



Bridging the Gap: Skills Moroccan Tertiary Students Need for Career Success

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Abstract

In a constantly changing labor market, Moroccan university students face the challenge of acquiring comprehensive skills that combine technical proficiency with essential interpersonal capabilities. This study explores the gap between hard and soft skills among Moroccan university students, focusing on their preparedness for the professional world. Using a quantitative and qualitative approach, data was collected from 299 students across various disciplines and academic levels at multiple Moroccan universities through structured surveys. The study highlights the critical need for competencies such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and technical literacy to bridge the gap between academic training and market demands. Preliminary findings suggest significant gaps in both soft and technical skills. To address these issues, estimated solutions include integrating practical training within curricula, adjusting academic content with real-world applications, and promoting collaborations between universities and industries to provide experiential learning opportunities.

keywords: Labor market skills, market evolution, Moroccan Tertiary students, soft skills, technical skills

1. Introduction

The labor market is evolving rapidly, driven by technological advancements, globalization, and changing employer expectations. This transformation has redefined the skills necessary for professional success, emphasizing a balance between technical expertise

and interpersonal competencies. For Moroccan university students, this shift poses a significant challenge: bridging the gap between academic preparation and the demands of the workforce. While many graduates possess degrees, they often enter the labor market neglecting the full range of skills employers require. Hard skills, such as technical proficiency and data analysis, are essential but insufficient on their own. These must be complemented by soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are critical for workplace success. Employers increasingly value a dual set of skills that combine adaptability, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence with specialized knowledge.

To address these issues, this study seeks to:

- Examine the extent to which Moroccan university students possess the hard and soft skills required by today's labor market, with a particular focus on communication, problem-solving, adaptability, and digital literacy.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of current university initiatives and support systems in improving employability skills among students.
- To propose strategic, student-informed recommendations for bridging the gap between academic training and workforce demands by identifying institutional shortcomings and opportunities for enhancing skill development.

This research is guided by two key questions:

1. What hard and soft skills do Moroccan tertiary students currently possess, and how do these align with labor market expectations?
2. What strategies can educational institutions adopt to bridge the gap between academic training and workforce requirements?

By investigating the extent of the skills gap among Moroccan university students, this study aims to offer valuable insights to educators and policymakers. These findings will help ensure that academic programs are better adjusted to the demands of a constantly changing job market, equipping students for success in their professional journeys.

2. Literature Review

The rapid evolution of industries and the integration of advanced technologies have placed a renewed emphasis on equipping students with both technical and interpersonal skills. This section examines the required professional competencies for career success, highlighting the interplay between digital literacy, communication abilities, and problem-solving capabilities. Additionally, it reviews strategies for encouraging lifelong learning and draws on case studies that illustrate effective approaches to skill acquisition among university students.

2.1. Professional Skills

Effective communication is a crucial component of career success. Research underscores the importance of both verbal and written communication in encouraging teamwork, enhancing client interactions, and delivering impactful presentations (Robles, 2012). In a globalized work environment, clear and concise communication ensures consistent collaboration across diverse teams and cultural boundaries. Furthermore, the ability to articulate ideas in written reports and oral presentations strengthens students' confidence and professional conduct, making them more competitive in the job market.

Teamwork and collaboration are equally critical as workplaces become more dynamic and interdependent. The rise of remote and hybrid work models has introduced new challenges, requiring individuals to navigate diverse teams effectively (Jackson, 2015). Collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet, and Slack have become indispensable, highlighting the need for adaptability in both virtual and in-person interactions.

Problem-solving and critical thinking are consistently cited as top skills by employers. These abilities empower individuals to approach complex challenges with innovative solutions,

a quality essential for thriving in rapidly changing industries. Techniques such as brainstorming, case analysis, and simulation exercises have been shown to enhance students' analytical capabilities, preparing them for decision-making in real-world scenarios (Deming, 2017).

2.2. Digital and Technological Proficiency

Technological literacy is now a prerequisite for almost all professions. Proficiency in fundamental tools like Microsoft Office, Google Workspace, and email platforms is expected across sectors (World Economic Forum, 2020). Beyond these basics, familiarity with industry-specific software such as SPSS for data analysis can significantly enhance students' employability.

Adaptability to emerging technologies is vital in an era of rapid innovation. The integration of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and automation across industries demands that graduates remain current with technological trends. Studies show that continuous learning through online platforms like Coursera and LinkedIn Learning can bridge the gap between formal education and evolving industry needs (Kolb, 1984). Furthermore, integrating technology-oriented courses into university curricula stimulates students' ability to innovate and stay relevant.

Data analysis skills have gained prominence as businesses increasingly rely on data-driven decision-making. Proficiency in tools like Excel, Python, and Tableau equips students with the ability to interpret and visualize data effectively (Tynjälä, 2008). By integrating statistics and data science courses, universities can enhance students' analytical insightfulness, aligning their skills with industry demands.

2.3. Interpersonal and Emotional Intelligence

Networking and relationship-building are critical for career advancement. Building a robust professional network enables students to access mentorship opportunities, internships, and employment prospects. Platforms like LinkedIn have revolutionized professional networking, offering students tools to showcase their skills and connect with industry leaders (Robles, 2012).

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is another essential dimension that facilitates effective workplace relationships. The ability to recognize and regulate emotions promotes empathy, teamwork, and conflict resolution, qualities that are indispensable for leadership roles. High EQ has been linked to improved job performance and stronger interpersonal connections, making it a priority for skill development in academic settings (Goleman, 1995).

2.4. Self-Management and Adaptability

Time management and organizational skills are crucial for balancing competing priorities. As students transition into professional environments, the ability to plan effectively and meet deadlines becomes a prerequisite factor in their success. Tools like Trello and Notion, combined with techniques such as prioritization and time-blocking, enhance productivity and reduce stress (Boud et al., 2013).

Resilience and adaptability are equally important in navigating the uncertainties of the modern workplace. Developing a growth mindset, where individuals view challenges as opportunities for learning, promotes long-term career success. Universities can support this through programs that encourage experiential learning and exposure to diverse professional contexts (Kolb, 1984).

2.5. Case Studies and Comparative Analyses

Several case studies and comparative analyses offer valuable insights into skill acquisition among university students. A study by Robles (2012) explored the impact of targeted writing workshops on undergraduate science students. The intervention significantly improved participants' ability to articulate complex scientific ideas and engage in collaborative problem-solving. These findings highlight the importance of structured initiatives in developing students' communication and teamwork skills.

Comparative studies across countries further illuminate the role of education systems in encouraging skill development. For example, Finland's emphasis on collaborative and student-centered learning has consistently produced graduates who excel in teamwork and critical thinking (OECD, 2018). Similarly, Singapore's applied learning approach, which integrates real-world problem-solving into academic curricula, has been praised for its success in preparing students for the workforce (Tynjälä, 2008).

In disciplinary contexts, research has found that STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) students often excel in technical skills but may lack interpersonal competencies. In contrast, students in humanities and social sciences tend to demonstrate stronger communication and analytical skills but may lag in technical proficiency (Jackson, 2015). These variations underscore the need for adjusted pedagogical strategies that address the specific needs of different academic disciplines.

2.6. Lifelong Learning and Upskilling

In an era of rapid change, lifelong learning is essential for maintaining relevance in the workforce. Employers value graduates who demonstrate a commitment to continuous self-improvement through workshops, certifications, and online courses (Robles, 2012). Platforms like Udemy, Coursera, and Skillshare have empowered access to professional development resources, enabling students to acquire new skills independently.

Upskilling initiatives within universities, such as industry partnerships and mentorship programs, can further bridge the gap between academia and the job market. These initiatives not only enhance employability but also instill a culture of lifelong learning that benefits graduates throughout their careers.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

A quantitative and qualitative research design was employed to systematically explore the skill gaps among Moroccan university students. This approach allowed for measurable data collection and statistical analysis to identify patterns and relationships in skill acquisition. Specifically, the study utilized a cross-sectional survey framework, which targeted a diverse sample of students at various academic levels and from multiple disciplines.

3.2. Population and Sample

To achieve representativeness, a stratified random sampling strategy was adopted. This method divides the population by factors such as gender, age, academic year, discipline, and institution, ensuring a proportional representation of 299 diverse students. This approach minimized sampling bias and enhanced the generalizability of the findings.

Table 1: Distribution frequencies of students' affiliation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	University Cadi Ayyad, Marrakech	3	1.0	1.0	1.0
	University Hassan I, Settat	1	.3	.3	1.3
	University Hassan II, Casablanca	41	13.7	13.7	15.1
	University Ibn Tofail, Kenitra	2	.7	.7	15.7
	University Mohammed V, Rabat	188	62.9	62.9	78.6
	University Moulay Ismail, Meknes	29	9.7	9.7	88.3
	University Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah, Fes	35	11.7	11.7	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

The study focused on seven major Moroccan universities, with the majority coming from University Mohammed V, Rabat, followed by significant representation from universities in Casablanca, Fes, and Meknes. Smaller contributions came from institutions in Marrakech, Kenitra, and Settat. This diverse institutional representation ensures a broad perspective on student skill gaps and university support programs across different academic environments.

Table 2: Distribution frequencies of students' field of study

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Law, Economics, and Social Sciences	183	61.2	61.2	61.2
	Letters, art and Humanities	110	36.8	36.8	98.0
	Science	6	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

The majority of respondents come from Law, Economics, and Social Sciences, followed by a significant portion from Letters, Arts, and Humanities, with a smaller representation from science fields.

Table 3: Distribution frequencies of students' educational level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	First year	101	33.8	33.8	33.8
	Master	41	13.7	13.7	47.5
	Second year	113	37.8	37.8	85.3
	Third year	44	14.7	14.7	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

In terms of academic level, most students are in their second year, with notable participation from first-year, third-year, and Master's students, ensuring a well-rounded perspective across different stages of university education.

Table 4: Distribution frequencies of age groups

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-20	183	61.2	61.2	61.2
	21-23	72	24.1	24.1	85.3
	24 or older	44	14.7	14.7	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

Most respondents are between 18-20 years old, followed by those aged 21-23, with a smaller group being 24 or older. In terms of gender distribution, female students make up the majority, while male students represent a smaller proportion of the surveyed population. The distribution of ages is outlined in the table below:

Table 5: Distribution frequencies of gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	189	63.2	63.2	63.2
	Male	110	36.8	36.8	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

3.3. Research Instrument and Data Collection Tools

To facilitate efficient data collection and reach a diverse group of participants, Google Forms was employed as the primary research instrument. This digital tool allowed for the creation of structured and user-friendly questionnaires, which were distributed online via email, university networks, and social media platforms.

Data was gathered using a structured questionnaire designed to address key research objectives. This questionnaire included multiple-choice closed questions and open-ended questions to gather quantitative and qualitative data and to ensure accessibility and clarity for students across varying academic levels.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using the statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to ensure precise and reliable data analysis. This software facilitated the organization of datasets and the computation of descriptive statistics such as means and frequencies. By using SPSS, the study identified key trends and relationships, providing robust and actionable insights into the skill gaps among Moroccan university students.

4. Results and discussions

4.1. Importance of Soft Skills

4.1.1. Communication and Teamwork Skills

Table 6. Students' effectiveness in communication skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	average	116	38.8	38.8	38.8
	excellent	15	5.0	5.0	43.8
	good	139	46.5	46.5	90.3
	poor	21	7.0	7.0	97.3
	very poor	8	2.7	2.7	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: Students' effectiveness in teamwork

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	average	78	26.1	26.1	26.1
	excellent	57	19.1	19.1	45.2
	good	150	50.2	50.2	95.3
	poor	10	3.3	3.3	98.7
	very poor	4	1.3	1.3	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

The survey results reveal that Moroccan university students have mixed confidence in their communication and teamwork abilities. While many feel comfortable with these skills, only a small percentage believe they truly excel. Nearly half (46.5%) rated their communication skills as “good”, and 38.8% described them as “average”, while just 5% considered themselves “excellent”. Similarly, teamwork skills followed a similar trend, with 50.2% of students rating themselves as “good”, and 26.1% as “average”. A smaller but notable 19.1% feel highly confident in their ability to work with others, but a small group (4.6%) admitted to struggling with teamwork. These results suggest that while most students feel reasonably capable, only a few feel truly strong in these essential skills.

These findings support Robles (2012), who emphasized that strong communication is key to success in teamwork, client interactions, and career advancement. However, Jackson (2015) highlights that modern teamwork goes beyond basic cooperation as it requires adaptability, leadership, and digital communication skills, especially in workplaces that rely on virtual collaboration. The fact that many students see themselves as only moderately skilled suggests a gap between academic training and real-world demands. Research by Robles (2012) shows that structured group projects and real-world exercises significantly improve communication and teamwork. Without enough opportunities to develop these skills, students may struggle with collaboration, leadership, and adapting to digital workplace environments, all of which are crucial in today's competitive job market.

4.1.2. Solving problems and critical thinking skills

Table 8: Students' effectiveness in solving problems

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	average	88	29.4	29.4	29.4
	excellent	23	7.7	7.7	37.1
	good	172	57.5	57.5	94.6
	poor	13	4.3	4.3	99.0
	very poor	3	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

The survey results suggest that most Moroccan university students feel reasonably confident in their problem-solving skills. More than half (57.5%) rated their abilities as “good”, while nearly a third (29.4%) saw themselves as “average”. However, only 7.7% of students considered their problem-solving skills “excellent”, indicating that few feel they have truly mastered this important skill. On the other hand, a small but notable group (5.3%) rated their abilities as “poor” or “very poor”, suggesting that some students may struggle with analytical thinking and making decisions in complex situations.

These findings align with Deming (2017), who highlighted problem-solving as one of the most valuable skills in today's job market. While many students feel capable, the fact that so few rate themselves as “excellent” suggests a lack of confidence or exposure to advanced problem-solving techniques. Research by Tynjälä (2008) shows that active participation experiences such as case studies, simulations, and brainstorming activities play a key role in

sharpening critical thinking. Without enough structured opportunities to practice these skills, students may struggle to apply their knowledge effectively in fast-changing work environments, making it harder to adapt and make confident decisions in their careers.

4.1.3. Students' Digital and Technological Literacy

Table 9: Students' effectiveness in Technical and analytical skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	average	112	37.5	37.5	37.5
	excellent	23	7.7	7.7	45.2
	good	95	31.8	31.8	76.9
	poor	58	19.4	19.4	96.3
	very poor	11	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

Table 10: Students' adaptability to new technologies

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	average	62	20.7	20.7	20.7
	excellent	63	21.1	21.1	41.8
	good	157	52.5	52.5	94.3
	poor	15	5.0	5.0	99.3
	very poor	2	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

The survey results reveal mixed confidence among Moroccan university students regarding their technical and analytical skills. While many feel somewhat capable, 31.8% rated their skills as "good" and 37.5% as "average", only 7.7% consider themselves "excellent" in using software and analyzing data. On the other hand, nearly one in four students (23.1%) admitted to having "poor" or "very poor" technical skills, suggesting that a significant portion struggles with essential digital tools. This highlights a gap in technical proficiency, which is increasingly crucial in today's data-driven job market.

At the same time, students show stronger confidence in their ability to adapt to new technologies, with 52.5% rating their adaptability as "good" and 21.1% as "excellent". However, 5.7% of students struggle to keep up with technological advancements, which could hinder their career growth. These findings align with the World Economic Forum (2020), which emphasizes that digital literacy and adaptability are essential across all industries. The fact that few students rate themselves as highly skilled suggests they haven't had enough engaging experience with widely used software like Excel, SPSS, Python, or Tableau. According to Tynjälä (2008), universities play a crucial role in closing this gap by incorporating real-world applications and technical training into their programs. Without structured exposure to data analysis tools and emerging technologies, some students may struggle to meet workplace demands, making it harder to compete in a rapidly evolving digital economy.

4.2. Skills for the job market

4.2.1. Important skills for employment

Table 11: Students' important skills for employment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Adapting to new technologies	32	10.7	10.7	10.7
	Communication skills	126	42.1	42.1	52.8
	Leadership skills	32	10.7	10.7	63.5
	Problem-solving skills	57	19.1	19.1	82.6
	Teamwork	25	8.4	8.4	91.0
	Technical skills	27	9.0	9.0	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

When asked about the most important skills for securing a job, communication skills stood out as the top choice, selected by 42.1% of students. This was followed by problem-solving skills (19.1%), highlighting students' recognition of the need to think critically and handle workplace challenges. Leadership skills (10.7%), adapting to new technologies (10.7%), technical skills (9.0%), and teamwork (8.4%) were also considered valuable, but they were ranked lower. These responses suggest that while students understand the significance of technical and teamwork abilities, they believe that strong communication and problem-solving skills are the key to employability.

These findings align with Robles (2012), who emphasized that employers prioritize soft skills like communication, teamwork, and problem-solving alongside technical expertise. In an increasingly digital and globalized world, the ability to adapt, lead, and work collaboratively is just as important as knowing how to use specialized software (Jackson, 2015). The fact that technical skills ranked lower suggests that students may underestimate their importance in job competitiveness. As the World Economic Forum (2020) points out, digital literacy and problem-solving are essential across industries, meaning students must balance both technical and interpersonal skills to thrive in today's job market.

4.2.2. Skills to improve

Table 12: Skills Students Need to Improve the Most

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Solving problems	44	14.7	14.7	14.7
	Speaking clearly	123	41.1	41.1	55.9
	Teamwork	22	7.4	7.4	63.2
	Using new technologies	54	18.1	18.1	81.3
	Writing effectively	56	18.7	18.7	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

When asked about the skills they feel need the most improvement, speaking clearly was the top choice, selected by 41.1% of students. This was followed by writing effectively (18.7%) and using new technologies (18.1%), suggesting that many students feel their ability to communicate both verbally and in writing needs further development. Problem-solving (14.7%) and teamwork (7.4%) were also identified as areas for growth, though they were less frequently mentioned. These results indicate that while students recognize the importance of technical and problem-solving skills, clear and confident communication remains their biggest challenge.

These findings align with Robles (2012), who emphasized that communication, both spoken and written, is one of the most valued skills in the workplace. He also found that

structured training in writing and public speaking significantly improves students' confidence and effectiveness. The fact that technical skills and problem-solving were also highlighted supports research from the World Economic Forum (2020), which stresses the growing need for digital literacy and critical thinking in the modern workforce. These results suggest that while students are aware of their weaknesses, they need more structured opportunities to develop these essential skills, ensuring they are better prepared for real-world professional demands.

4.3. University Support and Barriers to Skill Development

4.3.1. University Programs for Skill Development

Table 13: University Programs for Skill Development

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Conferences	63	21.1	21.1	21.1
	Extracurricular activities (theatre, poetry, public speaking, debates....)	47	15.7	15.7	36.8
	I don't know	114	38.1	38.1	74.9
	Internships	5	1.7	1.7	76.6
	Study days	54	18.1	18.1	94.6
	Workshops	16	5.4	5.4	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

The survey results reveal that many students are unaware of the skill-building programs offered by their universities, with 38.1% selecting "I don't know." Among those who were aware, conferences (21.1%) and study days (18.1%) were the most mentioned programs, followed by extracurricular activities like debates and public speaking (15.7%). Meanwhile, workshops (5.4%) and internships (1.7%) were mentioned far less frequently, suggesting that either these opportunities are limited or students are not well informed about them. These findings indicate a gap between available resources and student engagement, as many may not be taking advantage of the programs designed to help them develop essential skills.

These results align with Robles (2012), who emphasized that structured interventions, such as workshops and extracurricular activities, are key to improving communication, teamwork, and leadership skills. The low participation in internships and workshops also supports Tynjälä's (2008) argument that universities need to integrate more active participation and practical learning opportunities to better prepare students for the workforce. The fact that a large number of students are unaware of available programs suggests that universities may need to improve outreach efforts, ensuring that students are informed about and encouraged to participate in skill-building initiatives that can enhance their employability.

4.3.2. Students' Expectations for University Support

Table 14: Students' Expectations for University Support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	More conferences	23	7.7	7.7	7.7
	More extracurricular activities	103	34.4	34.4	42.1
	More interships	55	18.4	18.4	60.5
	More study days	16	5.4	5.4	65.9
	More workshops	70	23.4	23.4	89.3
	Other	32	10.7	10.7	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

The survey results, along with students' open-ended responses, reveal a clear and recurring message: students want more practical, skill-oriented support from their universities. Many respondents expressed a strong need for extracurricular activities (34.4%), workshops (23.4%), and internships (18.4%), emphasizing the importance of engaged learning and real-world experience. This preference shows that students are eager to move beyond theory and engage in learning that helps them feel prepared and confident as they enter the workforce.

This need is reflected in the students' own words. One student wrote, *"The university can offer more programs to help us build skills,"* while another suggested, *"Flexible study schedule, extra academic activity."* Others shared the desire for *"better schedule"* and *"more programs and training courses,"* suggesting the challenge of balancing academic demands with opportunities for skill development. These sentiments reinforce the findings by Tynjälä (2008) and Robles (2012), who advocate for integrating real-world practice, like debates, leadership experiences, and industry engagement, into academic life.

The fact that a significant number of students selected "I don't know" when asked about available programs suggests that many are either unaware of existing opportunities or that such programs are not well-publicized or accessible. It's clear from their comments that students want support that is well-structured, clearly communicated, and relevant to their career goals. Whether it's through free workshops, internships, training programs, or more flexible schedules, students are calling for an academic experience that better reflects the challenges and demands of today's job market.

Altogether, their voices point to a shared desire, which is a university experience that blends academic learning with practical, empowering, and skill-building experiences, one that not only teaches but truly prepares them for life beyond the classroom.

4.3.3. Barriers to skill development

Table 15: Barriers to Learning Job Market Skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Lack of resources	59	19.7	19.7	19.7
	Lack of time	81	27.1	27.1	46.8
	No programs in My University	88	29.4	29.4	76.3
	Other	71	23.7	23.7	100.0
	Total	299	100.0	100.0	

The survey results highlight several challenges that prevent students from developing the skills they need for the job market. The most common obstacle is the lack of available programs at universities (29.4%), suggesting that many students feel their institutions are not offering enough structured opportunities for skill-building. Lack of time (27.1%) is another major barrier, indicating that students may struggle to balance coursework with efforts to improve their professional skills. Additionally, 19.7% cited a lack of resources, which could refer to financial constraints, limited access to technology, or insufficient training materials. Meanwhile, 23.7% selected "other", suggesting that some students face additional, more specific challenges that were not listed in the survey options.

These findings reflect common struggles in higher education, where academic demands often leave little room for skill development beyond traditional coursework. Tynjälä (2008) emphasized that universities need to integrate practical learning experiences into academic programs to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the workforce. Additionally, Robles (2012) found that a lack of institutional support and time constraints often prevent students from actively participating in skill-building activities. The fact that many students feel their universities do not offer enough programs suggests a gap between student needs and

university offerings, reinforcing the need for more accessible, flexible, and further skill development initiatives that fit within students' busy schedules.

5. Implications of the study

The findings of this study highlight an urgent need for Moroccan universities to adopt practical, student-centered reforms that align academic learning with labor market demands. First, universities should integrate life skills modules directly into the curriculum. This includes embedding communication training, collaborative problem-solving, digital literacy, and leadership exercises into existing courses across disciplines. Course assignments should reflect real-world applications, such as case studies, simulations, and real-world projects, ensuring that students not only understand theories but also apply them in ways that mirror workplace expectations.

Second, the study suggests a strong demand for expanded access to structured internships and experiential learning opportunities. Universities should formalize partnerships with local and international companies, NGOs, and government institutions to create internship programs that count as part of students' studies, so they can earn academic credit while gaining real work experience. These internships should be tracked and supervised to ensure educational value. Additionally, universities can offer job-shadowing days, project-based collaborations with companies, and career sessions led by former students to expose students to a range of industries and professional pathways.

Third, there is a clear gap in students' awareness of existing support programs. Universities must strengthen their communication and outreach strategies by centralizing information through user-friendly student portals, sending regular newsletters, hosting orientation sessions, and using social media to promote workshops and events. Career centers should proactively guide students in identifying and enrolling in skill-development activities, helping them create personal growth plans aligned with their career goals.

Finally, universities should focus on providing flexible, accessible learning options that cater to students' busy schedules. Many students cited time constraints as a major barrier to skill development, highlighting the need for hybrid-format workshops (online and in-person), evening workshops, recorded webinars, and blended learning options. Additionally, offering free or subsidized certification programs in technical and soft skills such as digital literacy, coding, public speaking, CV writing, entrepreneurship, leadership training, and project management can further heighten students' career readiness. By adopting a more student-centered, practical approach to education, Moroccan universities can bridge the gap between academia and the labor market, ensuring graduates are better prepared for professional success.

6. Limitations of the study and future research

While this study provides valuable insights into the skills gap among Moroccan university students, it does have some limitations. One major limitation is that the data relies on self-reported responses, meaning students' assessments of their own skills may not always reflect their actual abilities. Some may have underestimated or overestimated their competencies, leading to potential biases in the findings. Additionally, the study focused on a specific sample of university students, which may not fully represent the experiences of all students across different regions or academic disciplines. Future research could benefit from incorporating practical skill assessments or feedback from employers and faculty members to get a more objective view of students' preparedness for the job market.

To build on these findings, future research should explore skill development in a more in-depth and diverse manner. Longitudinal studies could track students' progress over time, identifying how university programs impact their career readiness after graduation. Additionally, research could compare the effectiveness of different skill-building initiatives,

such as internships, workshops, and extracurricular activities, to determine which approaches have the greatest impact. Expanding the study to include employer perspectives would also be beneficial, as it would help bridge the gap between what universities teach and what industries actually require. By taking these steps, future research can offer more comprehensive solutions for preparing students to thrive in the evolving job market.

7. Conclusion

This study has shed light on the skills gap among Moroccan university students, revealing key challenges in communication, problem-solving, technical proficiency, and adaptability to new technologies. While students recognize the importance of these skills for their careers, many lack confidence in their abilities, and a significant portion feels that their universities are not providing enough structured opportunities for skill development. The findings suggest that although academic programs equip students with theoretical knowledge, they often fall short in preparing them for the practical demands of the modern workplace.

A major concern highlighted in the study is that many students struggle to access or even be aware of skill-building programs offered by their universities. This lack of awareness, combined with time constraints and limited resources, creates barriers that prevent students from fully developing the competencies needed for professional success. The study also revealed that students are eager for more engaging learning experiences, such as workshops, internships, and extracurricular activities, which can help bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world applications.

The results align with existing research emphasizing that today's job market demands a balance of technical expertise and interpersonal skills. Employers increasingly seek graduates who are not only proficient in their field but also capable of adapting to new technologies, solving complex problems, and working effectively in teams. To ensure that students are well-prepared, universities must take a more practical and student-centered approach to education, integrating real-world learning opportunities into their academic programs.

Ultimately, addressing the skills gap requires a collaborative effort between universities, employers, and students themselves. Institutions need to expand access to skill-building programs, improve communication about available resources, and promote partnerships with industries to create more opportunities for students. At the same time, students must take an active role in their own learning journey, seeking out experiences that will enhance their employability. By making these changes, Moroccan universities can better prepare students to enter the workforce with confidence, ensuring that they are equipped to succeed in an increasingly competitive and evolving job market.

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