



Aligning Education with Career Prospects: English Department Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Employability and Skills Development at University of Tripoli


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مواصلة التعليم الجامعي مع الآفاق المهنية: تصورات طلبة مرحلة البكالوريوس بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية حول قابلية التوظيف وتنمية المهارات في جامعة طرابلس

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المخلص:

يواجه خريجو اللغة الإنجليزية في ليبيا مرحلة حرجية عند انتقالهم من الدراسة الأكاديمية إلى سوق العمل، حيث يمتلكون غالباً معرفة نظرية قوية، لكن مهاراتهم العملية اللازمة لتلبية متطلبات مكان العمل الحديث تكون محدودة. (Tantoush & Hmedan, 2018; Shaheebah, 2023). تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف تصورات طلاب المرحلة الجامعية حول القابلية للتوظيف وتطوير المهارات في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة طرابلس، مع التركيز على وعيهم المهني، ومواقفهم تجاه البرنامج الأكاديمي الحالي، وتقييمهم الذاتي لتطوير المهارات الشخصية الأساسية المطلوبة في الحياة المهنية. اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج المختلط، وجمعت البيانات من 110 طالباً جامعياً باستخدام استبيان منظم، إضافةً إلى مقابلات شبه منظمة مع عدد من الخريجين المختارين لضمان دقة وموثوقية النتائج. وتأتي الدراسة في طبيعتها استكشافية، إذ تسعى إلى تسليط الضوء على جانب لم يُبحث بشكل كافٍ في الأدبيات السابقة، التي ركزت أساساً على آراء أصحاب العمل والأكاديميين أكثر من الطلاب أنفسهم. أظهرت النتائج أن غالبية الطلاب لديهم تصور واضح لمساراتهم المهنية، خاصة في مجالات التدريس، والأعمال، والعلاقات العامة؛ إلا أنهم مع تقدمهم في الدراسة يبدؤون بالشعور بالارتباك وعدم اليقين بشأن مدى ارتباط المنهج الأكاديمي بمساراتهم المهنية وتطوير المهارات العملية الأساسية. كما كشف البرنامج الأكاديمي الحالي عن محدودية الفرص المتاحة لتطوير المهارات الشخصية، والخبرة العملية، والكفاءات المهنية. بناءً على هذه النتائج، توصي الدراسة بضرورة مواصلة تصميم المناهج مع متطلبات سوق العمل، عبر دمج وحدات مهنية، والتعلم القائم على المشاريع، وفرص التدريب العملي، وتطوير المهارات الشخصية ضمن البرامج الأكاديمية.

الكلمات الدالة: التعليم، القابلية للتوظيف، المسار المهني، المهارات الشخصية، تصميم المناهج الأكاديمية.

Abstract

Libyan English language graduates experience a critical phase as they shift from lecture halls to the workforce. They often find themselves possessing solid theoretical knowledge; however, they have limited practical skills needed in the modern workplace (Tantoush & Hmedan, 2018; Shaheebah, 2023). This paper investigates undergraduate students' views of employability and skill development at the English Language Department, University of Tripoli. It mainly focuses on undergraduate students' career awareness, attitudes towards the current academic program, and self-assessed development of key soft skills required for professional life. Adopting the mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 110 undergraduate students. A structured questionnaire was administered to undergraduate students, complemented by semi-structured interviews with selected graduates, to draw reliable and credible data. The study is exploratory in nature and attempts to shed light on an area that has not been sufficiently investigated, as previous scholarship explored mainly employers' and educators' views rather than students themselves. The findings of the study reveal that most undergraduate students possess clear career prospects, namely in teaching, business, and public relations; however, as they advance in their academic journey, they begin to experience self-doubt and confusion regarding their employability and the development of essential practical skills for their professional life. The current program offers limited opportunities for developing soft skills, practical experience, and professional competencies. Based on these results, the study recommends the urgent need to align curriculum design with labor market requirements by integrating career-oriented modules, project-based learning, internship opportunities, and soft skills development into academic programs.

Keywords: education, career, employability, soft skills, academic curriculum.

Introduction

Central to tertiary education is to equip students with solid knowledge that matches effectively with their future career prospects. As the world is moving fast toward a highly globalized and digitized era, employers seek not only candidates with sheer theoretical knowledge but also with strong personal and workplace skills. These skills that enable employees to survive potential challenges and thrive successfully in their professions; some of these skills are effective communication, critical thinking, adaptability, leadership skills and project management. The increasing demand for such practical, known also as, soft skills across modern professions emphasizes the urgent need on the part of educators and curriculum developers to urgently, and regularly, update academic programs in accordance with the evolving requirements of present-day labor market, especially that "soft skills are often the deciding factor in hiring and promotion decisions." (Robles 2012, p. 460)

The English language department is one of the most popular study majors as far as the Libyan educational context is concerned. In fact, it has always been a competitive choice alongside traditional favorites, such as medicine and engineering. A significant number of students, each year, opt for English for tertiary level education. Choosing English as an academic trajectory is prompted by various reasons, mainly for English being an international language that has become a prerequisite in most contemporary vocations. Obtaining an English degree is often seen a gateway to a broad range of fields, beginning with education and translation, and extending to business communication, media, and international relations. This makes English undoubtedly an attractive academic discipline, particularly for students who lack a clear vision apropos their career goals.

Latest research findings have exposed that many Libyan English language students and graduates feel frustrated when accessing the labor force (Abdalla, 2023, Jabara & Al-Qudah, 2018, Tantoush & Hmedan, 2018, Shaheebah 2023, British Council, 2016, UNICEF 2023). This frustration stems from two main reasons: "limited access to career guidance and skill-building opportunities." Tantoush & Hmedan (2018, p.112). In fact, graduates report testimonies of being completely unprepared for the tasks requested upon them as most of the professions expect not only good language command but also strong demonstration of

soft skills. These skills range from effective communication, critical thinking, time management, adaptability, digital literacy, teamwork and project management. As a result “many graduates work outside their field due to lack of opportunities and practical training.” (Tantouch & Hmedan 2018, p. 103) After the completion of four years of university study, a large number of Libyan students end up having strong theoretical knowledge but limited exposure to real-world applications that enhance their employability or prepare them for global competence. Moreover, as the world has become dominated by social media and digital communication, vital soft skills such as cultural awareness, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence have become mandatory for present-day graduates to succeed in their chosen professions. However, university classes in Libya, especially in the sphere of humanities, are still largely run in a traditional, unidirectional fashion, where interactive, project-based learning tasks are uncommon. As a result, students seldom engage with language in authentic, real-world contexts. Consequently, key competencies such as critical thinking, teamwork, and creativity are not sufficiently developed throughout their academic journey, which affects their overall employability and skills development.

From a comparative perspective, English language programs internationally have increasingly shifted toward employability-oriented curricula that integrate transferable skills, experiential learning, and career development components. Benchmarking against similar programs in the region and globally reveals that many universities embed project-based learning, internship modules, and explicitly stated graduate employability outcomes within English language degrees, in line with international frameworks such as those proposed by the OECD and the World Economic Forum. In contrast, English language programs in Libyan public universities, including the University of Tripoli, continue to emphasize predominantly theoretical and language-focused content, with limited structured alignment to labor market competencies. This disparity highlights a growing gap between local academic practices and global standards, underscoring the need for systematic evaluation and curriculum reform informed by students’ perspectives.

Although several previous studies explored employers’ as well as graduates’ perspectives on employability and language proficiency, only few focused on undergraduates career prospects, self-perceived skills development and attitudes towards the academic program. This study, therefore, seeks to addresses these gaps to support curriculum improvements and enhance employability.

1.1. Research Aim and Objectives:

Previous research has surveyed mainly employers’ perceptions and graduates experiences without sufficient reference to undergraduate students’ perceptions regarding career prospects and attitudes to the current program. To address this gap, the present research pursues three main objectives: (1) to investigate students’ career awareness, (2) insights of curriculum relevance, and (3) self-assessed development of key professional skills.

1.2. Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are English major students at University of Tripoli aware of their future career prospects, and how do these aspirations match with their academic programs?
2. How well does the current English department curriculum prepare students with the practical skills needed for their desired careers?

1.3. Significance of the Study

The importance of this research is threefold.

- First, aligning higher education with career goals is of great significance as it makes students’ university education meaningful; further, it assists graduates to confidently transition from education to career world with less challenges.

- Second, understanding students' perspectives on the current academic program provides important insights vis a vis the main challenges they encounter and sheds light on potential existing gaps in the curriculum.
- Finally, the findings of this research along with other previous studies can bring about a broader educational reform at the national level specifically within humanities and language -related disciplines.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Education in Step with Employment

The concept of students' career readiness refers to "the cognitive, academic, work, and social skills, knowledge, or experiences required to facilitate an individual's transition from education to the workplace." (Sahid, 2024, p. 4) It also reflects the efforts devoted by the education policies to establish a connection between academic programs alongside job market requirements and students career prospects. It mainly stresses the importance of assuring that students graduate from tertiary education with practical workplace skills to ensure successful transition to employment.

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) has constantly raised the significance of linking academic objectives to labor market demands to avoid unemployment among graduates. Thus, educational institutions should not solely focus on imparting pure theoretical knowledge but also embracing the responsibility of practically preparing graduates for successful move to the workforce. This can be conducted by means of offering ample training and structured internships prior to employment, as stated:

"Aligning education with labor market needs involves designing academic programs and curricula that respond directly to evolving economic demands, reducing the mismatch between graduates' qualifications and job market requirements." Cedefop (2015, p.45)

Many latest studies have revealed that most employers in the market today have observed a noticeable dearth in core soft skills among recent English language graduates (Abdalla, 2023; Shaheebah, 2023; Jabara & Al-Qudah, 2018; Tantoush & Hmedan, 2018). This shortcoming significantly impedes workplace performance especially that "executives consistently rank soft skills above technical skills in workplace importance" (Robles, 2012, p. 460).

Unlike hard skills which refer to the solid technical knowledge required to perform specific professional task, soft skills comprise an array of interpersonal and cognitive competencies. A number of scholars have put forward various definitions of soft skills including Robles (2012), who defines them as "a cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language skills, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that characterize relationships with other people." (Robles, 2012, p. 457) Likewise, Andrews and Higson (2008) describe soft skills as transferable interpersonal traits that are generally pan professional, meaning required across all professions, and essential for efficiently interacting in modern workplace contexts. These definitions project a growing congruence in academia that soft skills are not simply complementary but strongly fundamental to long-term career success, especially that "employers consistently reported that, while technical knowledge is essential, it is the possession of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability that most distinguishes effective graduates in the workplace." (Andrews & Higson, 2008, p. 301)

In the Libyan context, employers, especially in sectors such as education, business, and media, place high value on graduates who demonstrate both English proficiency and essential soft skills, including technical writing, project management, teamwork, critical thinking, and, most importantly, effective communication skills, both in oral and written forms. As Mabruk, Ghiblawi, and Kabar (2021, p.5) note, "in addition to carrying a bachelor's degree, employers typically expect candidates to acquire a variety of skills to assure that their future employees will be capable of handling the tasks demanded to them". Nevertheless, such

skills remain underdeveloped among students, as most national academic programs continue to depend on delivering theoretical knowledge and rote learning. Students, therefore, graduate having limited opportunities to apply practical competencies in real-world settings. National and regional studies have repeatedly pointed to this career-education gap, which exposes that Libyan tertiary education is facing a critical challenge as it is still heavily theoretical and provides limited opportunities for practical skill acquisition, (UNICEF, 2023; British Council, 2016).

2.2. Previous Studies: Libyan Context

Within the Libyan setting, many studies have brought to fore the critical disconnect between higher education outcomes and the realities of the labor market. In a recent study, *Challenges & Needs of Youth in the Libyan Job Market*, Tantoush and Hmidan (2024) investigated the underlying hardships that Libyan students continue to face after graduation regarding their skills and employment opportunities. The study argues that beyond the chaotic socio-political and economic situation endured by students since 2011, the root challenge lies within the educational system itself, which depends heavily on theoretical instruction. Most students end up ill-prepared to take up professional roles because higher education programs lack detailed planning, clear objectives, and, more importantly, the collective will, on the part of officials, to implement meaningful change within the area of career education alignment.

Moreover, in a 2023 report conducted by UNICEF entitled *Youth Employability Skills in Libya*, it was found that Libya ranks first in the Arab region in terms of unemployment, with a rate of approximately 51.4%. The study outlines the core reasons behind the alarming surge in unemployment in the country, especially during the last decade, and presents data revealing the key factors contributing to the inability of Libyan youth to successfully integrate into their prospective careers or secure suitable employment.

The report unveiled deeply rooted structural barriers to youth employment within Libya's system, primarily nepotism and suspected irregularities in the recruitment process, that not only discourage and demoralize students but also conflict with the needs and development of the national labor market, further worsening the country's socio-economic status quo. It also highlighted the blatant mismatch between the current world criteria in workforce and the academic programs offered for the university students emphasizing that educational reform has become a national imperative.

Parallel with earlier research, a comprehensive study conducted by Malak Shaheebah, titled *Addressing the Employability Skills Gap: A Curriculum Reform in English Degree Programs*, which involved around 150 English graduates and 50 employers from various professions, including media, education, and industry. The study exposed a high rate of underemployment among English graduates. Among the reasons behind this continuous alarming rate of unemployment is that employers prioritizes hiring based on soft skills. In fact, more than 78% of employers expressed clear dissatisfaction over the clear growing deficiencies in the qualifications of English major graduates, especially in areas such as digital literacy, project management, and technical writing.

Although most research on career readiness focused mainly on employers, graduates and educators views, it has seldom investigated how undergraduate students themselves consider their employability skills for their desired future workplace. Thus, conducting student-centered research is crucial to understand how student evaluate their preparedness and contributes to identify gaps in their education and training.

3. Methodology:

3.1. Research Design:

To fulfill the purpose of the present study, a mixed methods approach was deployed by integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The choice of this approach is justified by its viability in providing both depth, credibility and objectivity.

3.2. Students:

A total of 110 undergraduate students took part in this study by responding to a questionnaire tailored specifically for English language students, Faculty of Arts and Languages. The informants ranged from first- to fourth-year students, with the majority (61.1%) in the 4th and 5th semesters. The questionnaire targeted to assess students' career awareness, and their perceptions of curriculum relevance, and development of professional skills.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected graduates to find out their personal experiences and insights regarding the relevance of their educational background with the realities of modern workplace.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis:

A structured questionnaire was designed for data collection (see Appendix A). The questionnaire targeted undergraduate students and was divided into three sections: (1) students' career awareness, (2) the extent of curriculum relevance to labor market requirements, and (3) the development of essential soft skills needed for employability. The questionnaire was distributed through online student forums on Facebook as well as Telegram platforms, it was formulated in Arabic to facilitate understanding and to ensure accurate and spontaneous responses on the part of the students. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subgroup of graduates, to elicit their real-world experiences and the applicability of their background education to workplace requirements. Open coding was used to analyze the interviews to identify frequent themes related to students' career awareness and their self-perceived employability and skill development.

4.3. Study Limitations and Credibility

This study has some limitations that should be taken into account when considering the findings. First, it concentrates mainly on undergraduate students views of employability, career goals and curriculum relevance and soft skills development. Therefore, the findings are based on students' self-perceived perceptions rather than strict objective measures of skills and actual employment outcomes. Second, the research was conducted only at the English language department, University of Tripoli, limiting the ability to generalize the scope of results to other national universities. Third, the data were drawn during one academic semester, so the results reflect student's perceptions at a single point in time. To enhance credibility, a mixed methods approach was employed by combining both questionnaire data with interviews which allowed more consistent and reliable interpretation. The findings, thus, should be deemed indicative, not definitive.

4. Findings and results:

4.1. Students' awareness of their career goals

A large number of students demonstrated a high level of awareness of the career trajectories they desire to pursue after graduation. Specifically, 70.3% of respondents (n = 77) reported having a clear idea about their future career, while 21.9% (n = 24) expressed uncertainty and 9.4% (n = 10) reported having no clear career goals (Table 1). Teaching and business were among the most commonly selected career sectors, followed by translation and diplomatic relations (Table 2).

Table 1. Students' awareness of career paths (n= 110)

Question	Number of Students	Yes	No	Uncertain
Do you have a clear idea about your future career after graduation?	110	70.3%	9.4%	21.9%

Table 2. Students' Career Aspirations (n = 110)

Career Sector	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Teaching	40	36.7%
Business	19	17.4%
Diplomatic Relations	20	18.3%
Uncertain / Other	22	20.4%
	8	7.1%

Although many students consider teaching as the most desired career path (36.7%, n = 40), the current academic program does not sufficiently support the development of core practical teaching skills. Most of the courses within the English Language Department focus primarily on language proficiency, general theoretical aspects of linguistics, and literature, with no formal inclusion of teaching pedagogy or classroom practice modules. While teaching remains the dominant professional objective among students, a closer examination of the taught modules exposes a paradox in that the program lacks essential courses required for language-related teaching pedagogies. As a result, students graduate with limited or no foundational training needed to enter the teaching profession with confidence.

Despite this gap, a number of graduates are directly hired in public schools as English language teachers, which negatively impacts the overall quality of education and students' learning outcomes. This deficiency particularly affects learners at the primary and preparatory levels, who are still in the foundational phase of second language acquisition.

Students' qualitative responses further reinforce these findings. One student stated, *"I desire to be a good teacher, but we're never trained to teach in real classrooms."* Another added, *"I want to be a teacher, but I feel unprepared."* These remarks reflect a shared concern among students regarding the lack of practical training and the resulting low levels of self-confidence among English language students aspiring to teaching careers.

The business sector ranked second (18.3%, n = 20). Testimonies from recent graduates employed in business settings revealed feelings of inadequate preparation for handling basic professional tasks such as business meetings and communication with international clients. Graduates emphasized their limited command of business-specific terminology and professional communication skills. These findings corroborate earlier research indicating that *"most graduates have a medium to negative perception of university training and do not feel sufficiently prepared to enter the labor market"* (Mabruk et al., 2021, p. 2). Ultimately, both graduates reported transitioning into sectors unrelated to their field of study.

In addition, 20.4% of students (n = 22) expressed aspirations to work in diplomatic relations or public relations. While students associate English proficiency with these professions, the academic program offers limited training in essential competencies such as critical thinking, cultural awareness, digital media literacy, and cross-cultural communication. Consequently, many students reported frustration upon realizing the mismatch between their academic preparation and professional expectations, leading to feelings of underqualification and reduced employability.

As this study is exploratory in nature, the findings in this section are based on descriptive statistical analysis specifically, in frequencies and percentages, providing an empirical overview of students' career awareness and aspirations rather than inferential or causal conclusions.

4.2. Perceptions of curriculum relevance to career goals

Unlike their relatively high awareness of potential career paths, a substantial proportion of students expressed uncertainty regarding the relevance of their current studies to their future careers. Specifically, 53% of respondents selected the "uncertain" option, indicating doubt as to whether their academic coursework would effectively prepare them for their intended occupations. Given that most participants

were in their fourth and fifth semesters, this finding suggests that uncertainty about employability and curriculum relevance emerges early in the academic journey, potentially influencing students' academic motivation and future career outlook.

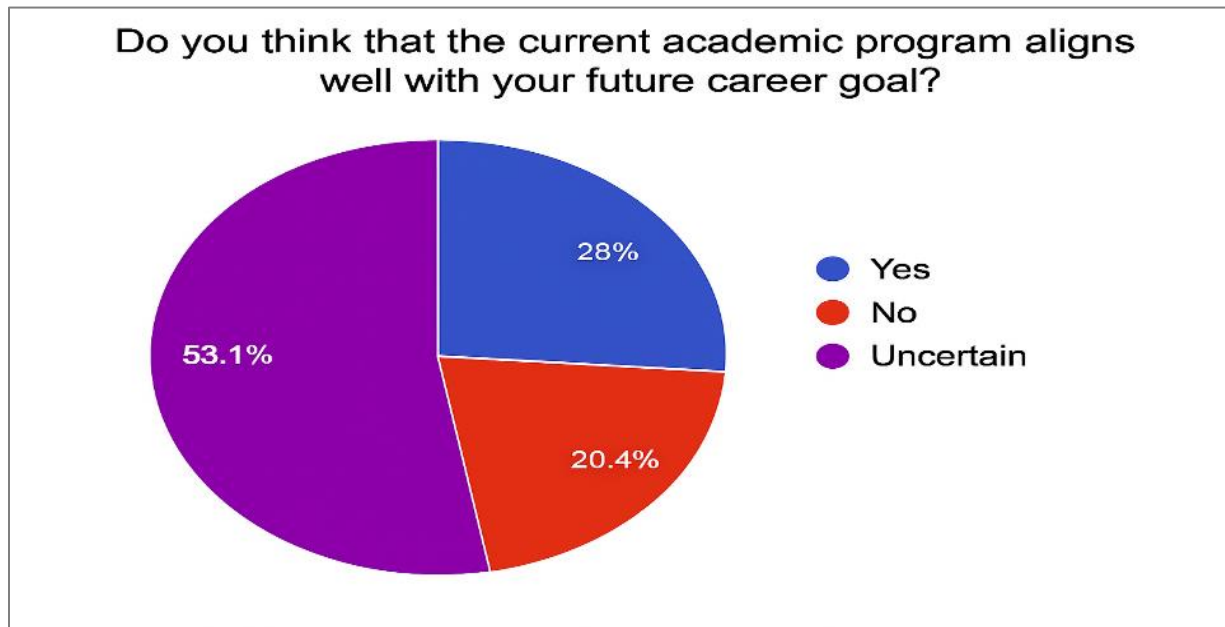


Figure 3. Students' Perception of Academic Program Alignment with Future Career Prospects (n = 110)

The 53% stated they were uncertain if what they are studying now will actually help them to efficiently fulfill the tasks of that occupational goal. Given that most participants were in their 4th and 5th semesters, this clearly shows that students begin to experience doubt and uncertainty early on which consequently reflects negatively on their academic performance and future career outlook.

4.3. Self-assessed development of soft skills and other competencies

The findings reveal that many students perceive weaknesses in the development of key soft skills, particularly oral communication and interpersonal competence. When asked whether lectures enhance general interpersonal skills such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and presentation skills, only 25% responded "Yes," while 43% answered "No," and 31% selected "uncertain" (Table 3). These results indicate that the majority of students do not perceive current instructional practices as effectively fostering transferable skills essential for employability.

Table 3: Students' Perceptions of Lectures Enhancing Interpersonal Skills

Response	Percentage (%)
Yes	25%
No	43%
Uncertain	31%

The results also show that students are aware of their weakness in both oral and communications skills. Further, while the content instruction in class is mostly imparted in English, many teachers tend to use Arabic during casual interactions. Students' complained that this further minimizes their day-to-day exposure to authentic spoken English. All participating students strongly asserted the need for more opportunities to practice speaking to enhance their oral proficiency. As stated by one of the students: *"I wish professors would improve their lecturing skills and deliver their lectures entirely in English."*

In the same line, another student added, *"We have to go out to seek language centers where we improve our conversation skills, but we don't have the luxury of time [...] transportation is complicated, not to mention the high cost of these centers."* Another student criticized the outmoded teaching methods, noting that, *"Conversation classes are run in a very traditional fashion, and we often don't get to listen to authentic material. Most of the talk is done by the instructor"*.

Furthermore, when asked about the skill most frequently practiced during their academic journey, presentation skills emerged as the most commonly reported activity. However, 27.8% of students indicated that they had not practiced any of the listed skills, while project writing, group discussions, and computer or technology skills were each

reported by only 11.1% of respondents. This distribution reflects limited exposure to experiential, collaborative, and technology-based learning opportunities within the program.

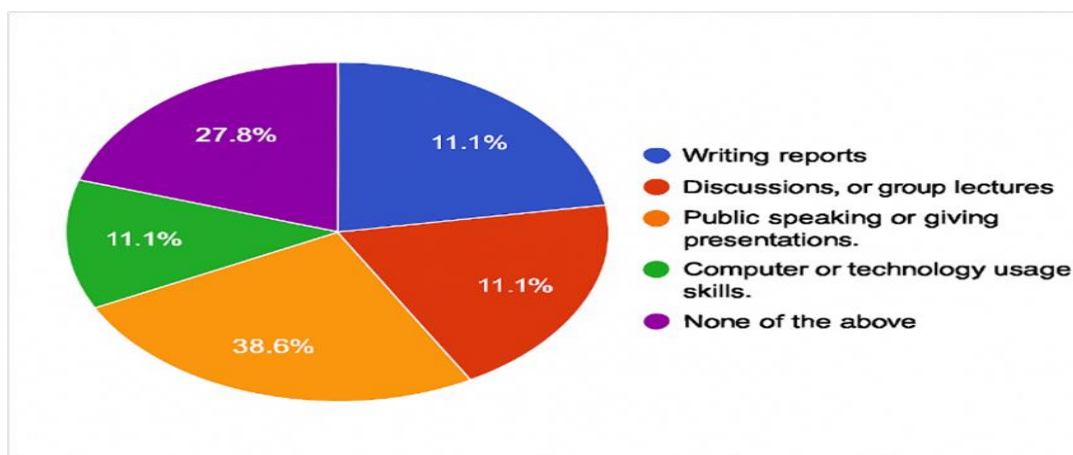


Figure 3. Distribution of students' self-reported practice of essential professional skills during their academic studies

(n = 110)

Qualitative responses further support these quantitative findings, as students repeatedly emphasized the need for increased opportunities to practice spoken English, engage in interactive learning, and develop digital and leadership skills.

4.4. Satisfaction with academic preparation for employability

A paradoxical feeling shared among students of the English Language Department regarding the adequacy of their academic preparation and readiness to enter the job market. A large number of students concur that the current academic program provides limited opportunities for developing practical skills related to their prospective future roles. However, a minority expressed feeling well-prepared to join the workforce. Students reported that the program provides strong theoretical instruction but the gap remains in the practical side such as: advanced digital literacy training, internships, real-world project work, and structured communication practice, teamwork tasks, competencies that are increasingly essential across all modern industries as stated by Robles (2012, p. 457) "Soft skills such as communication, integrity, and teamwork are ranked higher than technical skills by executives."

The following excerpts project some of the students' feedback on the department's academic preparation for their future employability:

Students' Feedback in Arabic as stated in questionnaires	Translated into English
"لا اعتقد ان التدريس في الجامعات يعطيك المهارات الكافية لدخول سوق العمل بغض النظر عن التخصص. هذا لن يكون كافي"	"I do not believe that studying at universities provides sufficient skills to enter the labor market regardless of the specialization; this will not be enough."
"للاسف المناهج سيئة للغاية و لا تساعد في بناء قدرات الطالب"	"The curricula is very poor and doesn't help building students' skills".
"يجب زيادة تركيز على محاضرات ومناقشة مع اصحاب العمل موجودين في سوق الان"	"There should be increased focus on lectures and discussions with potential employers in the current market."
"المشكلة الوحيدة هي انه يجب تطوير المناهج و طريقة العطاء"	"The only problem is that the curricula and the method of delivery need to be developed."
"القسم جيد جدا ، لكن يحتاج الى بعض التطويرات لتكون كفاءة الطلاب افضل ، لان اغلب الطلاب يتخرجون ولكن ليس بالنتيجة المتوقعة او المطلوبة"	"The department is very good; however, it still requires some development to enhance students' competency, as most graduates do not achieve the expected or required outcomes."
"إذا كان هناك امكان في توظيف أساتذة ذوي خبرة مسيقة في مجال الترجمة و الأفضل ان يكونوا لا يزالون يعملون في هذا المجال ليطلعونا"	"If possible, experienced instructors with a professional background in the field of translation should be hired,

عليه عن قرب يعلمونا ما نحتاج اليه حقيقة و بشكل واقعي، وان يعاد ترتيب تسلسل المواد ويعاد النظر في بعض المناهج"	preferably those who are still actively working in the area so that they can provide us with closer and more practical exposure to the profession and teach us what we truly need in a realistic manner. In addition, the sequence of the courses should be reorganized and some curricula should be reconsidered."
"الدكترة لي في القسم فوق الابداع لكن المنهج قديم و مكرر"	"The professors in the department are excellent, but the curriculum is old and repetitive.

5. Conclusion and General Recommendations:

Students and graduates of Tripoli University, English language department undergo a serious challenge as they are conscious of their lack of career readiness. The results of the present paper indicate that there is a growing mismatch between the education received and the expectations of the professions aspired for by the students. Although students have clear career aspirations in teaching, business, translation and diplomatic relations, the academic program is still highly theoretical with limited practical experience and an evident dearth of opportunities for developing core soft skills. Due to the utter absence of project-based modules such as, classroom training and internship opportunities prior to graduation, students' testimonies show a shared feeling of frustration, confusion and low self-confidence. Students constantly required more conversation practice, presentation training, digital literacy, and project-based coursework. These needs and wants expose growing awareness on the part of the students in terms of the crucial role of soft skills for the enhancement of their employability. In fact, it is not merely a pedagogical necessity to align the English department's academic program with the labor market expectations, but indeed it is a national educational requirement. Updating the curriculum by including key modern and professional skills will boost English language graduates' professional preparedness and will largely contribute to mitigating Libya's broader concern regarding youth unemployment.

The following recommendations are proposed based on the findings revealed in this study:

1. Establish a Students' Guidance Center on campus to support academic and career planning, monitor skill development, and provide early interventions to enhance employability.
2. Integrate career-oriented modules such as Business Communication, ESP, and workplace terminology (media, tourism, IT, healthcare) to strengthen both language proficiency and practical skills.
3. Introduce core teaching modules for aspiring EFL teachers, including hands-on training and workshops in modern educational pedagogies.
4. Build university-employer partnerships to align education with labor market needs; outstanding students demonstrating strong performance should receive priority for recruitment (Cedefop, 2015, p. 3).
5. Embed soft skills development within courses through structured activities, project-based assignments, and workshops promoting leadership, teamwork, and cross-cultural communication.
6. Revamp IT modules to provide up-to-date digital competencies, ensuring sustained exposure and progressive skill development throughout the final semesters.

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