FACTORS AFFECTING CAREER-JOB MISMATCH AMONG VIETNAMESE GRADUATES AND WORKERS

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the factors influencing the situation of graduates in Vietnam working outside their fields of study. By conducting a survey of 120 participants using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, the research focuses on clarifying the current employment situation, identifying the causes of occupational mismatch, and proposing several remedial solutions. The results indicate that although the majority of graduates work in jobs aligned with or closely related to their training, a considerable proportion shift to unrelated fields. The main reasons include personal interests, unsatisfactory salary levels, limited opportunities for advancement, and difficulties in finding jobs that match their specialization. This phenomenon reflects the lack of alignment between university curricula and the practical demands of the labour market. While negative impacts such as restricted career development opportunities and the absence of long-term orientation exist, working outside one's field can also offer certain benefits, including skill diversification and greater adaptability to a flexible labour environment. The study emphasizes the importance of career counselling, stronger connections between educational institutions and enterprises, as well as retraining and upskilling programs to enhance employability and reduce the gap between training and employment.

Research purpose:
This research analyses the factors influencing the phenomenon of working outside one's trained major among Vietnamese graduates. The study investigates the current employment status, reasons for career mismatch, and potential solutions to address this issue from both individual and systemic perspectives.

Research motivation:
Amidst the rapid development of Vietnam's economy, the labour market has become increasingly diverse and dynamic. However, the phenomenon of employees working outside their field of study is becoming more widespread, especially among young university graduates. This mismatch not only raises concerns regarding workers' job satisfaction, performance, and long-term career orientation but also impacts the effectiveness of educational institutions and the overall development of the national workforce. This paper aims to explore the root causes of this phenomenon and to propose solutions from the perspectives of human resource management, education, and social policy. This issue is urgent, highly relevant, and directly affects millions of Vietnamese workers. Understanding the underlying factors of employment mismatch will help improve not only individual career satisfaction but also overall productivity and national human capital development.

Research design, approach, and method:
This study adopts a quantitative research design to systematically explore the phenomenon of employment mismatch in Vietnam. The questionnaire was constructed based on relevant theoretical frameworks and insights from previous studies. The study targeted individuals who had completed undergraduate or college programs in Vietnam and were currently employed. The intended age range was between 22 and 30 years, focusing on recent graduates or early-career workers who are more likely to experience employment mismatch. A convenience sampling method was employed, whereby respondents voluntarily participated in the survey. This data was collected through a survey of 120

participants conducted via Google Forms with a 5-point Likert scale.

Main findings:
The survey results indicate that while a majority of graduates work in their field or a related area, a significant portion engage in jobs unrelated to their academic training. Key reasons for working outside their major include personal interest in other fields, insufficient salary, limited career advancement opportunities, and difficulties finding jobs aligned with their qualifications. This situation reflects the broader disconnect between higher education and labor market requirements, raising concerns about the effectiveness of academic training and career preparation. The research also highlights both negative impacts, such as adaptation challenges and limited promotion prospects, and positive outcomes, including skill diversification and expanded career options, and increased flexibility in navigating a dynamic job market. These insights provide a more nuanced understanding of the employment experiences of Vietnamese graduates.

Practical/managerial implications:
Through a thorough literature review and empirical analysis, the study underscores the need for improved career counseling, enhanced curriculum relevance to market demands, stronger connections between universities and enterprises, and programs for reskilling and upskilling. The findings contribute valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and employers aiming to reduce employment mismatch and better support graduate employability in Vietnam. This paper offers practical recommendations to bridge the gap between education and labor market requirements, emphasizing the importance of a coordinated approach to career guidance and training. The study enriches academic discourse on employment mismatch and provides a foundation for future research on improving graduate outcomes in rapidly evolving economies..

Keywords: *Higher education, Career orientation, Professional skills, Working outside one's field of study, University graduates, Post-graduation employment.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of Vietnam's economy, the labor market has become increasingly diverse and dynamic. However, the phenomenon of employees working outside their field of study is becoming more widespread, especially among young university graduates. In Vietnam, there has been a significant increase in postsecondary education enrollment, with the gross enrollment rate surging from approximately 10.30% in 2000 to 28.66% in 2018 (World Bank, 2024). Despite this educational expansion, recent data indicates a concerning trend: individuals with higher levels of education are more prone to unemployment. This suggests a growing skills mismatch, where the competencies and knowledge gained by graduates do not align with the demands of the job market (Demombynes and Testaverde, 2018; Tran and Vu, 2020; Tran et al., 2023). Job-education mismatch, or "job mismatch," poses significant challenges for workers and national economies. For individuals, it can lead to lower wages, job dissatisfaction, and a decline in skill utilization. The financial repercussions of job mismatch are evident in wage penalties (Tran et al., 2019). Specifically, graduates in jobs that are either vertically mismatched (e.g., overqualified) or fully mismatched experience lower earnings compared to those in fully matched positions (Tran et al., 2025). On a broader scale, job mismatch represents a squandering of human capital, hindering a country's overall development (Somers et al., 2019). Vietnam exemplifies this issue, as highlighted by the World Bank's Utilization-adjusted Human Capital Index (U-HCI). The U-HCI indicates that Vietnam is not fully leveraging its human capital. Between 2010 and 2019, Vietnam's Human Capital Index score fell from 0.69 to 0.57 (Pennings, 2020). This decline suggests that a substantial portion of the Vietnamese workforce is not employed in high-quality positions, leading to an underutilization of skilled labor and undermining the full potential of its workforce (Yang and Tran, 2022). This research aims to explore the root causes of this phenomenon and to propose solutions from the perspectives of human resource management, education, and social policy. This issue is urgent, highly relevant, and directly affects millions of Vietnamese workers. Understanding the underlying factors of employment mismatch will help improve not only individual career satisfaction but also overall productivity and national human capital development.

Academically, this study contributes to the theoretical body of knowledge on person-job fit and the factors affecting individual career development. It aims to fill a gap in current literature by focusing on the Vietnamese context, where limited empirical research has been conducted on the subject. Practically, the findings aim to assist HR managers, educational organizations, and policymakers in identifying the underlying causes and devising appropriate strategies to improve training quality and labor utilization efficiency. In particular, the research provides insights that can be applied to enhance career guidance, curriculum design, and employment services. These practical applications are expected to support a more flexible and responsive workforce in a rapidly changing job market.

The central research question addressed is: "What factors influence the prevalence of employment outside one's field of study among Vietnamese workers?" This study aims to achieve three specific objectives. Firstly, it seeks to determine the proportion of individuals working outside their trained fields in Vietnam and to examine their key demographic characteristics. Secondly, the study investigates the individual, organizational, and external environmental factors that influence the decision to pursue employment unrelated to one's academic major. Finally, its third objective is to develop policy-oriented recommendations aimed at reducing employment mismatch and improving the alignment between education, career orientation, and labor market demands.

This paper is structured into six main sections. The first section provides an introduction, outlining the research motivation, objectives, and overall structure. Following this, Section 2 presents a literature review, synthesizing relevant theories and prior studies on employment outside one's primary field. Section 3 details the methodology, describing the data collection and analysis approaches used in the study. The findings and their interpretation are then presented in Section 4, discussing the empirical results in relation to existing literature. Section 5 summarizes the key findings and offers practical solutions in the conclusions and recommendations. Finally, Section 6 addresses the limitations of the study and suggests directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Employment Mismatch and its impacts

Employment mismatch, often referred to as field-of-study mismatch, is a condition in which an individual's current job role is not directly related to their formal academic training (Robst, 2007). It is a form of occupational misalignment where workers engage in jobs that either do not require or do not utilize the specialized knowledge and skills they acquired during their education. This type of mismatch is conceptually distinct from other labor market mismatches, such as overeducation—where individuals possess higher qualifications than the job requires—or under skilling, which occurs when individuals lack the requisite skills for their job. Field-of-study mismatch reflects not only inefficient allocation of educational resources but also broader issues in the alignment between higher education systems and labor market demands.

Employment mismatch has both beneficial and adverse implications for individuals and the broader economy. On the positive side, mismatched employment may offer opportunities for individuals to discover better career paths, expand their skill sets, and become more flexible in the evolving job market. For some, working outside their field becomes a gateway to more fulfilling and better-paying careers. However, the negative consequences tend to outweigh the benefits for most mismatched individuals. These include lower earnings, decreased job satisfaction, limited career advancement, and higher likelihood of turnover (Allen & van der Velden, 2001). On a systemic level, widespread mismatch leads to inefficient use of educational resources and reduced productivity, especially when a significant proportion of the workforce is underemployed or underutilized.

2.2 Foundational Theories

Person-Job Fit Theory: Person–Job Fit Theory, as developed by Kristof (1996), serves as a foundational framework in understanding the dynamics of job satisfaction and performance. The theory posits that when there is a high level of congruence between an individual's characteristics—such as values, abilities, and preferences—and the demands or nature

of their job, positive outcomes such as increased satisfaction, better performance, and stronger organizational commitment are likely. Conversely, when there is a lack of fit, such as in cases of employment outside one's trained field, it often leads to dissatisfaction, low motivation, turnover, and reduced performance. Thus, employment mismatch can be interpreted as a manifestation of poor person–job fit, which negatively affects both individuals and organizations.

Holland's Career Choice Theory (RIASEC): Holland's Career Choice Theory (1997), known as the RIASEC model, classifies individuals into six personality types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. Holland theorized that individuals are more likely to experience career satisfaction and success when working in environments that align with their personality type. Therefore, when students choose academic majors without adequate self-awareness or understanding of their vocational interests, they increase the risk of entering mismatched careers after graduation. For example, a person with an Artistic personality type might struggle in a highly structured finance role, regardless of academic achievement, leading to eventual career dissatisfaction and transition to unrelated fields.

Human Capital Theory: Becker's Human Capital Theory (1964) emphasizes the economic value of investing in education and training, viewing these as forms of capital that enhance productivity and employability. From this perspective, employment mismatch represents an inefficient use of human capital, as individuals are unable to fully utilize the knowledge and skills they have acquired. This underutilization not only limits the worker's productivity and earnings but also results in suboptimal returns
on both public and private investment in education. When mismatches become widespread, they can reduce overall economic efficiency and hinder national workforce development.

2.3 Factors Affecting Employment Mismatch

Individual Factors: A substantial body of literature suggests that various personal characteristics significantly influence the likelihood of employment mismatch. Gender, academic performance, personal interest, career expectations, and self-directedness play critical roles. Bender and Heywood (2011) found that gender norms often guide women to choose "safer" or more socially accepted majors, sometimes at the cost of personal passion. In the Vietnamese context, familial expectations and lack of career awareness often drive students toward popular or "stable" majors without consideration of fit (Nguyen & Doan, 2020). Furthermore, students who enter university without a clear understanding of their interests and career paths are more vulnerable to later mismatches.

Educational and Training Factors: Educational institutions also play a critical role in either mitigating or exacerbating employment mismatch. Programs that are heavily theoretical and lack practical exposure tend to produce graduates who are ill-prepared for industry demands. As noted by Tran (2019), many university programs in Vietnam still focus on rote learning and lack industry collaboration, which reduces the relevance of training to actual job roles. Another contributing factor is the absence of structured career guidance, particularly at the high school and early university levels. Without access to effective counseling and labor market information, students may make uninformed decisions about their academic paths, leading to higher risks of mismatch.

Labour Market Factors: Macroeconomic and structural characteristics of the labour market also contribute significantly to mismatch. The imbalance between supply and demand in various academic disciplines is a persistent issue. Fields such as business administration, finance, and economics often produce more graduates than the market can absorb, while technical and vocational fields remain understaffed (ILO, 2021). Moreover, the mismatch is exacerbated by regional disparities in labour demand. Urban centres may have more jobs but not necessarily in the fields for which students have been trained. This misalignment between training output and actual demand is a core issue in Vietnam's employment ecosystem.

Organizational Factors: At the organizational level, recruitment and talent management practices can influence mismatch. Many companies, especially in the service and business sectors, prioritize soft skills and adaptability over strict academic credentials. This leads to hiring decisions that do not necessarily align with a candidate's academic background.

In addition, unclear job descriptions and lack of structured onboarding or retraining programs can leave employees struggling to adapt, especially when transitioning into roles that differ significantly from their formal education. This situation may compel workers to accept any available job, even if unrelated to their specialization, especially under financial pressure.

2.4 Research Gaps and Study Direction

While international research has addressed the issue of employment mismatch extensively, studies in the Vietnamese context remain limited in scope and depth. Existing studies tend to focus narrowly on specific regions, industries, or educational sectors, and often lack comprehensive analysis that incorporates both supply-side (educational) and demand-side (market and employer) perspectives. This study aims to fill the existing research gap by conducting an empirical survey targeting a diverse sample of individuals who are currently employed outside their academic fields. By analyzing the causes of mismatch within Vietnam's unique socioeconomic and educational framework, the research seeks to provide realistic and actionable policy recommendations. These insights are intended to aid not only educational institutions and HR professionals but also policymakers in formulating effective strategies to bridge the gap between education and employment.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to systematically explore the phenomenon of employment mismatch in Vietnam. The quantitative approach enables the researcher to quantify the extent of the mismatch and assess the relative influence of various contributing factors. Data collection was implemented through an online survey distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire was constructed based on relevant theoretical frameworks and insights from previous studies. To facilitate clear responses and consistent interpretation, most items utilized a 5-point Likert scale to measure respondents' evaluations and perceptions.

3.2 Data collection method

The study utilized a structured questionnaire, developed from key influencing factors identified in the literature review, as its primary data collection tool. This questionnaire was divided into four comprehensive sections: "Personal Information," which gathered basic demographic data for categorizing respondents; "Employment Status," where respondents evaluated their current job relevance to their trained field; "Influencing Factors," which assessed various determinants of employment mismatch on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = No influence, 5 = Very strong influence), including career orientation, alignment between training and market, current labor market demand, expected income and career opportunities, and family/social influence; and "Proposed Solutions," where respondents offered opinions on effective measures to address employment mismatch from the perspectives of individuals, educational institutions, and employers. The questionnaire was distributed via social media, university student communities, and professional forums, yielding a total of 120 valid responses for analysis.

3.3 Population and Sampling method

The study targeted individuals who had completed undergraduate or college programs in Vietnam and were currently employed. The intended age range was between 22 and 30 years, focusing on recent graduates or early-career workers who are more likely to experience employment mismatch. A convenience sampling method was employed, whereby respondents voluntarily participated in the survey. While this method may limit the overall representativeness of the sample, it was deemed appropriate due to time and resource constraints.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data was compiled and processed using Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets. Several analytical procedures

were employed throughout the research process. Firstly, descriptive statistics were utilized to illustrate key characteristics of the sample, including the extent of employment mismatch, distribution by gender, field of study, and work experience. Secondly, influence analysis was conducted by calculating the mean scores of Likert-scale responses to determine which factors most strongly influenced the decision to work outside one's field of training. Finally, open-ended responses regarding potential solutions were thematically analyzed and synthesized, serving as a basis for policy recommendations presented in the following chapter.

3.5. Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the instrument was developed based on well-established research and academic literature. A pilot test was conducted with five individuals to assess the clarity, structure, and coherence of the survey items. Internal consistency was reviewed to confirm logical alignment within groups of related questions, ensuring that responses would be interpretable and reliable. Additionally, the study sought to include participants from a variety of academic backgrounds—such as economics, engineering, education, and the social sciences—thus supporting the internal generalizability of the findings within the scope of the research.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. General Information of Respondents

To analyze the employment mismatch among students in Vietnam, the study surveyed 120 individuals across three main groups: current students, graduates who are currently employed, and those pursuing an additional degree after prior work experience. Figure 4.1 shows the classification of respondents. The high proportion of students (59.2%) suggests that the sample primarily targets those preparing to enter the labor market. Meanwhile, the remaining 41% are individuals with work experience, providing practical insights that serve as a valuable basis for analyzing employment mismatch realities.

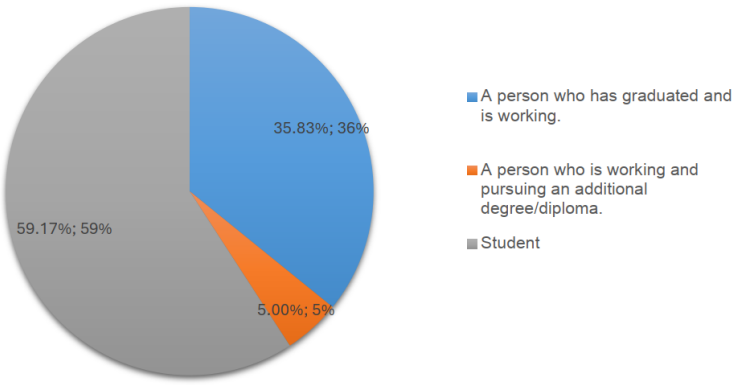


Figure 4.1: Classification of Respondents

Females represent a dominant portion of the sample (70.8%), which aligns with the current demographic trends in fields such as economics, social sciences, and education—areas with a high ratio of female students. This gender structure may influence job choices and mismatch rates due to factors such as gender norms, unequal job opportunities, and the gendered nature of certain professions in Vietnam (as shown in Figure 4.2).

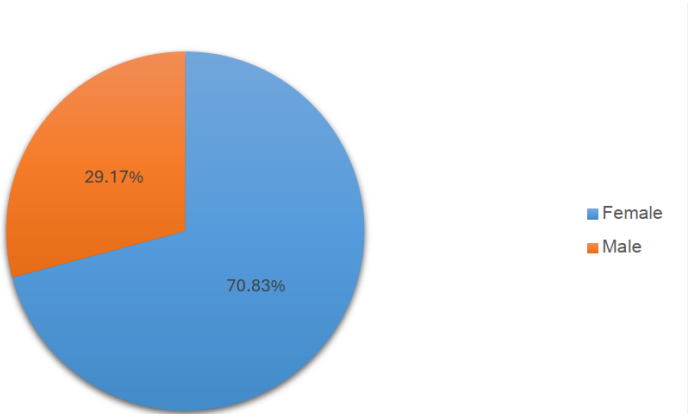


Figure 4.2: Gender Distribution

As shown in Figure 4.3, The dominance of the Economics – Finance group (79.17%) reflects the popular trend in higher education but also suggests higher susceptibility to job market competition, which increases the risk of employment mismatch. Fields such as Arts, Languages, and Education account for nearly 16%, representing areas with specialized skills but limited job openings. Without proper career orientation, graduates in these fields may face higher risks of occupational mismatch. Meanwhile, Engineering – Technology – IT only accounts for 4.17% of the sample—a paradox given the current shortage of skilled labor in these sectors. This illustrates a structural imbalance in educational choices, which is one of the environmental factors contributing to employment mismatch. According to the General Statistics Office (2023), the mismatch rate for graduates in Economics – Finance ranges from 35% to 40%, whereas over 80% of IT graduates are employed within their field.

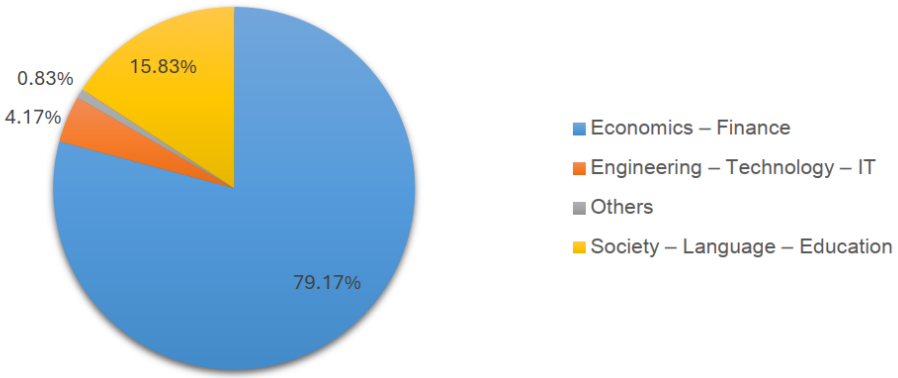


Figure 4.3: Field of Study

As shown in Figure 4.4, respondents with 6 months to under 2 years of experience account for the majority (55.83%), indicating that most participants have entered the labor market and are in the early stages of career development—an appropriate phase to assess employment mismatch. The group with less than 6 months of experience (21.67%) likely consists of recent graduates or those in probationary periods, who are more likely to switch jobs or industries. Those with 2–5 years of experience (17.50%) are generally more stable in their careers, making their responses valuable and reliable. The remaining 5% of respondents who have never worked offer perspectives from individuals preparing to join the workforce.

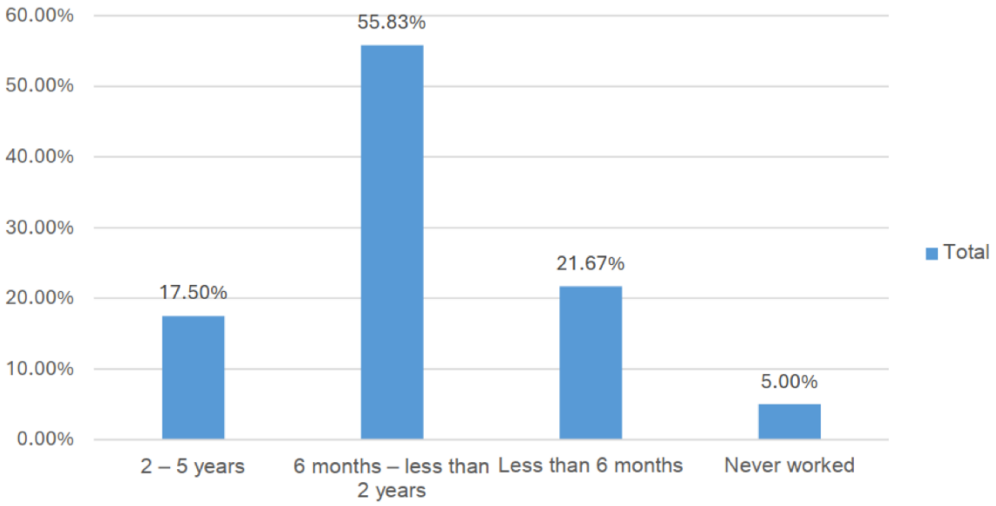


Figure 4.4: Work Experience Duration

4.2 Work Experience and Employment Duration

A majority of respondents (55%) are currently employed in a field that directly aligns with their academic major. This is a positive indicator, suggesting that over half of graduates are able to pursue careers in their trained discipline. 33.33% of respondents reported working in jobs that are somewhat related to their field of study. This implies a level of adaptability and flexibility in responding to labor market conditions. 10.83% are employed in jobs entirely unrelated to their academic background, which directly reflects the issue of employment mismatch. One respondent (0.84%) is unemployed. While the proportion is small, it raises a concern about employability and the potential mismatch between education and job market integration as shown in Table 4.1. According to Navigos Group (2022), 63% of graduates reported working outside of their trained field at least once within the first two years after graduation. However, the 10.83% reported in this study reflects the employment mismatch at a specific point in time, without accounting for job changes over time.

Table 4.1. Employment Status

Employment Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Working in the same field as their major	66	55.00%
Working in a related field	40	33.33%
Working in a completely unrelated field	13	10.83%
Unemployed	1	0.84%
Total	**120**	**100%**

As shown in Table 4.2, the most frequently cited reason for working outside one's trained field is “Greater interest in another field” (37 responses, 34.58%). This suggests a significant number of graduates experience a shift in passion or discover new interests post-graduation. This is an internal factor, not necessarily driven by labor market forces. The

second most common reason, cited by 21 respondents (19.63%), is that the salary in their trained field does not meet financial expectations, highlighting income-related dissatisfaction in some academic disciplines. High experience requirements (16 responses) and difficulty finding jobs in the trained field (12 responses) reflect structural challenges within the labor market, especially for recent graduates who often lack work experience. Notably, no respondents selected external pressure from family or jobrelated stress as their primary reasons. This indicates that the decision to pursue employment outside one's trained field is largely self-directed. Only 3 responses mentioned a lack of practical skills, implying that most graduates either feel confident in their academic training or may not fully perceive the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical job demands.

Table 4.2 Primary Reasons for Working Outside of Field of Study

Reason for Employment Mismatch	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total Responses (n = 107)
Greater interest in another field	37	34.58%
Insufficient salary in trained field	21	19.63%
High experience requirements in trained field	16	14.95%
Difficulty finding jobs in trained field	12	11.21%
Limited advancement opportunities in trained field	12	11.21%
Trained field is no longer market-relevant	4	3.74%
Lacking practical skills required for the job	3	2.80%
Currently working in trained field (other reason)	2	1.87%
Pressure from family/society	0	0.00%
Inability to handle job-related pressure	0	0.00%
Total	**107**	**100%**

Note: Participants could choose up to two reasons – total responses exceed the number of participants

4.3. Factors Influencing Employment Outside of Field of Study

To evaluate the degree of influence each factor has on the decision to work outside one's field of study, the study employed a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 – no influence, 5 – very strong influence). Table 4.3 presents the mean scores derived from 120 survey responses. The factor with the highest influence on career deviation is "Unfavorable working environment in the trained field" (Mean = 4.30). This suggests that many students, upon entering the actual work environment, experience a significant mismatch between expectations and reality, leading them to shift their career direction. The second most influential factor is "Shifting labor market trends" (Mean = 4.23), followed closely by "Entry-level salary does not meet financial needs" (Mean = 4.18). These reflect the impact of broader socioeconomic conditions and financial necessities, which compel graduates to prioritize market demand and income over alignment with their academic training. Other factors with relatively high influence include "Passion for a different career path" and "Lack of practical application in academic knowledge", both scoring 4.15. These results highlight the need for higher education institutions to modernize training methods, enhance practical learning opportunities, strengthen industry linkages, and provide early career counseling to students. On the other hand, "Family pressure or desire to follow traditional careers" received the lowest mean score (2.13), indicating that this is no longer a significant reason for employment mismatch. This may reflect the growing independence and autonomy of younger generations in making career choices.

In summary, the survey results reveal that employment outside one's field of study is driven by a wide range of factors—spanning personal motivations, educational system limitations, and labor market dynamics. These findings provide a crucial basis for stakeholders to reevaluate career guidance practices, improve curriculum relevance, and align skill development with real-world demands.

Table 4.3 Mean Scores of Influencing Factors

No.	Influencing Factor	Mean Score
1	Entry-level salary does not meet financial needs	4.18
2	Limited career advancement opportunities in the trained field	4.16
3	Shifting labor market trends	4.23
4	Unfavorable working environment in the trained field	4.30
5	Passion for a different career path	4.15
6	Lack of practical application in academic knowledge	4.15
7	Family pressure or desire to follow traditional careers	2.13

4.4. Respondents' Suggestions for Solutions

The most frequently recommended solution was "Improved career orientation at the university level", with 91 votes—accounting for approximately 75.8% of respondents. This indicates a significant gap in career counseling services in higher education, which may result in students choosing fields of study that are misaligned with their abilities, interests, or market demand—thereby increasing the likelihood of working outside their trained field after graduation. Ranked second was "Enhancing academic programs to better align with market needs", receiving 81 votes. Many participants expressed concern that current curricula are overly theoretical, outdated, and insufficiently responsive to evolving job market trends. Therefore, curriculum reform—emphasizing practicality, flexibility, and relevance—is considered essential to increase graduates' competitiveness. Other proposed solutions, such as "Strengthening university–employer linkages through internships" (37 votes) and "Supporting students in developing soft skills and career-related competencies" (21 votes), were also valued, albeit to a lesser extent. These responses reflect a recognized need for more comprehensive skill development, including early exposure to professional environments and improved communication, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities. The least selected option was "Promoting reskilling and upskilling programs", with only 18 votes. This suggests that such initiatives are not yet prioritized at the university level, and are more commonly associated with mid-career professional development, when workers begin to recognize misalignments between their skill sets and labor market demands.

In summary, the suggestions provided by respondents emphasize the need for coordinated efforts among universities, employers, and students. A particular focus should be placed on career guidance and curriculum reform, as these are perceived to be the most effective long-term strategies for minimizing employment mismatch among recent graduate

Table 4.4 Proposed Solutions by respondents

No.	Proposed Solution	Number of Votes
1	Improved career orientation at the university level	91
2	Enhancing academic programs to better align with market needs	81
3	Strengthening university–employer linkages through internships	37
4	Supporting students in developing soft skills and career-related competencies	21
5	Promoting reskilling and upskilling programs	18

4.5. Impacts of Working Outside the Field

Regarding the consequences of working outside one's field, participants expressed a range of perspectives on employment mismatch. Negative impacts cited included a loss of time due to adapting to a new professional domain and limited

opportunities for career advancement, often stemming from a lack of foundational knowledge or specialized expertise. However, positive impacts were also acknowledged, such as opportunities to acquire new skills and competencies, alongside broader perspectives and improved adaptability in diverse occupational environments. These insights suggest that employment mismatch is not inherently disadvantageous; with a proactive mindset and willingness to learn, individuals can successfully adapt and potentially uncover new interests or passions leading to fulfilling career paths.

4.6 Representative Comments from Participants

Selected Qualitative Insights: Participants offered insightful qualitative remarks revealing both individual attitudes and systemic challenges regarding employment mismatch. Comments such as "Working outside my field is okay if I learn new things and enjoy the job" highlight a pragmatic approach, while "Career guidance should start clearly from the first year of university, not just after graduation when students realize they are on the wrong track" and "Employers should expand internships and entry-level hiring since graduates lack experience and struggle to find jobs in their field" point to critical areas for improvement. These reflections demonstrate a growing realism and adaptability among young professionals, concurrently underscoring the urgent need for structural enhancements in career guidance, higher education curricula, and early employment opportunities. Overall, the feedback emphasizes that better alignment between academic training and labor market demands is essential for reducing skills mismatches and enhancing graduate employability.

4.7 Linkage to Theory and Research Objectives

The survey results align closely with the theoretical framework of employment mismatch, particularly the education-employment mismatch theory, which proved highly relevant to the surveyed population. The research successfully addressed all three objectives: identifying the prevalence and general status of employment mismatch among recent graduates, analyzing key contributing factors from individual, educational, and labor market perspectives, and collecting and synthesizing practical solutions proposed by participants to mitigate the mismatch. Overall, this chapter integrates both quantitative and qualitative insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of the employment mismatch phenomenon, bridging theoretical concepts with real-world observations, and offering meaningful contributions to both academic literature and practical policymaking.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on a survey of 120 participants, mainly students and recent graduates in Vietnam, this study has clarified the current situation and factors affecting the phenomenon of working outside one's field of study. Although most respondents work in their exact or related fields, the proportion of those working outside their major remains significant. The main reasons for this include the discrepancy between personal interests and the chosen major, lower-than-expected income, limited promotion opportunities, and high experience requirements from employers that recent graduates cannot meet. The study also found that working outside one's field is not entirely negative. Many participants view it as an opportunity to explore themselves, develop new skills, and broaden their career paths. However, this also highlights the urgent need for adjustments in higher education and career guidance to better align with labor market realities.

The central research question, "What factors influence the phenomenon of working outside the field of study among graduates in Vietnam?", was thoroughly explored through survey data and subsequent analysis, revealing a multifaceted set of contributing factors across four main dimensions. These include Personal Factors, such as individual preferences and aspirations often driven by newly discovered interests; Labor Market Factors, characterized by inadequate income levels and limited career progression within trained fields, prompting graduates to seek more rewarding alternatives; Educational System Factors, involving misalignment between academic curricula and job market requirements, combined with insufficient early-stage career guidance; and Employer-Related Factors, stemming from a shortage of internship opportunities and a prevalent demand for prior experience even for entry-level roles, which create significant barriers for fresh graduates. Collectively, these findings underscore the complex interplay between individual choices, systemic shortcomings, and external economic conditions that contribute to the trend of employment mismatch in Vietnam.

Based on the research findings, several recommendations are proposed to address employment mismatch among Vietnamese graduates, tailored to universities, students, and employers. Universities and training institutions should focus on curriculum reform by regularly updating academic programs to align with current labor market needs, while also providing enhanced career guidance through structured counseling from the first year of study to help students understand their fields, career pathways, and employer expectations. Strengthening industry collaboration via internships and practical placements will enable students to gain real-world experience and clearer professional orientation. For students

and graduates, proactive career planning is crucial; they should research their field, understand career prospects, and stay updated on labor market trends, embracing lifelong learning and skill development to remain adaptable. Employers and businesses are encouraged to adopt inclusive recruitment practices by reducing excessive experience requirements for entry-level positions and offering more internships and in-house training programs. Furthermore, active educational engagement, such as co-developing practice-oriented curricula with universities, will ensure better alignment with workplace demands and skill expectations.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of convenience sampling may have introduced selection bias, as participants self-selected into the study. This potentially limits the objectivity and representativeness of the findings. Second, the relatively small sample size of 120 respondents may constrain the generalizability of the results to the broader Vietnamese labour force. Third, since data were self-reported, they may be affected by misinterpretation of questions or social desirability bias, thus reducing the precision of the data collected. Finally, this study primarily utilized basic quantitative methods to survey young students and workers in Vietnam. Building upon these findings, future research could be expanded in several ways: by incorporating qualitative approaches through in-depth interviews to gain richer insights into individual experiences and motivations for working outside one's field of study; by conducting regional and disciplinary analyses to examine differences across regions or specific academic majors, thereby revealing more nuanced patterns and contextual factors influencing employment mismatch; and by implementing longitudinal studies to track long-term career transitions, offering a better understanding of how workers adapt over time and the evolving nature of employment mismatch in response to changes in the labor market.

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