

## Towards holistic vocational education in Morocco: The intersection of technical, soft, and language skills for employability

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**Received:** October 24, 2025; **Accepted:** November 27, 2025; **Published:** December 8, 2025

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### Abstract

Vocational Education and Training (VET) plays a critical role in equipping learners with practical skills essential for workforce participation. However, the integration of soft skills and foreign language acquisition within VET programs remains insufficiently addressed, particularly in Morocco. This study investigates how combining these competencies can enhance employability outcomes for vocational students. Using a mixed-methods case study approach focused on vocational education institutions in the city of Marrakech (ISTA), the research gathers quantitative and qualitative data from both students and educators. The analysis examines pedagogical strategies aimed at developing technical expertise alongside interpersonal and language skills. Findings underscore the benefits of adopting a holistic curriculum that meets the evolving requirements of Morocco's labor market. This study offers empirical insights and practical recommendations to support the reform of VET curricula in the city of Marrakech and beyond, contributing to the preparation of graduates capable of thriving in diverse and multilingual professional settings.

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**Keywords:** vocational education and training, VET, soft skills, foreign language acquisition, curriculum reform, employability

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### 1. Introduction

The demands of the modern labor market are rapidly evolving, requiring workers to possess not only technical expertise but also a diverse set of transferable skills. Vocational Education and Training (VET) plays a pivotal role in equipping learners with this combination of

competencies, enabling their successful integration into increasingly complex and globalized workplaces. In Morocco, the emphasis on VET as a driver of economic development has grown, yet the full potential of these programs remains underutilized due to a disproportionate focus on hard skills at the expense of soft skills and language proficiency.

Soft skills, including communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving, have emerged as essential attributes that enhance employability and workplace effectiveness (Succi & Canovi, 2020; Jackson & Tomlinson, 2022). Despite their importance, these competencies are frequently overlooked in Moroccan vocational curricula, which traditionally prioritize technical training. This imbalance contributes to a persistent disconnect between the skills graduates acquire and the expectations of employers, limiting graduates' career prospects even when their technical qualifications are strong (Cherkaoui & El Moussaoui, 2021).

Alongside soft skills, foreign language acquisition represents a crucial element for vocational learners in Morocco, particularly given the country's multilingual environment and its integration within regional and international markets. Proficiency in languages such as French and English broadens employment opportunities and fosters cross-cultural communication, skills that are indispensable in contemporary workplaces (Ezzaidi, 2024). The integration of language learning within VET curricula thus complements the development of soft skills and technical abilities, forming a comprehensive foundation for employability.

Current educational discourse stresses the need for holistic vocational training models that balance technical knowledge with transferable skills (European Training Foundation, 2020). Such an approach aligns with competency-based education frameworks advocated by global organizations like UNESCO (2023), emphasizing the multidimensional nature of skills required in the 21st century. By nurturing a well-rounded skill set, VET can better prepare Moroccan graduates to navigate the dynamic demands of local and international labor markets.

This study responds to the identified gaps by focusing on vocational education institutions in the city of Marrakech, Morocco. It examines how these institutions integrate soft skills and foreign language training alongside technical instruction, exploring the effectiveness of current pedagogical practices. Through this lens, the research aims to provide actionable insights that inform curriculum development and policy reforms, ultimately enhancing the employability of Moroccan vocational graduates.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

Vocational Education and Training holds significant promise for equipping students with essential practical and technical skills. However, a persistent challenge remains: insufficient integration of foreign language proficiency and soft skills development within VET curricula. This shortfall limits graduates' ability to adapt and succeed in increasingly complex and interconnected global labor markets. In Morocco and across much of Africa, VET has only recently regained attention in national education agendas after decades of marginalization (UNESCO, 2021). Despite this renewed focus, prevailing perceptions continue to question the effectiveness of VET systems both during formal education and in post-school contexts (ILO, 2022).

This research seeks to address this gap by critically examining how vocational training in Morocco intersects with language learning and soft skills development. The scarcity of empirical studies investigating these dimensions underscores the urgency for innovative approaches to VET reform tailored to the African context. Drawing on global best practices and emerging theoretical frameworks, this study aims to challenge traditional dichotomies between academic and vocational pathways, proposing a more integrated and dynamic vision of vocational education. By doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of how VET can better support economic development and workforce readiness in Morocco and the wider region.

### 1.2. Rationale of the Study

In response to the growing diversification and internationalization of the Moroccan labor market, the imperative to cultivate a comprehensive skill set encompassing technical expertise, foreign language proficiency, and interpersonal competencies has intensified. Exploring the interrelationship among these skill domains within Vocational Education and Training programs is essential for elucidating their collective impact on improving graduate employability. This study is situated within the broader context of national initiatives aimed at reforming and strengthening vocational training systems, advocating for an expanded pedagogical framework that integrates soft skills and language acquisition alongside traditional technical instruction. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to the development of more adaptive and responsive VET curricula that better align with contemporary workforce demands.

### 1.3. Purpose of the Study

The study seeks to examine the role of Vocational Education and Training in fostering essential employability skills beyond technical proficiency, specifically focusing on the incorporation of soft skills and foreign language learning. It aims to identify the current practices, challenges, and opportunities within Moroccan VET institutions regarding this integration. By doing so, the research intends to contribute to the enhancement of vocational curricula, ensuring that graduates are better equipped to navigate the demands of both local and global labor markets. This investigation addresses a critical gap in existing scholarship by illuminating how combined skill development can improve workforce readiness in Morocco.

### 1.4. Research Questions

To ensure a clear analytical framework, the study is driven by a series of research questions that explore the core dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation.

- **RQ1:** To what extent are soft skills and foreign language acquisition incorporated within existing Vocational Education and Training programs?
- **RQ2:** How do students and educators perceive the significance and impact of soft skills and language proficiency on employability outcomes?
- **RQ3:** In what ways do the interactions between vocational training, soft skills development, and language learning affect graduates' capacity to respond to evolving labor market demands?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Understanding Vocational Education and Training

Vocational Education and Training represents a critical component of modern education systems, aiming to develop job-ready skills through targeted, practice-oriented learning. Rather than following a one-size-fits-all model, VET has evolved in response to shifting economic demands, technological advancements, and changing labor market dynamics (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022). Originating during the Industrial Revolution as a response to growing industrial complexity, VET has since transformed from informal apprenticeships to structured curricula integrated into national education strategies (Rospigliosi, Bournier, & Heath, 2016).

At its core, VET prioritizes experiential learning, equipping learners with both technical and transferable skills essential for specific occupations. UNESCO (2021) characterizes it as an educational pathway focused on “developing skills for employability,” emphasizing its role in fostering economic inclusion and workforce readiness. This dual aim, supporting individual career development and satisfying industry skill demands, positions VET as a bridge between education and employment.

Multiple conceptualizations of VET highlight its diverse purposes. While some frameworks stress its utilitarian function, providing direct access to employment in trades, manufacturing, agriculture, or service sectors, others underline its capacity to support lifelong learning and adaptability (Anderson & Chartrand, 2019). The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA, 2023) defines VET as post-secondary education that delivers nationally recognized training to develop competencies demanded by employers. This competency-based model focuses not only on technical expertise but also on problem-solving, communication, and workplace ethics—skills increasingly vital in a knowledge-driven economy.

The distinction between general and vocational education has also been a subject of scholarly inquiry. Whereas general education often centers on theoretical knowledge, vocational learning emphasizes application and performance in real-world contexts. Winch (2018) terms this a shift from declarative to procedural knowledge, suggesting that VET operates as a form of knowledge-in-action that can only be fully grasped through doing, not merely knowing.

Furthermore, modern VET systems integrate both formal qualifications and informal learning pathways, acknowledging the diverse ways individuals acquire work-related competencies. This inclusive approach accommodates school leavers, adult learners, and career changers, reinforcing VET’s flexibility and relevance in a dynamic labor environment (Billett, 2014).

In summary, Vocational Education and Training serves as an essential pillar for economic development, social mobility, and individual empowerment. As global labor markets demand increasingly adaptive and versatile workforces, VET’s emphasis on applied learning, industry alignment, and skills recognition ensures its continued significance in shaping both national economies and individual career trajectories.

## 2.2. Transforming Vocational Training: A New Focus on Competence, Communication, and Career Readiness

Vocational Education and Training has undergone a profound transformation from its early beginnings to its current role as a strategic pillar in workforce development. Historically, vocational instruction was informal, relying heavily on apprenticeships passed down through generations within specific trades. As global economies industrialized, particularly throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there emerged a need to formalize this type of education. Countries such as Germany and the United Kingdom led the way in institutionalizing vocational programs to meet the growing demand for technically skilled labor within factory-based economies (Lucas, 2004).

Today, the scope and purpose of VET have significantly broadened. No longer confined to manual or technical trades, vocational pathways now encompass a wide array of sectors, including digital technologies, healthcare services, logistics, and renewable energy. This shift corresponds with changes in global labor market dynamics, where workers must continuously adapt to new technologies and intercultural environments (Cedefop, 2020).

In the context of Morocco, the evolution of VET reflects a national response to youth unemployment and the pressing need for job-ready graduates. Institutional actors such as the National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Skills (ANAPEC) and the Ministry of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills have played a vital role in promoting vocational pathways as a key driver of inclusive growth. Strategic reforms such as the National Strategy for Vocational Training 2021–2030 aim to enhance access, modernize infrastructure, and tailor training to sectors with strong economic potential, including agribusiness, renewable energy, and industrial manufacturing (Ministère de l'Inclusion Économique, 2022).

A defining characteristic of contemporary VET is its holistic approach to employability, which includes not only technical qualifications but also the cultivation of soft skills and language competencies. These skills, ranging from interpersonal communication and emotional intelligence to adaptability and creative problem-solving, are increasingly regarded by employers as essential for workplace success in a fast-paced, digital economy (World Bank, 2021). Recognizing this, vocational programs across Morocco have begun to embed soft skills



training into their core curricula, often in collaboration with private-sector partners and international donors.

Language proficiency, particularly in French, English, and increasingly Spanish, is another area of focus. As Morocco strengthens its trade and diplomatic ties across Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, multilingualism becomes a strategic advantage for graduates seeking employment in multinational firms or international markets. Language acquisition is no longer viewed as an ancillary subject but as a foundational component of professional training (Erling, 2015).

Furthermore, recent studies have shown that graduates equipped with both technical knowledge and interpersonal abilities enjoy higher employability rates and tend to transition more smoothly into the workforce (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2023). For instance, integrated VET models, such as dual training systems that combine classroom learning with hands-on workplace experience, have proven effective in aligning education with real-world industry needs.

In conclusion, the reimagining of VET as a multidimensional educational model reflects a global and national recognition of the complex skillsets demanded by contemporary labor markets. In Morocco, this approach is not only helping bridge the gap between education and employment but is also fostering a more inclusive, resilient, and dynamic economy. Continuous innovation in curriculum design, stronger industry linkages, and an emphasis on soft and language skills will be essential to sustaining the impact and relevance of vocational education in the years to come.

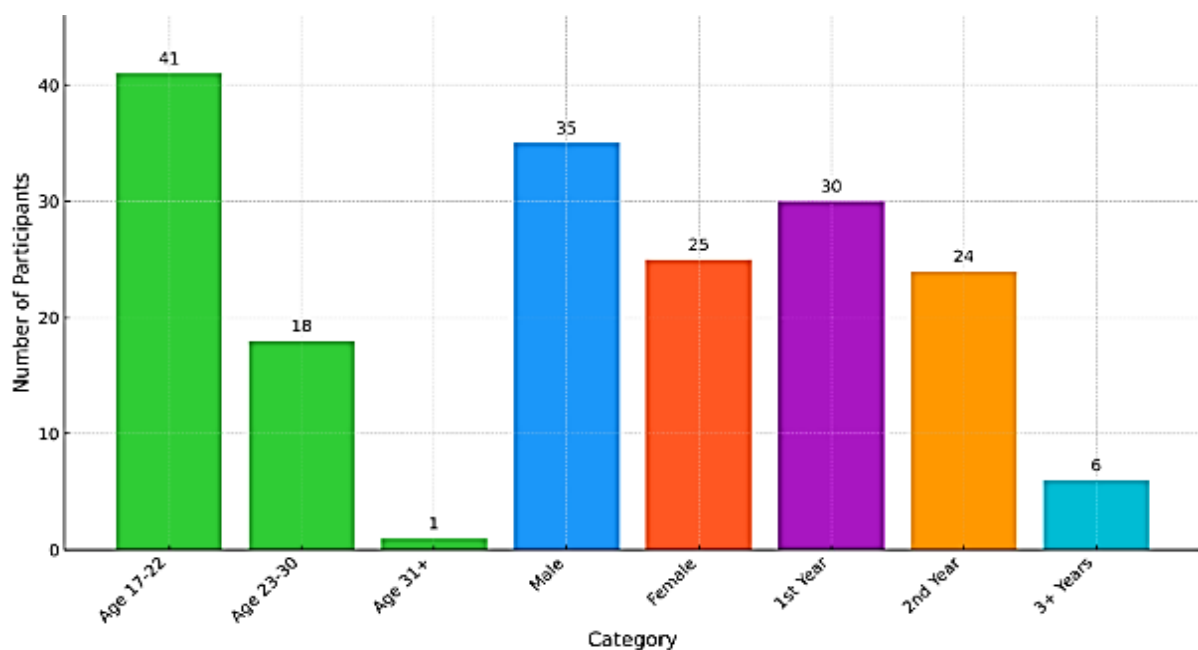
### 3. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to explore the relationship between vocational education, soft skills, language acquisition, and employability within the Moroccan context.

The quantitative component was initiated through an online survey targeting vocational students enrolled at the ISTA institute in Marrakech. A random sample of 60 students participated in the study. The survey instrument featured both closed-ended questions, aimed at capturing measurable trends, and open-ended questions, allowing respondents to elaborate on their views and experiences. Administered via Google Forms, the questionnaire was initially prepared in English and subsequently translated into Arabic and French to ensure accessibility.

It included key demographic indicators such as participants' gender, age, and current academic year.

Additionally, a set of in-depth qualitative interviews will be carried out with six VET instructors from the same institution to capture richer insights into their professional practices and viewpoints. The interview data will be processed through a thematic analysis supported by NVivo 14, which will help identify recurring patterns across their accounts. Focusing on participants working within vocational training environments enables a thorough exploration of how technical training, soft skills development, and foreign language learning intersect to shape employability outcomes in the Moroccan context. Figure 1 illustrates the key demographic characteristics of the participants.



*Figure 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants.*

The study's demographic profile offers important insights into vocational education and training at ISTA Marrakech. Most participants (68%,  $n = 41$ ) are between 17 and 22 years old, highlighting a focus on younger learners likely entering the workforce for the first time. Those aged 23-30 make up 30% ( $n = 18$ ) of the sample, representing individuals who may be upskilling or changing careers. Participants over 31 are scarcely represented (3%,  $n = 1$ ), indicating a potential gap in engagement among older learners and an opportunity for targeted outreach.



In terms of gender, male participants constitute 59% ( $n = 35$ ), while females account for 41% ( $n = 25$ ). This moderate gender imbalance reflects broader trends in vocational education and suggests the need to examine how gender may shape learners' experiences, particularly in the development of soft skills and language competencies relevant to employability.

Examining the participants' academic years shows that half of them (50%,  $n = 30$ ) are first-year students, offering insights into early experiences with VET programs. Second-year students represent 40% ( $n = 24$ ), while participants with more than two years of training make up 10% ( $n = 6$ ). This distribution captures a range of engagement levels, from newcomers to more experienced learners, providing a comprehensive view of how VET programs contribute to employability over time.

This distribution captures a spectrum of experiences, from newcomers navigating foundational skills to seasoned learners applying advanced knowledge. Combined with the age and gender profile, the data highlights a predominantly young, male cohort with diverse levels of training, offering a strong basis for examining how VET programs shape employability through the development of soft skills and language competencies.

## 4. Results and Discussion

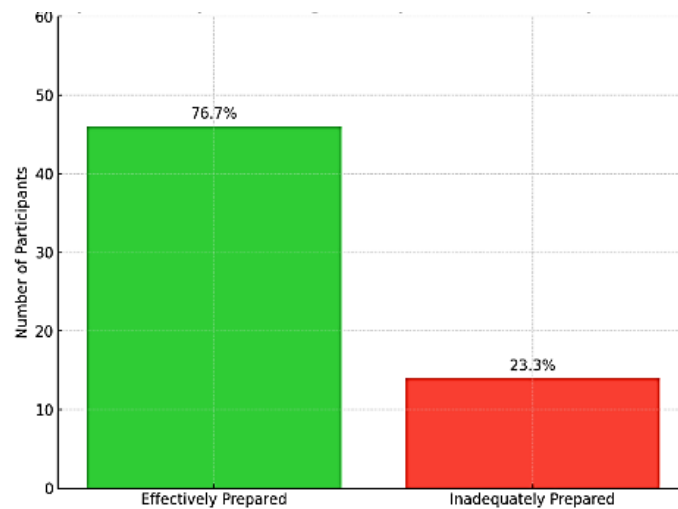
### 4.1. Survey Analysis of Students' Perspectives on VET Programs

#### 4.1.1. *Technical Competencies and Job Readiness*

A core objective of Vocational Education and Training programs is to prepare learners with practical technical skills that meet workplace demands. To assess this, students were asked whether their VET program provides adequate preparation for professional tasks. The responses indicate that most students feel confident in the technical training they receive, suggesting that the programs are effectively aligned with workforce requirements. The distribution of responses is summarized in figure 2.

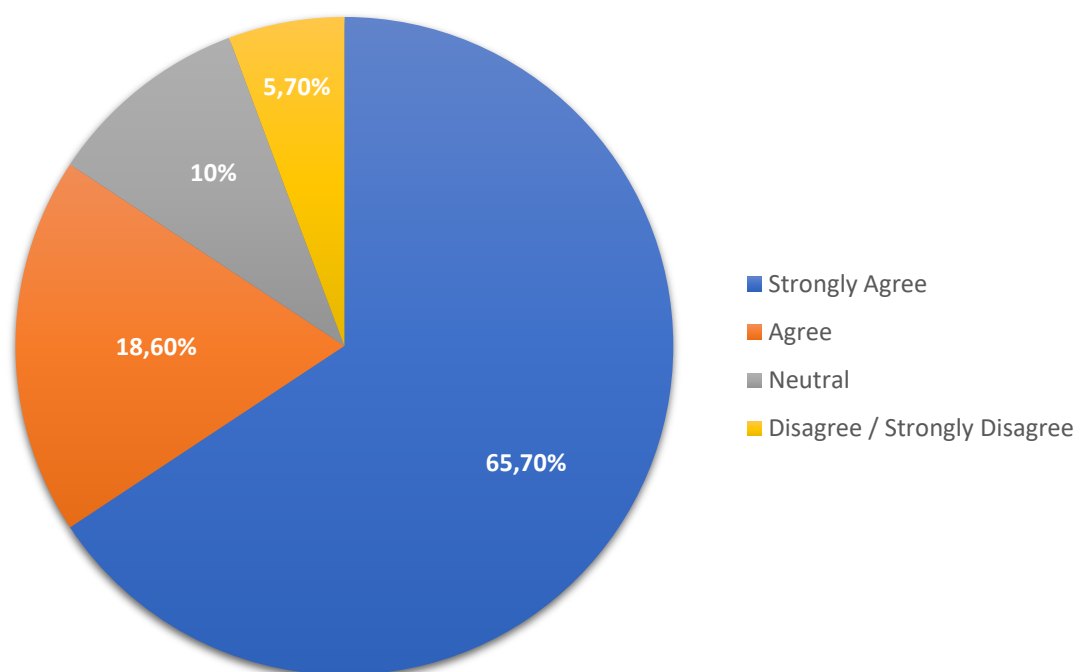
Out of 60 participants, 46 (76.7%) reported that their program effectively prepared them for workplace demands, demonstrating a strong sense of confidence in how well the curriculum aligns with industry expectations. In contrast, 14 (23.3%) expressed concerns about inadequate preparation, highlighting potential gaps in the integration of practical tools and industry-relevant practices. Although the overall response is positive, these findings underscore the importance of continuous assessment and curriculum updates to ensure VET programs remain

responsive to both student expectations and the shifting requirements of the professional environment.



**Figure 2.** Assessment of Technical Skills Preparedness among VET Learners.

Although the majority of participants expressed satisfaction with their program, the survey also revealed specific aspects that need improvement to support student success. Respondents evaluated how well the program equips them with relevant skills and knowledge for today's professional environment, using a scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The findings from this evaluation are displayed in figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Perceived Effectiveness of VET Skills in Meeting Employer Demands.

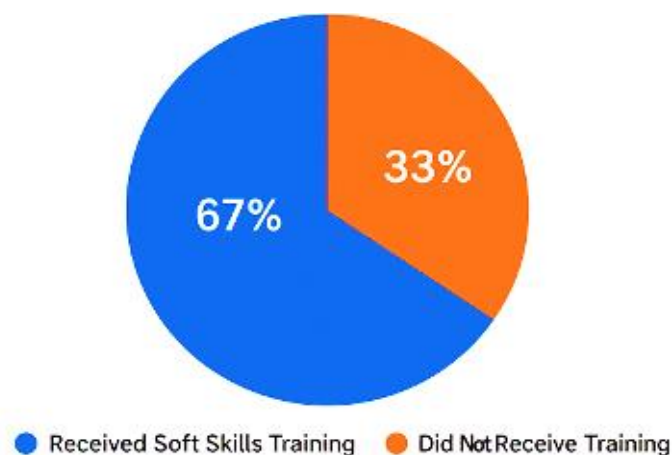
A clear majority of respondents (65.7%) strongly agreed that the program prepares them well for the workforce. A smaller segment (10%) remained neutral, while 5.7% strongly felt that their training does not fully meet employer expectations. Overall, the data indicate strong alignment between the program and workplace needs, though a minor portion of participants points to areas that could benefit from further improvement.

The data indicate strong overall satisfaction with the VET program, as most participants perceive it as well-aligned with workplace requirements. However, a small proportion of respondents feel that the program falls short in certain areas. Addressing these gaps may require stronger engagement with industry experts and updating training practices to reflect evolving job market demands. These results demonstrate the program's effectiveness while highlighting the importance of ongoing refinement to support all participants.

#### 4.1.2. *Enhancement of Interpersonal and Professional Competencies*

Beyond technical proficiency, interpersonal and professional skills play a crucial role in shaping competent and adaptable employees. These abilities, ranging from communication and teamwork to problem-solving, are essential for thriving in today's fast-evolving workplaces. As employers place increasing emphasis on such competencies, vocational education and training programs are expected to embed them within their curricula to promote holistic professional development.

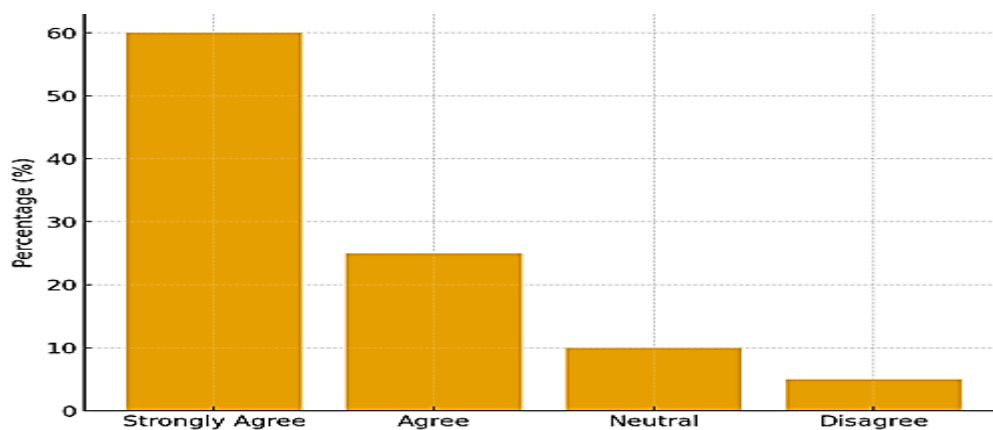
To explore this dimension, respondents were asked whether their VET experience included structured training in areas such as collaboration, communication, and critical thinking. The main findings from this investigation are summarized in figure 4.



**Figure 4.** *Soft Skill Training among VET Participants.*

The analysis reveals that nearly two-thirds of participants (67%) benefited from dedicated training in soft skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and communication. This suggests that most VET programs have taken meaningful steps toward integrating interpersonal and professional competencies into their instruction. Yet, one-third of respondents (33%) reported not receiving such training, pointing to inconsistencies in how these essential skills are addressed. These findings underline the growing recognition of soft skills as a vital component of employability while emphasizing the need for a more uniform approach across all vocational programs.

Building on the previous finding that most participants (67%) received formal training in soft skills as part of their VET programs, the next stage of the analysis focuses on one core competency: communication. Recognized as a foundation of professional success, communication enables individuals to collaborate effectively, share ideas clearly, and engage confidently in workplace settings. This section examines how effectively VET programs develop this skill in practice, offering insight into both the quality and impact of soft skills instruction. To explore this, participants were asked to rate their agreement with a related statement on a Likert scale, as illustrated in figure 5.

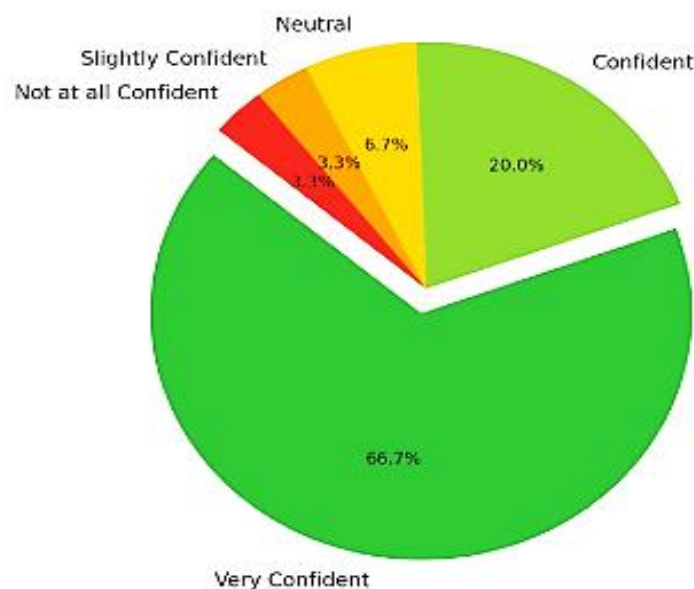


**Figure 5.** Agreement Levels on VET Training's Impact on Communication Competence.

The findings reveal that a strong majority (60%) of respondents strongly agreed and another 25% agreed that their courses have improved their ability to communicate effectively. Meanwhile, 10% remained neutral, and a small minority (5%) disagreed, indicating limited dissatisfaction. Overall, the data demonstrate that VET programs are making considerable progress in cultivating communication competence, equipping learners to collaborate, present ideas, and interact confidently in workplace settings. However, the results also point to the value of ongoing enhancement, such as tailoring communication modules to different professional

contexts and offering more individualized feedback, to ensure that all participants benefit equally.

The following statement shifts attention to a broader form of workplace preparedness by asking participants how confident they feel when combining practical know-how with interpersonal abilities in real professional situations (figure 6). This perspective highlights the idea that readiness is not built on technical knowledge alone but also on the capacity to interact, collaborate, and respond effectively with others. The findings further highlight that solid communication skills, combined with targeted soft-skills development, significantly enhance confidence in performing workplace tasks.



**Figure 6.** Participants' Self-Perceived Competence and Confidence at Work.

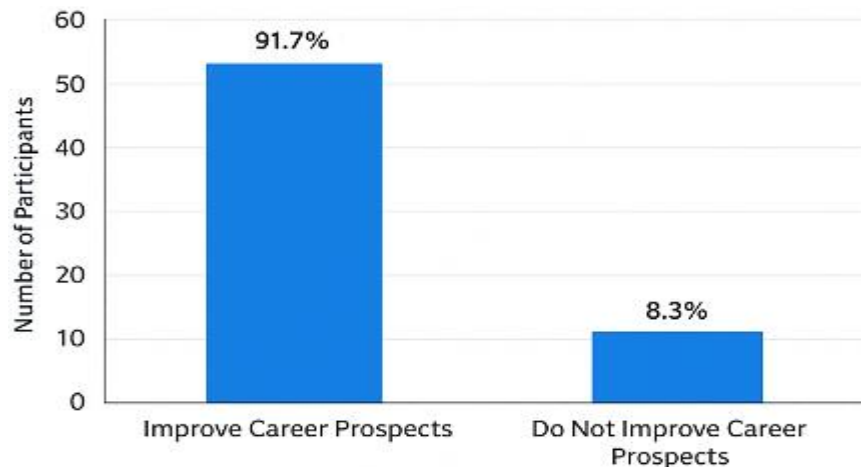
Out of 60 participants, the majority reported feeling well-prepared to navigate workplace challenges. Specifically, 40 individuals (66.7%) described themselves as “Very Confident”, while 12 (20%) felt “Confident” in combining technical expertise with interpersonal skills. A smaller group expressed less certainty: 4 participants (6.7%) chose “Neutral”, 2 (3.3%) indicated “Slightly Confident”, and 2 (3.3%) reported feeling “Not at all Confident”.

These results underscore the VET program’s effectiveness in equipping learners with both technical and soft skills, fostering readiness for varied professional scenarios. At the same time, the presence of a few participants with lower confidence highlights opportunities for tailored support: such as mentorship, practical workshops, or targeted coaching, to further strengthen workplace preparedness.

#### 4.1.3. Enhancing Employability through English Language Proficiency

English language skills have become essential for career success, especially in Morocco's multilingual professional environment. Fields such as healthcare, engineering, and international trade increasingly rely on employees who can communicate effectively in English. This section explores how vocational education contributes to developing English proficiency and its influence on employability. When participants were asked whether strengthening their English abilities would improve their career opportunities, the vast majority agreed, indicating that strong English skills significantly boost success in competitive workplaces, as shown in figure 7.

Among the 60 participants, an overwhelming majority (55, or 91.7%) indicated that English language proficiency greatly boosts career prospects. Only 5 participants (8.3%) expressed a different view, possibly reflecting different professional goals or personal priorities. These results highlight the importance of English skills for vocational students and suggest that incorporating focused English training into VET programs could further enhance graduates' preparedness for the workforce.

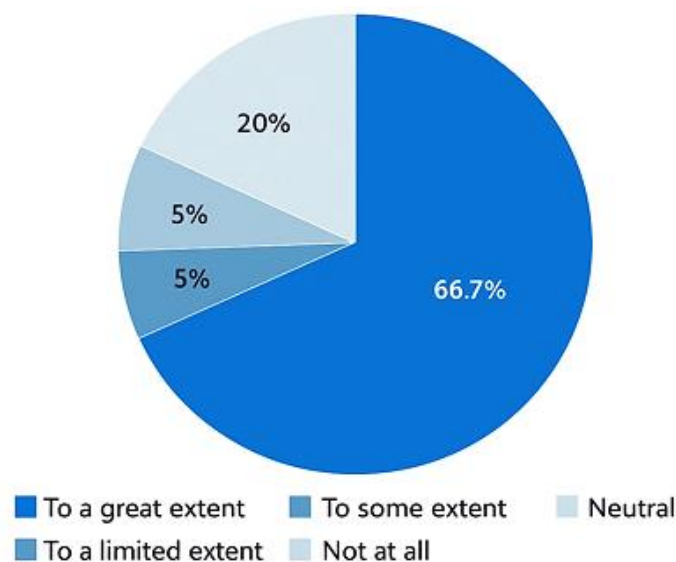


**Figure 7.** Vocational Students' Perceptions of English Skills and Career Prospects.

Since most participants believe that strong English skills improve career prospects, examining how well vocational education programs support this goal is essential. Incorporating English courses, either general or designed for specific professional contexts, is essential for developing the language skills learners need to succeed in the workplace. To explore this, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which their VET program incorporates English training to enhance career prospects, as shown in figure 8.



To explore this, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which their VET program incorporates English training to enhance career prospects. Out of 60 participants, 40 (66.7%) reported that this is done to a great extent, 12 (20%) to some extent, 3 (5%) were neutral, 3 (5%) indicated to a limited extent, and 2 (3.3%) reported not at all. These findings suggest that VET programs are largely effective in integrating English to support career development, while the minority of limited or no emphasis points to opportunities for improvement, such as aligning English courses with industry-specific requirements and increasing access to learning resources. Overall, the results indicate a strong correspondence between participant perceptions and the institutional focus on English within vocational education.



**Figure 8.** Participants' Assessment of English Language Emphasis in Vocational Education.

This study underscores the integral role of vocational education and training programs in preparing participants for contemporary labor markets by fostering a balanced combination of technical expertise, soft skills, and language proficiency. Participants reported a high degree of confidence in the technical competencies acquired through their programs, while simultaneously recognizing the critical importance of interpersonal and communication skills in enhancing employability.

English language proficiency, including both general and specialized instruction, was consistently identified as a key determinant in accessing broader career opportunities and reflects a deliberate emphasis within the programs. Furthermore, the integration of language acquisition with soft skills development was overwhelmingly perceived as an effective strategy for comprehensive professional preparation. Although the majority of responses indicate strong

alignment with workforce requirements, the presence of a small proportion of neutral or less positive perceptions highlights the need for ongoing program refinement to ensure equitable benefits for all participants. Collectively, these results affirm the efficacy of VET programs in cultivating workforce readiness while identifying avenues for continuous enhancement.

#### **4.2. Interview Findings: Educators' Insights on the Implementation of Soft Skills in Vocational Education**

This section presents an examination of interview data to explore educators' perspectives on the current integration of soft skills within vocational education (figure 9). By analyzing the coded references, the aim is to identify patterns, shared viewpoints, and areas of divergence regarding how soft skills are addressed in VET programs. The qualitative insights derived from these interviews provide a deeper understanding of the extent to which soft skills are integrated in instructional practices, the perceived gaps in their delivery, and the challenges educators encounter in promoting them alongside technical competencies.

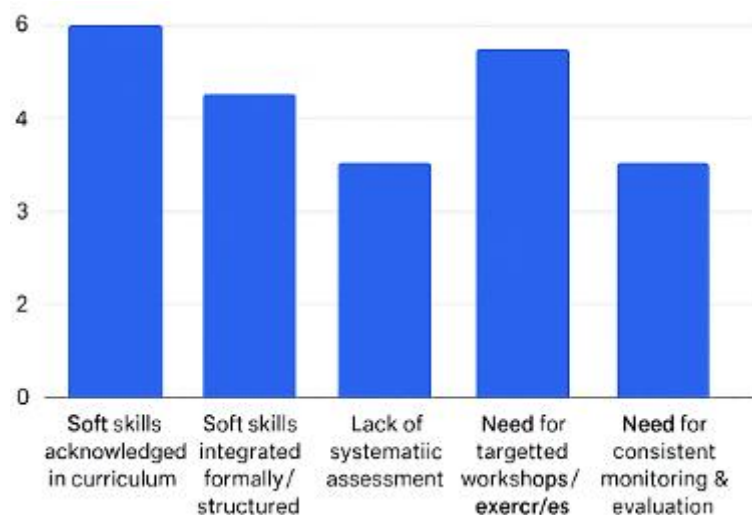
The interview data indicate a shared perception among educators that, although soft skills are incorporated into the VET curriculum, they receive considerably less emphasis than technical competencies. Participants noted that soft skills are frequently addressed in an indirect or peripheral manner, often embedded within group assignments or extracurricular activities. Despite these efforts, such approaches tend to lack systematic structure, consistency, and formal assessment, limiting their overall effectiveness in fostering comprehensive professional development.

Educators consistently highlighted the limited emphasis placed on soft skills within the current VET curriculum. A primary concern is the absence of dedicated modules or structured programs explicitly targeting essential competencies such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. Although group projects and classroom presentations are occasionally employed as mechanisms to develop collaboration and communication abilities, these activities are largely informal, lacking explicit guidance or systematic evaluation. Consequently, students' development in these areas depends on unplanned and unstructured opportunities rather than intentional, systematically designed learning experiences.

The findings suggest that, while soft skills are acknowledged within VET programs, existing practices do not provide consistent, measurable, or deliberate development. These insights emphasize the necessity for a formalized and integrated framework for soft skills training,

ensuring students are comprehensively prepared to meet the interpersonal and professional demands of contemporary workplaces.

The analysis of responses reveals a prominent trend: educators strongly emphasize the importance of integrating soft skills into the curriculum. Participants noted that current approaches are often informal, which limits their effectiveness in fostering meaningful skill development. To address this gap, educators recommended implementing targeted workshops, practical exercises, and simulation activities aimed at developing specific competencies such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving. Furthermore, they highlighted the necessity of systematic evaluation mechanisms to monitor progress and ensure that skill acquisition is consistently reinforced throughout the program.

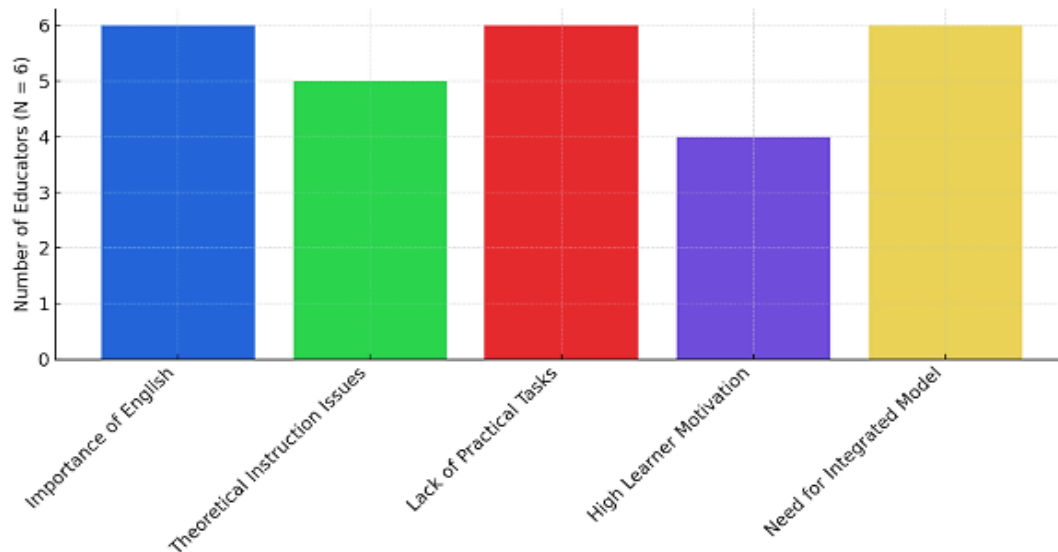


*Figure 9. Educators' Perceptions of Soft Skills Integration in Vocational Education.*

#### **4.2.1. English Language Learning as a Component of Vocational Education**

The thematic analysis of the interview data reveals a strong consensus among educators regarding the indispensable role of English language learning in vocational education, while simultaneously highlighting significant shortcomings in current instructional approaches (figure 10). Despite occasional inclusion of technical vocabulary or professionally oriented reading materials, educators report that English teaching remains predominantly theoretical and insufficiently connected to authentic professional situations. As a result, learners rarely engage in practical communicative tasks such as simulated workplace interactions, job interviews, report writing, or oral briefings, limiting their ability to transfer linguistic skills to real employment contexts. This gap is viewed as particularly problematic given students' high

motivation to learn English, which they associate with improved career mobility and access to better-quality, internationally oriented job opportunities. Consequently, participants emphasize the need for a pedagogical model that integrates language instruction with technical training to develop both occupational and communicative competencies. Overall, the analysis points to a shared view that English language teaching requires greater interactivity and contextualization to align more effectively with workplace expectations and transversal skill development.



**Figure 10.** Educators' Views on the Role and Gaps of English in Vocational Education.

#### **4.2.2. Integrating Language Learning and Soft Skills Development in Vocational Education**

A thematic analysis of the interview data highlights a shared recognition among educators of the strong link between English language learning and the development of essential professional skills such as communication, collaboration, and adaptability. Participants report that interactive language activities, like debates, group projects, role-plays, and problem-solving exercises, serve a dual purpose: they enhance linguistic competence while simultaneously cultivating interpersonal and cognitive skills critical for workplace success (figure 11). For instance, presentations and simulated scenarios not only improve students' English proficiency but also foster teamwork, confidence, and the ability to negotiate ideas effectively. Educators also observe that these activities encourage flexibility and self-assurance, yet they note a significant gap: soft skills are rarely explicitly integrated into language instruction, leaving learners unaware of their value. To address this, participants emphasize the need for stronger coordination between language instructors and technical trainers, ensuring

that pedagogical strategies align more closely with real-world professional demands and maximize the combined development of language proficiency and transversal skills.



**Figure 11.** *Educators' Perspectives on the Intersection of Language Acquisition and Soft Skills Development.*

#### **4.2.3. Aligning VET Programs with Evolving Labor Market Demands**

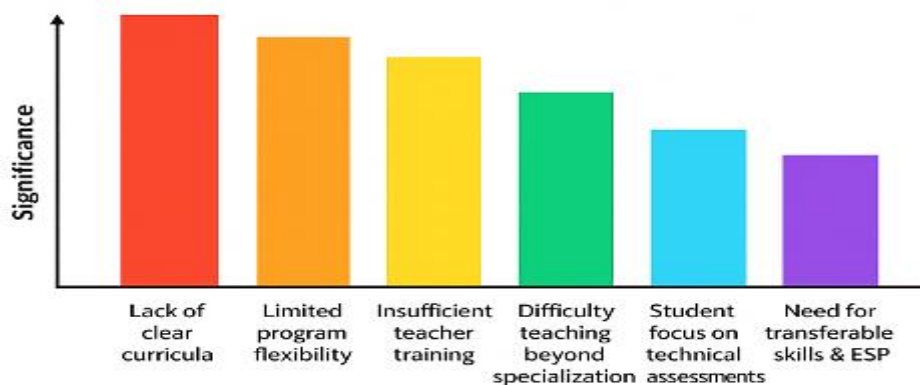
A thematic examination of the qualitative evidence from educator interviews illuminates the dual nature of vocational education and training programs, revealing both their effectiveness and their limitations in preparing students for contemporary professional environments. Instructors consistently emphasize that VET instructional frameworks cultivate essential technical expertise, equipping learners with the practical competencies required for hands-on tasks. Nevertheless, a prominent pattern emerging from the analysis is the disjunction between the skills imparted through these programs and the increasingly complex expectations of modern employers. While learners often demonstrate proficiency in operational and procedural tasks, they frequently encounter challenges in analytical thinking, collaborative engagement, and professional communication within workplace contexts.

Educators highlight cases in which graduates perform exceptionally in technical assessments yet falter in interviews or team-based assignments due to underdeveloped interpersonal abilities and limited adaptive capacity. This discrepancy is further exacerbated by curricula that have not kept pace with the evolving demands of industry. Consequently, educators advocate for a pedagogical recalibration that integrates critical soft skills: such as resilience, cooperative problem-solving, and strategic communication, alongside technical instruction. They also highlight the necessity of robust partnerships with industry stakeholders to ensure alignment

between educational outcomes and labor market needs, including structured internships and applied learning opportunities that bridge theoretical knowledge with professional practice.

#### 4.2.4. Addressing the Gaps in Multidisciplinary Teaching and Learning

A thematic analysis of educator perspectives reveals several critical challenges in implementing a multidisciplinary pedagogical approach. As demonstrated in figure 12, foremost among these is the absence of clearly defined curricular frameworks and the limited flexibility of existing programs, which constrain instructors' ability to integrate complementary skill sets and adapt lessons to the evolving needs of students. In addition, insufficient professional development emerges as a prominent barrier, as many educators lack the expertise to teach beyond their technical specializations, particularly in areas such as English for Specific Purposes and soft skills development. Consequently, students frequently struggle to navigate this integrated instructional model, often prioritizing performance in technical assessments over the acquisition of transferable competencies and language proficiency. Collectively, these findings underscore the need for comprehensive curricular reform, targeted teacher training, and pedagogical strategies that foster both technical mastery and essential cognitive, linguistic, and interpersonal skills, ultimately enhancing learner adaptability and employability in dynamic labor markets.



*Figure 12. Educators' Insights on Multidisciplinary Teaching Challenges.*

Building on the thematic analysis, the results show that although vocational education and training programs are successful in delivering technical competencies, substantial deficiencies remain in cultivating soft skills and language abilities. Factors such as restricted instructional time, outdated curricula, limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and poor alignment with industry requirements impede comprehensive student development, leaving graduates inadequately prepared for the interpersonal and communicative challenges of contemporary



workplaces. Effectively addressing these issues calls for focused curricular reforms, enhanced professional development for instructors beyond their technical expertise, and closer collaboration with industry to ensure graduates develop the well-rounded skills needed to thrive in dynamic and competitive labor markets.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study indicate that Vocational Education and Training programs are generally successful in equipping students with essential technical skills, which are widely recognized by both learners and educators as critical for workforce readiness. Students express considerable confidence in their technical skills and acknowledge the value of English proficiency, with a majority reporting that their programs align well with workplace expectations. Despite these strengths, educators highlight persistent shortcomings in the structured development of soft skills and the practical application of English within professional contexts. Activities aimed at fostering teamwork, communication, and problem-solving are frequently informal, inconsistent, and rarely subject to formal assessment, limiting their effectiveness in preparing students for the interpersonal demands of contemporary workplaces.

Additional systemic challenges, including outdated curricula, constrained instructional time, limited institutional resources, insufficient teacher training, and weak engagement with industry partners, further hinder the capacity of VET programs to provide holistic education. Addressing these gaps necessitates a multi-pronged strategy: the introduction of structured soft skills modules, enhancement of English for Specific Purposes through workplace-oriented activities, modernization of curricular content to reflect evolving industry standards, and continuous professional development for educators to expand their pedagogical competencies beyond technical specialization. Furthermore, fostering stronger partnerships with industry is critical to ensure that programs remain responsive to labor market needs and equip graduates with the versatile skill set required to thrive in dynamic, competitive, and globalized professional environments. Collectively, these measures would enable VET programs to move beyond purely technical instruction toward a more comprehensive approach that balances cognitive, linguistic, and interpersonal skill development, thereby enhancing graduate employability and adaptability.

### Disclosure Statement

*The author/s declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. No financial, personal, or professional relationships have influenced the research, analysis, or conclusions presented in this work.*

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