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Vietnam's Higher Education in the Age of AI: Redefining Career Preparation for the Next Generation of Students

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Abstract
The rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is profoundly transforming the global labor market, driving major shifts in required skills, working methods, and recruitment standards across nearly all professional domains. In this context, Vietnam's higher education system faces an urgent imperative to reshape its approach to preparing students -the country's future workforce - for an AI-driven world.
This study analyzes the impact of AI on the nature of work and career competencies and evaluates the current career readiness of Vietnamese university students amid digital transformation. While many students in Vietnam possess strong academic backgrounds, foreign language proficiency, and cross-cultural adaptability, they lack essential digital skills, AI literacy, experience working in digital environments, and career self-management capabilities.
Employing qualitative research and thematic content analysis from academic literature, labor market reports, and education policy documents, the study identifies key challenges hindering students' career transition in the age of AI.
The article proposes strategic recommendations for three primary stakeholder groups: universities, students, and employers. These include interdisciplinary curriculum reform, promoting self-directed digital learning, developing online personal branding, and enhancing university-industry collaboration in practical training. The ultimate goal is to nurture a new generation of graduates who are agile, tech-savvy, and adaptable to career volatility driven by AI, thereby contributing to the quality of Vietnam's human capital in the digital era.

Keywords: Career Preparation, Vietnamese University Students, Artificial Intelligence, Digital Skills, Higher Education, Labor Market, Career Adaptability, Educational Innovation

Introduction

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping the global employment landscape. Breakthroughs in machine learning, natural language processing, and intelligent process automation are not only creating new types of jobs but also significantly transforming the nature of traditional work. As a result, employability today increasingly depends not just on academic qualifications, but also on digital adaptability, lifelong learning capabilities, and creative thinking in tech-driven environments.

In Vietnam, university graduates - particularly the younger generation raised in the digital age - are facing entirely new demands from the labor market. While many students demonstrate solid academic performance, strong language skills, and global integration capabilities, they often fall short in digital competencies, experience in tech-enabled workplaces, and career development strategies aligned with AI trends. This points to a widening gap between what higher education currently produces and what the digital economy requires. Thus, redefining career preparation is not only an individual necessity but a strategic imperative for Vietnam's entire higher education system. Outdated career competency frameworks can no longer serve a generation learning and working in a world powered by data, automation, and artificial intelligence.

This paper seeks to clarify how AI is transforming labor market demands and the new skillsets expected of young workers. It also evaluates Vietnamese students' career readiness and provides strategic directions for universities, students, and employers to collaborate in preparing a future-ready workforce - one that is knowledgeable, flexible, and capable of navigating the evolving world of work driven by AI.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach combined with thematic content analysis to explore the impact of AI on Vietnamese university students' employability and to identify strategic directions for enhancing career preparation in a rapidly evolving labor market.

Data were collected from three main sources:

1. **Academic literature:** A synthesis and analysis of peer-reviewed articles published between 2019-2024, focusing on employability, digital skills, interdisciplinary training, and the impact of AI on higher education.
2. **Policy documents:** Content analysis of Vietnam's education and human resource development policies (e.g., National Digital Transformation Strategy in Education, Project 1665 on student entrepreneurship support, national occupational skill frameworks), and labor market reports from the Ministry of Labor, WEF, LinkedIn, McKinsey, and the World Bank.
3. **Secondary data from educational practices:** Case studies and experiential data from leading universities in Vietnam, including internship programs, university-industry collaboration projects, integrated digital skill modules, and curriculum innovations.

The analysis followed these steps:

- **Initial coding** of content related to career skills, the role of AI, graduate learning outcomes, and labor market expectations.
- **Thematic grouping** based on recurrence and relevance to employability in the digital era, including: digital skills, lifelong learning, adaptability, personal branding, and employer engagement.
- **Theoretical triangulation** with employability frameworks, notably those by Yorke (2006), Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007), and Moreau & Leathwood (2006).

This qualitative approach offers a flexible yet in-depth understanding of how skillsets and career strategies are evolving under AI, enabling the development of system-level, actionable recommendations for Vietnam's higher education sector.

Findings

The combined analysis from academic, policy, and educational practice sources indicates that Vietnamese university students are undergoing a critical transition in career preparation. As AI reshapes job structures and skill requirements, four major findings emerge:

Skill Gaps Between University Training and Market Demands

Despite the academic strengths of many students - particularly those at top-tier institutions - with critical thinking and foreign language proficiency (Pham & Hoang, 2023) [8], they still lack essential digital and AI-related skills. These include basic automation tools, data analysis, and machine learning literacy. Moreover, students are often unprepared for modern soft skills such as digital collaboration, remote teamwork, and self-regulation in flexible work environments (Nguyen *et al*., 2023) [5].

Lack of Career Self-Management and Personal Branding Skills

Many students remain reliant on institutional career services and are not proactive in building their CVs, online portfolios, or job search strategies through digital platforms. Core skills such as video interviews, professional email writing, and online networking are often underdeveloped due to limited coverage in formal curricula (Doan & Le, 2021) [2].

Opportunities and Challenges of Remote Work and Global Labor Markets

AI and digital platforms are unlocking global job opportunities for Vietnamese students in fields such as translation, customer support, data analytics, and digital content creation. However, to seize these opportunities, students must be trained in remote work competencies, collaborative tools like Notion, Slack, Trello, and Google Workspace, as well as international labor laws, time management, and cross-cultural work practices (Vu & Nguyen, 2024) [10].

Weak University-Industry Linkages

Many Vietnamese university programs are still overly theoretical, lacking integration with real-world experience through interdisciplinary projects, guided internships, or capstone projects aligned with employer needs. As a result, graduates are often perceived by employers as unprepared for immediate employment due to insufficient practical experience, professional communication, problem-solving, and technological adaptability (World Bank, 2021; Trinh *et al*., 2023) [11, 9].

Discussion

The research findings highlight a significant gap between the current higher education curriculum in Vietnam and the emerging competency requirements of the labor market in the era of Artificial Intelligence. This section provides an in-depth analysis of three key areas that must be restructured to enhance the career readiness of a new generation of students:

Restructuring university curricula toward interdisciplinarity and flexibility

Artificial Intelligence is increasingly blurring the boundaries between professional fields, requiring students not only to possess in-depth domain expertise but also to develop interdisciplinary skills such as data literacy, digital communication, digital management, and design thinking. Universities should develop integrated curricula across disciplines (e.g., economics + data analytics; language studies + AI communication), while promoting flexible learning models that enable students to personalize their academic pathways in alignment with their career aspirations in the digital age (World Economic Forum, 2023) [12].

Promoting self-directed learning and personal digital transformation

The ability to learn independently and keep pace with rapidly evolving technologies has become a survival skill in the AI era. Students should be trained to use online learning platforms (e.g., Coursera, Udemy, LinkedIn Learning), AI-powered study tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Copilot), and to develop competencies in information literacy and effective time management. In addition, institutions should incorporate into their curricula modules on lifelong learning, critical thinking, and self-management in the digital space (Pham & Hoang, 2023) [8].

Strengthening connections with industry and real-world work environments

To ensure students are job-ready upon graduation, there must be stronger collaboration between universities and enterprises in practice-based education. This includes: organizing internships with professional supervision, embedding real-world business problems into teaching, co-designing courses with entrepreneurs and AI experts, and hosting problem-solving competitions (e.g., hackathons, project showcases). Furthermore, students should be involved in mentoring programs, career counseling, and professional coaching in job interview skills, CV writing, and digital personal branding to maximize their employability (Nguyen *et al*., 2023; Trinh *et al*., 2023) [5, 9].

Developing global competencies and remote work readiness

Cross-border career opportunities are increasingly prevalent in the digital economy. As such, it is essential to equip students with intercultural communication skills, the ability to work in virtual teams, and a strong understanding of global professional ethics. Vietnamese higher education should proactively internationalize curricula and collaborate with global universities and corporations to provide students with practical international exposure and to expand their global career networks (Vu & Nguyen, 2024) [10].

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence is fundamentally reshaping the entire employment ecosystem - from the nature of work and required skill sets to job-seeking strategies and recruitment processes. In this context, Vietnamese university students must be equipped not only with academic knowledge but also with adaptive thinking, digital capabilities, lifelong learning skills, and the ability to work in interdisciplinary and global environments.

The findings of this study indicate that, although Vietnamese students - especially those from internationally oriented universities - possess notable strengths in foreign language proficiency, intercultural communication, and a growth mindset, there remain significant gaps in essential career skills for the AI era. The lack of alignment between curricula and real-world labor market demands, coupled with insufficient career guidance and experiential learning opportunities, are core reasons why many students feel unprepared for the future of work.

To address these challenges, the study proposes three strategic directions:

1. **Innovate higher education** by adopting interdisciplinary, flexible, and digital-first approaches, empowering students to develop comprehensive competencies for the AI era.
2. **Foster stronger university–industry collaboration** to create practical career pathways and enhance students' work-based learning experiences.
3. **Promote a culture of lifelong learning and proactive career ownership**, positioning students as active agents in their career development journeys.

In the future, Vietnamese higher education must transcend traditional training models and move toward building an innovative, open, and practice-integrated learning ecosystem. Only then can the next generation of students become agile, tech-savvy professionals who are fully equipped to adapt to AI-driven transformations - not only to *seek employment* but to *create employment* in a proactive and sustainable manner.

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