

Improving the quality of education in Korean Studies and Korean Language through the analysis of graduates' employment outcomes

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Abstract:

Approximately 50% of universities in Vietnam offer formal education in Korean Studies and Korean Language and Culture, with a significant concentration of prominent institutions in this discipline located in the southern region, particularly in Ho Chi Minh city. However, studies on the employment outcomes of graduates majoring in Korean-related disciplines are scarce, especially in the context of Ho Chi Minh city. Existing research often lacks comprehensive analyses that integrate the perspectives of both employers and graduates, alongside actionable recommendations for enhancing instructional standards in specific disciplines within training institutions. This study provides an overview of the employment landscape for graduates specialising in Korean Studies from universities and colleges in Ho Chi Minh city in recent years. Additionally, it incorporates the perspectives of employers who recruit graduates from Korean-related majors and the feedback of alumni who have undergone training in these disciplines, offering insights for improving the quality of education and alignment with labour market needs.

Keywords: employment, graduates, graduates employment in Ho Chi Minh city, Korean Languages and Cultures students, Korean studies students.

Classification numbers: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3

1. Introduction

The 2023 Policy Forum on Youth Employment released preliminary statistics on the employment status of Vietnamese youth, particularly those aged 15-24. In the first quarter of 2023, the youth unemployment rate stood at 7.61%, which was 3.38 times higher than the national average of 2.25%, with one in ten young people unemployed. Nevertheless, the forum noted that the number of young workers remains three times higher than that of older groups, highlighting the critical role of youth in the workforce. The forum also warned that youth unemployment poses a significant challenge to the Vietnamese economy [1].

Despite this, employment prospects for graduates specialising in Korean Studies and Korean Language and Cultures remain promising, bolstered by robust Vietnam-Korea cooperation. Over the past decade, this partnership has expanded across various sectors. In 2022, Korea invested over 80 billion USD in Vietnam, maintaining its position as the country's largest foreign investor. That same year, the two nations elevated their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, creating new avenues for collaboration [2]. Consequently, graduates with expertise in Korean Studies or Korean Languages and Cultures enjoy access to numerous attractive career opportunities.

Regarding the academic landscape, 2022 statistics indicate that 51 universities in Vietnam offer programmes in Korean Studies and Korean Language and Cultures, with expectations for continued growth. More than half of these institutions are located in the southern region, reflecting a rapid expansion in training facilities [3]. This surge suggests a substantial pool of graduates entering the job market both now and in the coming years. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the employment outcomes of graduates in Korean Studies and Korean Languages and Cultures, particularly in the southern region, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing training programmes and ensure alignment with labour market demands.

2. Literature review

Recent research on graduates' employment status has primarily explored job opportunities and causes of unemployment, categorised by industries such as economics, engineering, and education. Studies often examine the employment conditions and skills required for specific disciplines at particular universities. For instance, P.T.N. Khuyen, et al. (2016) [4] analysed the employment status and essential skills of business administration graduates from Can Tho University. Similarly, D.H. Thang (2021) [5]'s research, along with the 2023 employment status survey report from the

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International University, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, provided insights into the job suitability of graduates from Trade Union University and the International University [6].

Research by N.V. Canh, et al. (2021) [7] assessed the employment outcomes of Dong Thap University graduates one year after graduation. Their findings revealed that the majority of university students (70-90%) secure employment, with those achieving outstanding grades demonstrating a higher likelihood of finding jobs. Graduates are more likely to work in the private sector than in the public sector, and between 40 and 60% find jobs related to their fields of study. Employability is influenced by various skills, including teamwork, self-management, communication, sales, leadership, and IT proficiency.

In a 2015 poll conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), recruiters from major U.S. companies, such as IBM, Seagate Technology, and Chevron, identified the top ten skills they sought in graduates, including data analysis, job-specific knowledge, software proficiency, report writing, sales ability, planning and organisation, collaboration, decision-making, verbal communication, and influencing skills [8]. By 2023, however, the focus had shifted towards competencies such as analytical thinking, creative thinking, curiosity, lifelong learning, and technological expertise, as highlighted in the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report [9]. Additionally, Pearson's 2023 research identified leadership, teamwork, communication, attention to detail, and customer service as in-demand "soft skills" [10]. NACE's 2023 poll emphasised problem-solving, teamwork, written communication, work ethic, and adaptability as crucial attributes for graduates [11].

Studies on Korean Studies and Korean Language education in Vietnamese universities have primarily addressed the current state and potential improvements in these fields. K.L. Bui, et al. (2014) [12] highlighted the increasing demand for Korean language education in Vietnam, which has led to collaborations with the Korean government to establish Sejong Centres, with 11 centres operational by 2014. However, a key challenge remains the shortage of highly qualified instructors, particularly those with doctorates.

T.T. Huong (2020) [13]'s research observed that while most Korean Studies programmes are concentrated in Ho Chi Minh city, universities in the northern region place greater emphasis on Korean Language and Culture. Ho Chi Minh city-based programmes tend to prioritise job training and study abroad opportunities over academic research. Generally, Vietnamese universities focus heavily on Korean language education, with graduate employment rates consistently exceeding 90%. However, these institutions rely primarily on textbooks from Korean universities and lack theoretical texts addressing "Korean from a Linguistics Perspective" or broader "Korean Studies" topics.

C.T.H. Bac, et al. (2022) [14] study on Korean Studies courses at the University of Foreign Languages, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, found that all students, irrespective

of their training system (high-quality, standard, or pedagogical), are required to enrol in Korean Studies courses. Korean Studies majors undertake a greater number of these courses compared to other students, such as those specialising in translation. Many non-Korean Studies students reported that the course content was excessively advanced for their skill levels.

A study by L.T.V. Ha, et al. (2022) [15] explored the impact of COVID-19 on employment for graduates from Korean-related majors in Hanoi, revealing a sharp decline in job placements during the pandemic. This research attributed unemployment to insufficient training and job mismatches but focused primarily on the pandemic period (2020-2021), without addressing long-term trends. D.T. Hang, et al. (2017) [16] investigated the employment status of Korean Language graduates, finding that 54.8% were employed in electronics manufacturing, which highlighted a discrepancy between students' preferred and actual job sectors. However, this study was based primarily on student perspectives rather than those of employers.

This review identifies a significant research gap regarding the employment outcomes of Korean Studies graduates, particularly in the southern region and Ho Chi Minh city. Existing studies lack a robust connection between employment analyses and the improvement of training programmes. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview method, involving both graduates and employers, has not been widely employed. Most research relies on questionnaires and descriptive statistics.

To address this gap, the current study aims to investigate the employment status of Korean Studies and Korean Language graduates in Ho Chi Minh city. Additionally, interviews with recruiting companies will provide a deeper understanding of employer needs and expectations. As Vietnam-Korea relations continue to grow and the number of graduates in Korean-related fields increases - over 50% of universities offering these majors are located in the southern region, particularly in Ho Chi Minh city, this research seeks to bridge the gap between university training and employer demands. It aspires to offer practical insights and serve as a valuable resource for training institutions both locally and nationally.

3. Research objectives and methods

The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations for modernising the curriculum and improving the quality of education for Korean Studies and Korean Language and Culture majors. The research focuses on graduates from Ho Chi Minh city between 2014 and 2019 (four-year regular programmes) and examines their employment outcomes from 2018 to 2023. Data were collected through surveys of hiring companies and recent graduates, focusing on criteria such as office skills, soft skills, and foreign language proficiency that influence job-search success. The research team also conducted semi-structured interviews with these groups. The findings will be compared with the current training programmes to propose improvements to education quality and enhance employment opportunities in the field.

This study addresses three key objectives:

1. Surveying the employment status of students majoring in Korean-related fields at universities in Ho Chi Minh city.
2. Conducting semi-structured interviews with students and employers regarding current career outcomes, training orientations, and recruitment needs.
3. Analysing employment trends among these graduates to identify discrepancies between training programmes and stakeholder expectations, and proposing adjustments to curricula and teaching methods to improve education quality and strengthen the professional capacity of teaching staff.

A mixed-methods research approach was adopted, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection within a theoretical framework to assess the employment outcomes of university graduates. The methodology, commonly employed by universities nationwide, included a questionnaire survey to collect quantitative data and semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative insights. These interviews explored students' perspectives on their university training and captured the views of both employers and students regarding plans to improve the quality of education to meet labour market demands. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques were utilised to effectively identify and engage relevant participants.

This study is underpinned by Consensus Theory [17], which emphasises the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, faculty, universities, and policymakers to foster societal harmony and leverage education as a tool for socio-economic development. Additionally, it incorporates the framework proposed by M.J. Alam, et al. (2024) [18], which advocates for aligning academic programmes with labour market demands through industry collaboration, skill development, and active stakeholder engagement. By integrating these approaches, the study examines the relationship between university curricula in Korean-related majors and employment outcomes, addressing both societal and market-oriented dimensions of education. The Analytical Framework underpinning this study is depicted in Fig 1.

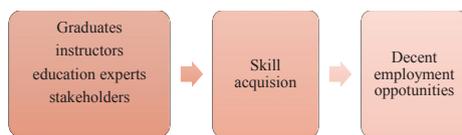


Fig. 1. Analytical framework.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Description of the study sample

The study, conducted in 2024, collected 97 questionnaire responses, of which 4 were deemed invalid, resulting in 93 valid responses for analysis. This accounts for only 46.5% of the initial target of 200 students. Most responses were from students of the 2018 and 2019 cohorts. Regarding graduation timelines, 90.7% of respondents graduated on time or earlier (within four years), while 9.3% graduated after five years.

Demographically, the sample was predominantly female (85.6%) and largely from the 2019 cohort (63.9%), with the vast majority (91.8%) graduating from a four-year university system. Academic performance was strong, with 51.5% graduating with “Good” and 33% with “Excellent” marks. In terms of employment, 74.1% of graduates were employed, primarily in private enterprises (34%) and foreign companies (28.9%). A notable trend was the prevalence in freelance roles (32%) and self-employment (2.1%), indicating an increase in entrepreneurial pursuits among these graduates. Despite the high employment rate, a 25.9% unemployment rate suggests challenges in securing full-time, aspiration-aligned positions.

Regarding job placement, a significant 68.5% of graduates secured their first job within six months of graduation, underscoring strong market demand for their skills... Furthermore, an 11% promotion rate to management within five years indicates favourable career advancement opportunities within this field. However, job satisfaction was lower (52.5% satisfied or very satisfied) compared to previous studies (75-85%). Financially, over 46% of graduates earned above Ho Chi Minh city’s average monthly income of 9.3 million VND [19], suggesting favourable initial salaries. However, a notable 37.1% of graduates earn only 5-10 million VND, a significantly lower proportion compared to a 2021 study in which 80% of similar graduates earned over 10 million VND, raising concerns about potential market saturation for Korean-related jobs in Ho Chi Minh city.

The study also highlighted skill gaps and a lack of suitable opportunities among unemployed graduates, with over 80% believing they lacked sufficient skills. While 69.1% worked within their field, the reasons for unemployment highlight a crucial mismatch between university training and current labor market demands, emphasising the need for better curriculum alignment with industry requirements.

4.2. Assessment evaluation of the training program from the perspective of graduates

Only 18.6% of graduates believed their university education fully met job requirements, while 79.4% felt it partially met them, and 2% stated it did not meet them at all. This highlights a significant gap between training and actual job demands, emphasising the need for Korean-related training institutions in Ho Chi Minh city to align their programmes more closely with market needs.

Graduates rated the training objectives and programmes positively ($M > 3$, standard deviation < 1), indicating overall satisfaction with Korean-related majors. However, 16.3% “strongly disagreed” or “disagreed” that the balance between theory and practice was reasonable ($M = 3.46$), representing the highest level of disagreement among evaluations. This underscores the need for improvement in this area, compared to factors such as training objectives and programme flexibility. Graduates expressed high satisfaction ($M > 4.2$) with lecturers’ professional qualifications, teaching methods, materials, and enthusiasm, appreciating their expertise and discipline. Nonetheless, 3.1% disagreed that lecturers were enthusiastic

and supportive, with some noting insufficient engagement and ineffective communication. As Vietnam moves towards a liberal education model, these findings highlight the need for lecturers in Korean-related majors to innovate teaching methods and reassess their approaches to teacher-student engagement.

Testing and evaluation methods received high ratings, with average scores exceeding 4.1 ($M > 4.1$), and over 80% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with their objectivity and diversity. While the overall rating of the training programme was positive ($M > 3.7$), 4-7% of graduates expressed dissatisfaction with the programme's ability to meet professional knowledge and skill requirements. Similarly, 79.4% of graduates felt their education only partially met job market demands, highlighting a need for institutions to better align programmes with market requirements through detailed surveys.

Evaluations of management and training services showed high averages ($M > 3.8$), but 3.1-7.2% of graduates were dissatisfied with training management effectiveness and the availability of career counselling activities. Regarding facilities, 9.3% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction, particularly with library resources and the availability of reference materials on Korean culture and language. This reflects a lack of updated resources and limited access to materials in Korean and Vietnamese, creating a notable gap compared to Korean institutions. Improving physical and online resource offerings remains a critical area for universities in Ho Chi Minh city.

4.3. Assessment of training quality from the perspective of recruiting units

To gain a comprehensive understanding of training quality based on graduate outcomes, the study surveyed 16 representatives from various sectors, including production/engineering, trade and services, information technology, education and vocational training, non-profit organisations, banking and finance, and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG). These organisations recruit graduates majoring in Korean Studies or Korean Language and Culture in Ho Chi Minh city. Among the respondents, 68.7% were members of recruitment committees. The majority were at management levels and played significant roles in personnel recruitment decisions, making their feedback representative of industry perspectives on the quality of Korean-related graduates. Notably, 81.3% of the representatives were themselves graduates of Korean-related majors, underscoring the strong community connections and traditional ties within this field.

The recruiting units were categorised into five types: state-owned organisations, domestic private enterprises, foreign enterprises, non-governmental organisations, and educational institutions. The results showed that 55.6% of representatives were from foreign-invested enterprises, 33.3% from domestic private enterprises, and 11.1% from educational institutions. No representatives were from state-owned or non-governmental organisations. These findings indicate that private and foreign enterprises, especially Korean companies, dominate the recruitment of Korean-related graduates, aligning with the statistic that over 60% of graduates are employed in these sectors.

Regarding the average tenure of graduates, 44.4% of recruiting units employed graduates for less than one year, 38.9% for 2-4 years, 16.7% for less than six months, and none for more than four years. Additionally, 44.4% of these enterprises had signed cooperation agreements with Korean-related schools or programmes, while 55.6% had not. This demonstrates that nearly half of the recruiting organisations maintain direct collaborations with training institutions, often due to alumni networks within the field. Korean enterprises investing in Vietnam frequently prefer direct engagement with training institutions over recruitment agencies. Therefore, training units should develop strategies to enhance partnerships with enterprises, which could increase employment opportunities for graduates.

The survey also revealed a preference for hiring graduates from Korean Studies (44.4%) and Korean Language and Culture (38.9%) majors, with only 16.7% employing individuals holding Korean language certificates from other fields. In terms of job assignments, 50% of recruits were placed in translation, interpretation, or assistant roles, 38.9% in general office positions, and 11.1% as customer consultants, reflecting the high demand for translation and interpretation services in Korean-related industries.

Regarding additional training courses for graduates, 56.8% of enterprises reported providing internal training for professional knowledge and skills, 27.8% required no additional courses, and only 11.1% offered soft skills training. No respondents indicated a need for IT skills training, suggesting that enterprises focus on addressing practical skill gaps internally while expecting graduates to independently improve their performance. This also implies that enterprises expect Korean language proficiency and other professional skills to be adequately addressed within university programmes. The lack of emphasis on IT skills suggests these are not currently a priority in the Korean-related sector, with basic writing skills deemed sufficient.

Recruiting units expressed high satisfaction with the quality of Korean-related graduates ($M > 4.00$), particularly in their ability to apply specialised knowledge, adapt to work environments, and demonstrate career development potential. Key competencies such as foreign language proficiency, discipline, work ethic, and communication skills received positive evaluations, with over 70% agreement among respondents. However, there was significant hesitation regarding "research capacity" (44.4% hesitant) and "career orientation before employment" (50% hesitant). This aligns with findings that 79.4% of graduates felt their university education only partially met job requirements, and 50% required additional certifications to secure employment. These results highlight the need for better career orientation within training programmes, a challenge that extends across many universities in Vietnam, not just those offering Korean-related majors.

Recent statistics underscore the broader challenges faced by graduates in the humanities and social sciences. A study by the International University, as reported by Dai Doan Ket newspaper, found that 21.43% of graduates work in unrelated

fields, with this figure exceeding 60% in disciplines such as humanities, natural sciences, and agriculture. Graduates in unrelated fields earn less on average than their counterparts in relevant roles [20]. Similarly, a survey by the University of Social Sciences and Humanities revealed that 70% of graduates lacked clear career orientation after graduation [21]. This lack of direction increases the number of graduates working outside their fields and contributes to lower average incomes. These findings underscore the urgent need for lecturers and training units to prioritise career orientation and self-development guidance for students.

4.4. Suggestions for improving the training quality of Korean-related major graduates and recruiting units

Based on evaluations of graduate satisfaction with Korean-related training programmes in Ho Chi Minh city and assessments by recruiting units regarding graduate quality, the research team conducted semi-structured interviews with graduates to identify solutions for improving training quality. A 5-point Likert scale survey was also combined with semi-structured interviews involving recruiting units to gather comprehensive insights.

Proposals for improving the training quality of students in Korean-related majors: Responses to the question, “Which subjects in the training programme are not essential and should have their duration reduced (based on actual job requirements)?” predominantly indicated that non-core subjects, such as general education courses or those centred on Korean culture and history, occupy an excessive portion of the students’ course load. These subjects are perceived as less relevant to the specialised practical skills required in the job market, such as Korean language proficiency, English language skills, and translation and interpretation competencies.

Student feedback reveals a consistent dissatisfaction with the practical applicability of their academic program. A central critique revolves around the curriculum’s perceived imbalance, with an excessive focus on abstract general subjects (e.g. philosophy, sociology) and insufficient emphasis on career-specific skills. Student A, a 4-year degree course graduate, remarked that “I found that general subjects... are very abstract, which makes it challenging to understand and apply them to future careers. The fact that students are required to study an excessive number of general courses while receiving insufficient education in areas that enhance their knowledge and abilities for future careers... makes it difficult for me to accept this reality”. This sentiment underscores a fundamental concern about the curriculum’s direct utility for professional pathways.

Furthermore, students reported that the content of general subjects is often outdated, failing to reflect current realities and subsequently diminishing engagement and motivation. Student B, also a 4-year degree course graduate, observed, “I found that the content of the general subjects is rarely updated during my studies. Most of it reuses outdated information, which makes it hard for students to feel interested or connect the

knowledge with current realities, leading to a loss of motivation” This suggests a need for dynamic curriculum development that incorporates contemporary issues and practical applications.

A strong consensus emerged among students regarding the necessity for more intensive training in core Korean language skills, especially listening and speaking, as well as specialised courses in translation and interpretation. Student C highlighted this, stating, “Most students wish to study translation and interpretation skills more in-depth during their final year due to their relevance for future employment. Therefore, I found it unreasonable that the school includes subjects unrelated to our registered courses, like Korean Language Teaching, which leaves students feeling disappointed with the training program”. This indicates a perceived mismatch between student career aspirations and the program’s offerings. Students also called for practical courses covering Korean corporate culture and communication etiquette, emphasising the need for “reflex skills when talking to Koreans” (Student B) and advocating for instructors to “communicate with students in Korean rather than Vietnamese” (Student A) to foster immersive learning.

To improve training quality, many students believe that faculty and institutions should actively listen to and incorporate their feedback, particularly regarding their semester experiences, rather than relying solely on formal feedback mechanisms. There is also strong support for increasing career guidance activities, offering internships with Korean-Vietnamese components, and facilitating practical exchange programmes between Vietnam and Korea. Additionally, students raised concerns about the inadequate transfer of credits for courses completed during exchanges in Korea, emphasising the need for training institutions to address this issue effectively.

Beyond curriculum content, graduates also expressed concerns regarding administrative processes and assessment methodologies. A notable critique pertained to the forced transition to online learning for specialised subjects. One graduate articulated this sentiment, stating that “the online learning method implemented in the recent past is really ineffective and not suitable for specialised subjects” (Student E, 4-year degree course graduate). This highlights a perceived disconnect between pedagogical methods and the specific requirements of in-depth Korean Studies and Language training, suggesting a need for educational institutions to more actively solicit and integrate student feedback on such policy decisions.

Furthermore, administrative inefficiencies were a significant source of frustration. Delays in credit transfers for students participating in exchange programs were particularly problematic, leading to disruptions in course enrollment and, in some cases, delayed graduation. As one student observed, “the Training and Finance departments... always take a long time to address issues with credit transfers for students participating in exchange programs abroad”. (Student B), such procedural shortcomings underscore the necessity for streamlined administrative processes to support student mobility and timely academic progression.

Additionally, a significant recommendation from students focused on enhancing practical learning and cultural immersion. Graduates proposed implementing more regular “practical sessions, experiences and cultural exchanges between Vietnamese and Korean students” to facilitate real-world Korean language communication. They also advocated for “hands-on exercises relating to dishwashing, utensils, and other aspects of Korean culture” to deepen cultural understanding through experiential learning. Crucially, there was a strong call for “more programs to support students to have the opportunity to practice and intern in related fields” (Student C), aiming to bridge the gap between academic learning and professional readiness by providing clearer career orientation and practical experience.

Finally, graduates advocated for the implementation of more rigorous academic standards and assessment criteria across semesters. A clear demand emerged for increased challenge in coursework and examinations, aimed at fostering greater competitiveness among students. As one graduate articulated, “instructors and lecturers at schools ought to make their classes and exams more challenging” (Student E), arguing that overly simplistic assessments lead to inflated grades that may not accurately reflect students’ true skill levels. This feedback underscores a desire for an academic environment that genuinely prepares graduates with the competencies required to excel in a competitive job market. Concurrently, there is a significant demand for modifying or adding foreign language skill courses to explicitly focus on training for relevant standardised certifications, such as TOPIK, TOEIC, and IELTS. Such adjustments are perceived as offering direct practical benefits for both enhancing job application prospects and facilitating postgraduate study opportunities.

Suggestions to improve the training quality of units recruiting students majoring in Korean-related majors: Enterprise representatives recruiting graduates with Korean-related majors largely supported proposals for enhancing training quality ($M > 4.0$), emphasising the critical need for closer collaboration with businesses and updated professional requirements. Over 80% agreed with research proposals, while 66.7% specifically supported joint scientific research and work projects to provide practical experience. The survey highlighted pervasive concerns among recruiters regarding declining foreign language skills (both Korean and English), deficiencies in soft skills, and a lack of clear career orientation among graduates, indicating significant gaps in current training and quality control.

Recruiters consistently expressed concerns regarding the observed decline in foreign language proficiency, encompassing both Korean and English, among recent graduates. As evidenced by one recruiter’s observation, “Recent graduates show very weak Korean and other foreign language skills, particularly in English, along with little practical experience, lack of orientation, and low motivation. Their ability to apply knowledge in real work situations is significantly weaker than what is assessed during recruitment sessions” (Recruiter 1). This highlights a fundamental discrepancy between academic

preparation and the linguistic competencies demanded by the professional environment, particularly in contexts requiring direct communication with Korean leadership. Furthermore, enterprises frequently noted deficiencies in graduates’ soft skills and a generalised “lack of future orientation” (Recruiter 3). Such observations suggest that graduates often “do not understand what they want and do not have a clear direction” (Recruiter 3), which can contribute to subsequent job dissatisfaction and premature attrition within the workforce.

In response to these perceived quality gaps, recruitment departments strongly advocated for more opportunities for students to engage with real business environments and participate in internships. They emphasised the necessity for academic institutions to conduct systematic surveys on hiring needs, understand specific career requirements for Korean-related majors, and forge stronger alliances with companies in the sector. Recruiters suggested that cultivating stronger “Vietnam-Korea connection programs, organising business exchanges, and establishing clubs” could enhance student proactivity and communication skills (Recruiter 4). Additionally, establishing active alumni organisations was proposed as a more effective channel for connecting students with job opportunities and fostering industry partnerships. Finally, there was a call for lecturers to guide students in “exploiting Korean data sources outside of the classroom” (Recruiter 2), promoting more practical and self-directed learning to ensure graduates possess competencies beyond basic communication for professional settings. These recommendations collectively stress the imperative for a more industry-integrated and practically oriented educational framework to better meet employer expectations.

5. Recommendations

To enhance the quality of education in Korean-related majors, this study suggests that universities focus on the following four areas: prioritising career orientation and guidance, job market demand-oriented curriculum improvement, strengthening collaboration with industry, and enhancing alumni connections and support activities.

5.1. Prioritising career orientation and guidance

Both students and recruiting companies emphasised the importance of stronger career advising during university studies. Employers observed that students pursuing careers related to Korea often lack clear career direction, leading to insecurity and inadequate preparation during the hiring process. Without clear objectives, students face challenges in securing employment, as over 76% of employers prefer candidates with 1-2 years of experience, according to TopCV’s 2023 research [22]. This lack of orientation results in demotivation, poorer academic performance, and a higher percentage of graduates working outside their field, which lowers their salaries and delays skill development. The report recommends integrating career mentoring into education, focusing on essential topics such as social insurance, tax awareness, labour market trends, and Korean-Vietnamese corporate culture. This proactive approach

would better prepare students for the job market, increasing their employability and confidence.

5.2. Job market demand-oriented curriculum improvement

Curriculum improvement should aim to equip students with the knowledge and skills required to meet job market demands. Recent graduates in Korean Studies or Korean Language majors often lack foreign language proficiency and the initiative to apply their knowledge effectively in the workplace. Recruiters have noted that graduates' creativity and language skills are not sufficiently developed. Educational institutions should update their curricula by benchmarking against those of other universities, ensuring relevance to students' future careers, with greater emphasis on practical applications rather than theoretical content. Enhanced access to resources such as books, e-books, and digital libraries is also essential and can be facilitated through collaborations with Korean universities. Korean-related majors in Ho Chi Minh city universities currently focus significantly on Korean Language (50%), reflecting the demand from numerous Korean companies in the region. This aligns with the city's role as an economic hub where Korean proficiency is highly valued for practical work applications. Training programmes should therefore emphasise workplace-relevant language skills and understanding Korean-Vietnamese corporate culture. Aligning curricula more closely with the expectations of enterprises, especially those with Korean affiliations, is critical for improving graduate outcomes.

5.3. Strengthening collaboration with enterprises, especially those that frequently recruit the institution's graduates

The provisions of the modified Law on Higher Education (2018) and Resolution No. 19-NQ/TW (2017) of Vietnam encourage greater collaboration between enterprises and vocational education institutions, with the goal of involving businesses in curriculum development, providing internships, and monitoring students' progress [23]. However, research findings reveal a gap between these policy intentions and their real-world application, particularly in higher education and the Practice-Oriented Higher Education (POHE) model [24]. This issue is also evident in Korean-related fields, where cooperation between educational institutions and enterprises remains limited. To address this, universities need to move beyond formal agreements into actionable collaborations. Universities should invite speakers from Korean or Korean-affiliated companies, especially those with established agreements, to provide career guidance, conduct practical lectures, and facilitate direct interaction between students and enterprises. Strengthening these partnerships is essential for aligning curricula with industry needs and improving job outcomes for graduates.

5.4. Strengthening alumni connections and alumni support activities

This study achieved only 46.5% valid responses from alumni of Korean-related majors, falling short of the target. Most respondents were from recent graduating classes (K2018 and K2019), highlighting weak connections between

alumni and educational institutions. Establishing strong alumni associations is essential for strengthening ties, enhancing the institution's image, and supporting student employment.

In Korean society, alumni associations play a vital role in career opportunities, collaboration, and maintaining connections between enterprises, educational institutions, and students. In Vietnam, an example from Lac Hong University showed that strengthening alumni activities boosted its graduate employment rate to 96% within six months in 2019, up from 78% five years prior. Lac Hong University also emphasised the critical role of alumni in the success of its programme [25].

As many key recruiters of Korean graduates in Ho Chi Minh city are alumni, particularly those in management positions, it is crucial to strengthen alumni connections. Ho Chi Minh city actively participates in global university rankings such as QS (Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings) and THE (Times Higher Education World University Rankings), which consider factors like graduate feedback and employment rates. QS rankings also assess alumni activities and their success [26].

These rankings have led many local universities, especially Ho Chi Minh city National University, to acknowledge the importance of alumni and their associations in enhancing rankings. For example, the Korean Studies Alumni Association at the Ho Chi Minh University of Social Sciences and Humanities has improved the faculty's visibility and created scholarship and employment opportunities for students. Alumni associations and educational institutions should work together to organise events such as professional seminars, business networking opportunities, scholarships, soft skills training, and career mentoring to provide additional support for students.

6. Conclusions

This study examines the current employment situation of students majoring in Korean-related fields in Ho Chi Minh city, incorporating perspectives from graduates and recruitment enterprises. The findings indicate a high employment rate, with most graduates securing jobs within a year, particularly in domestic and foreign enterprises across various industries. However, a potential trend shows an increasing number of graduates working outside their major. While students generally express satisfaction with their training, they raised concerns about the lack of reference materials and the need for more updated and practical teaching methods.

The research provides valuable insights for training units and lecturers, offering guidance on aligning teaching materials with the needs of students, employers, and other stakeholders. By fostering greater interaction between universities, students, and recruitment organisations, the study highlights key areas for improvement in the education of Korean-related majors moving forward.

Although this study has limitations due to not achieving the intended number of survey samples, it effectively summarises the employment situation of recent graduates in Ho Chi Minh city who majored in Korean Studies or Korean Languages and

Cultures. It establishes a foundation for future research that focuses on graduates from specific training institutions over a longer period, as well as on the employers recruiting in this sector. By adopting this approach, educational institutions will be better equipped to understand and implement changes to teaching strategies, training curricula, and faculty qualifications to meet the evolving demands of students and employers.

CRedit author statement

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