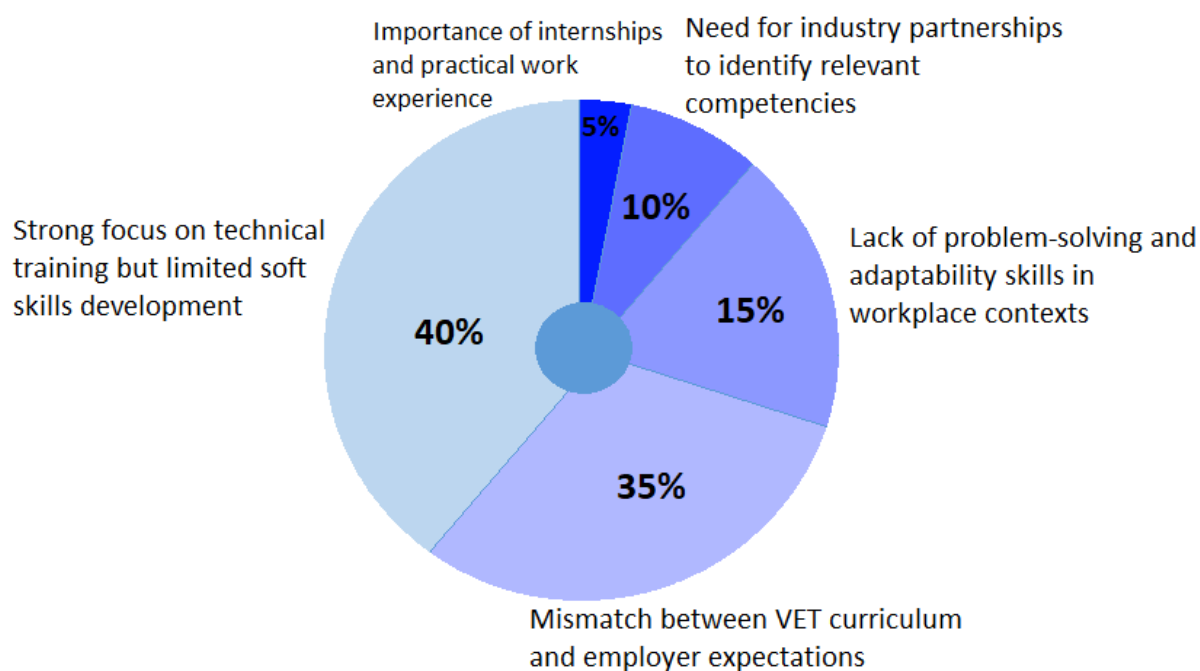
#### 7.2.4. Analysis of Theme 4: Employability and Workforce Readiness

The analysis of the coded references highlights both the strengths and limitations of VET programs in preparing students for the modern job market. Educators unanimously agree that VET programs provide a strong foundation in technical skills, enabling students to excel in tasks requiring hands-on expertise. However, a recurring pattern across all interviews is the lack of alignment between the skills taught in VET programs and the evolving expectations of employers.

In terms of the trends and their percentages of this theme, a major concern is that while students are proficient in operating machinery or applying technical knowledge, they often struggle with problem-solving, teamwork, and professional communication in real-life workplace contexts. For example, educators cite instances of graduates excelling in technical exams, but they fail to perform during job interviews or adapt to team dynamics due to a lack of confidence and soft skills. Another noticeable pattern is the outdated curriculum, which does not reflect the changing demands of modern industries. Educators stress the importance of integrating critical soft skills—such as adaptability, teamwork, and communication—alongside technical training. They further emphasize the need for stronger industry

partnerships to identify and incorporate the competencies employers seek, as well as opportunities for internships and practical work experiences to bridge the gap between classroom learning and workplace realities.

**Graph 12.** Employability and Workforce Readiness: Gaps in VET Programs for Meeting Job Market Demands



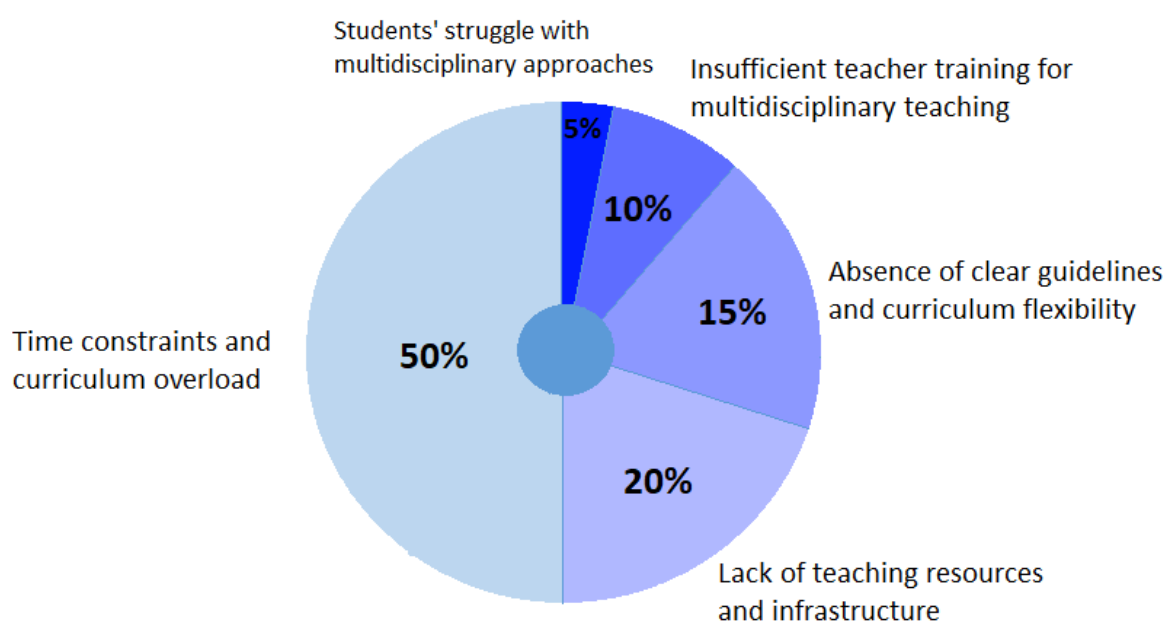
Source : Author

### 7.2.5. Analysis of Theme 5: Institutional and Pedagogical Challenges

The analysis of the coded references highlights several key challenges faced by VET educators in integrating technical skills, language acquisition, and soft skills. In terms of the trends and their percentages of this theme, a recurring issue is time constraints and curriculum overload, as educators struggle to balance these components within an already packed curriculum. Teachers often attempt to integrate soft skills and language exercises into technical training but find the process rushed and ineffective. Another significant barrier is the lack of teaching resources and infrastructure, such as multimedia tools, updated lesson plans, or materials that effectively connect technical skills with soft skills and language acquisition. This lack of support hampers educators' ability to deliver cohesive and meaningful lessons. Educators also emphasize the absence of clear guidelines and flexibility in the curriculum, which restricts their ability to adapt lessons to a multidisciplinary approach. Additionally,

insufficient teacher training is noted as a major challenge, as many instructors are not equipped to teach outside their technical specializations, particularly in areas like ESP or soft skills development. Lastly, educators highlight the overwhelming nature of this integrated approach for students who are often more focused on passing technical assessments than on developing soft skills or improving their language proficiency.

**Graph 13:** Institutional and Pedagogical Challenges in Integrating Technical Skills, Language Acquisition, and Soft Skills



Source : Author

The findings reveal that while VET programs excel in providing technical skills, significant gaps exist in integrating soft skills and language acquisition to meet workforce demands. Challenges such as time constraints, outdated curricula, inadequate resources, insufficient teacher training, and limited alignment with industry expectations hinder the holistic preparation of students. Addressing these issues through structural reforms, enhanced teacher training, and stronger industry collaboration is essential to equip graduates with the comprehensive skill set required for employability in a modern, dynamic job market.

## Conclusion

The study reveals that Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs are effective in providing technical skills, with both students and educators recognizing their importance for workforce readiness. Students generally expressed high confidence in their technical preparation, soft skills training, and the emphasis on English language acquisition, with 77.1% believing their programs align well with workplace demands and 95.7% acknowledging the value of English proficiency for employability. However, educators highlighted key gaps, particularly in the structured development of soft skills and the practical application of English for professional contexts, noting that activities like teamwork and communication often lack consistency and formal assessment. While both groups agree on the significance of integrating technical, soft, and language skills, educators emphasized challenges such as outdated curricula, limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and weak industry collaboration, which hinder the holistic preparation of students. To address these issues, VET programs need to implement structured soft skills modules, improve English for Specific Purposes (ESP) through workplace-oriented activities, modernize curricula to align with evolving industry requirements, and provide ongoing teacher training. In conclusion, the study reinforces the need for continuous improvements and stronger partnerships with industry stakeholders to ensure VET programs prepare students comprehensively for the demands of today's dynamic and globalized job market.

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