Assessing the Effectiveness of Soft Skills Training and Job Counselling: Evidence from Vietnam

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Overview

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- Three important questions

Project funding/acknowledgment

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- FFU/DFC
- 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2024
- DKK 5.0 million

Project teams (1)

International:

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  - Dr. Diego Ubfal, World Bank, USA
  - Prof. Lore Vandewalle, Graduate Institute Geneva, Switzerland
- Research assistants:
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  - Mr. Chinh Hoang-Duc (now a PhD student at Manchester, UK)

Project teams (2)

In Vietnam:

- Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs (ILSSA) at the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA)
  - Dr. Dao Quang Vinh, (former Director General), Senior Researcher
  - Dr. Hoang Manh Cam, Researcher, Project Coordinator
  - Mr. Nguyen Thanh Tuan, Data Analyst
  - Dr. Bui Ton Hien, ILSSA Director, (ILSSA Director General), Researcher
  - Dr. Le Ngu Binh, (ILSSA Deputy Director General), Researcher
  - Ms. Nguyen Hai Ninh, Researcher
- NOVAEDU and Manpower Group

Motivation

- Results from 2018 pilot survey on ~1,200 students from 21 colleges in Hanoi and 2020 survey on 69 key employers hiring fresh college graduates:
  - Vocational college students graduate without skills demanded in the labour market
  - Mismatch between students and available jobs/employers, leading to low rates of employment and job retention
- EEVE conducted a randomized control trial (RCT) with vocational colleges in Hanoi & Bac Ninh to evaluate effectiveness of two interventions to improve graduates' labour market prospects

Three research questions

1. Does provision of soft skills training to students improve their job market outcomes?
2. Does provision of career counselling services to students improve their job market outcomes?
3. Are soft skills and career counselling services complementary to each other in improving students' job market outcomes?

Study design

- Study conducted with 3,352 students from across 31 colleges and 154 college-majors in Hanoi & Bac Ninh
- Students randomly allocated to one of the following treatments:
  - Treatment 1: soft skills training
  - Treatment 2: career counselling
  - Treatment 3: soft skills training + career counselling
  - Control: no training offered
- All trainings offered free of charge to students
- All training sessions were held online due to COVID-19

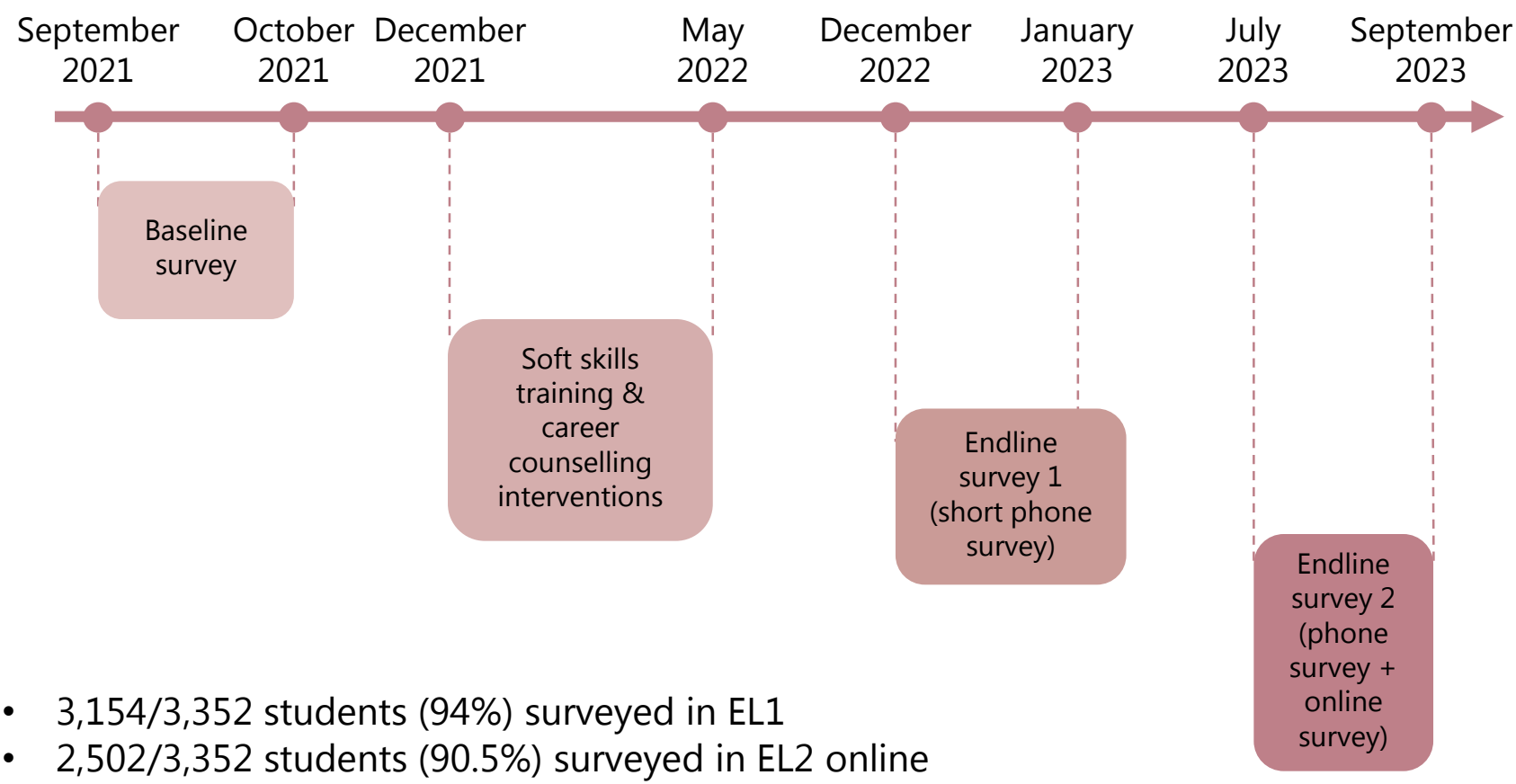
Soft skills training

- Service provider: NOVAEDU
- 7 group training sessions (total 21 hours) focusing on 3 broad skill groups:
  - Self-awareness skills (self-positioning, goal identification, positive thinking)
  - Emotional management skills
  - Social interaction skills (communication and presentation skills)
- Skills identified based on discussions with NOVAEDU and key employers hiring from vocational colleges

Career counselling

- Service provider: Manpower Group Vietnam
- Group training sessions (half-day) focusing on CV writing and interview preparation
- Individual coaching sessions (30 mins) for career advising based on student's strengths and weaknesses, interests, and motivation

Project timeline



- 3,154/3,352 students (94%) surveyed in EL1
- 2,502/3,352 students (90.5%) surveyed in EL2 online
- 3,034/3,352 students (74.6%) surveyed in EL2 phone

Theory of change

Interventions	Outputs	Outcomes	Goal
Soft skills training	• Improved interpersonal and intrapersonal skills • Enhanced job search (e.g., better interview performance)	• Ability to negotiate better terms of employment; • Better on-job performance & higher job retention	• Better labour market outcomes in the medium- and long-term • Higher life satisfaction and subjective well-being
Career counselling	• Better able to identify jobs to apply to; • Better use of networks to identify jobs and employers; • Better signalling of skills through CV + interview skills	• Jobs that are good matches given the skills and interest of students; • Higher job retention	
Assumptions	• Students attend and actively participate in the interventions • Skills taught are relevant	• Students apply the skills learnt for job search and on the job; • Employers value these enhanced skills	

Description of study sample (1)

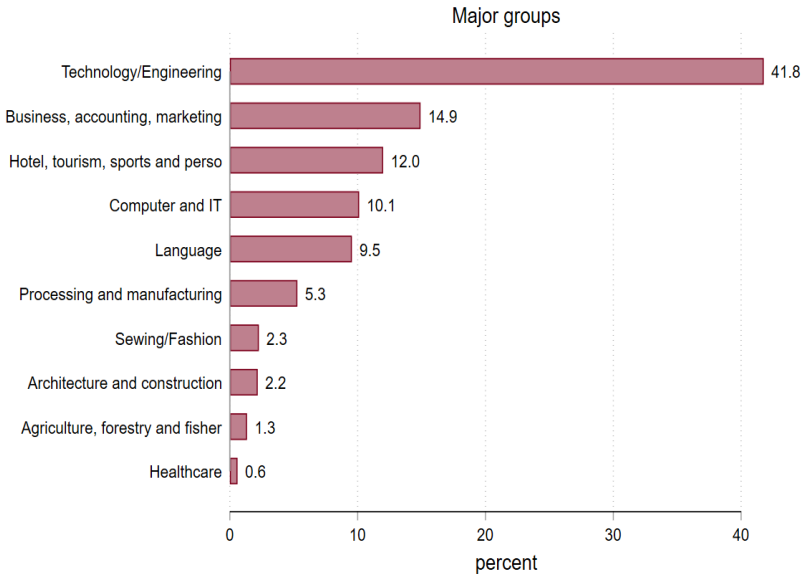
66.6%
Students are males

21
Average age of students

56.5%
Students are enrolled in 36-month majors

50%
Students are from Hanoi and Bac Ninh provinces

Technology/Engineering most common major group



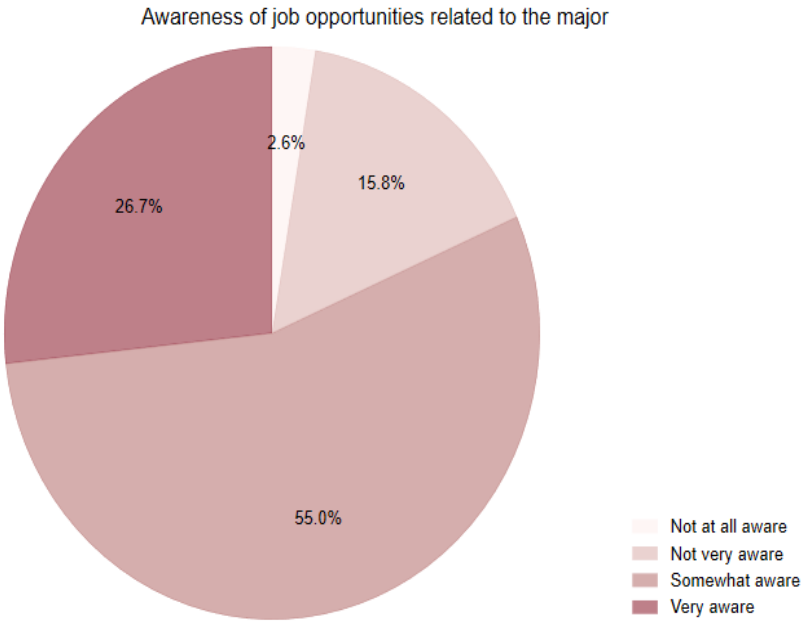
45% **Completed an internship in the last 5 years**

70% **Ever held a part-time/full-time job**

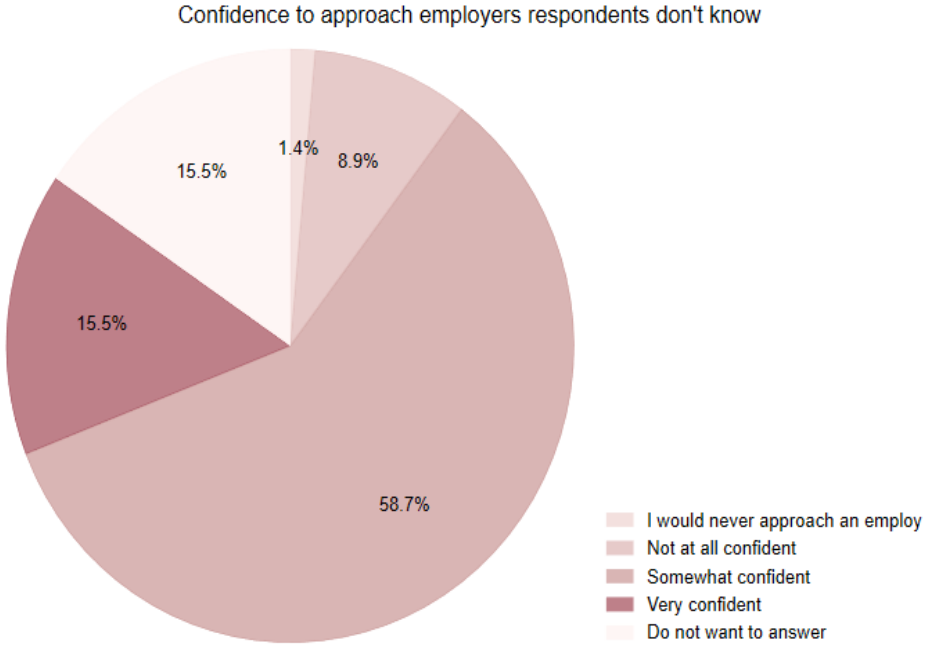
24% **Already found a job for after graduation**
(Part-time jobs: 4.8%, Full-time jobs: 18.6%)

Description of study sample (2)

26.7% fully aware of the job opportunities related to the major, 55% somewhat aware



15.5% very confident to approach employers they do not know when looking for jobs, while 58.7% somewhat confident



Description of study sample (3)

- **13%** of students have previously taken soft skills courses in addition to the college curriculum
- **56%** of students expressed an interest in attending a soft skills training if offered for free
- **58%** of students expressed an interest if offered a free employment counselling service

Attendance in training sessions

	Soft skills training (7 sessions)	Group career counselling (%)	Individual career counselling (%)
Soft skills treatment	6.37		
Career counselling treatment		85.5	85.7
Soft skills + career counselling treatment	6.19	89.7	90.1

Endline survey 1: labour market outcomes

	(1) Control	(2) Soft skills	(3) Career counselling	(4) Soft skills + career counselling
% employed	83.8	81.8	**80.2**	82.2
% self-employed	11.5	**6.37**	8.41	**6.82**
% wage employed	67.1	71.9	69	70.7
% formal contract	48.4	49	48	49.1
% formal open-ended contract	8.7	6.5	8.05	9.8
Hours worked/week	40.72	**39.36**	**38.41**	**39.62**
Average monthly income (in million VND)	6.23	5.99	6.14	6.05

Notes: values highlighted in blue are statistically significant and not reported are "working for household without wage" and "apprenticeship"
Relative to students in the control group:

- Students in the career counselling treatment are **less likely** to be employed
- Students in soft skills training and combined training are **less likely** to be self-employed
- Students in all 3 treated groups report **working fewer hours/week**

Endline survey 2: labour market outcomes

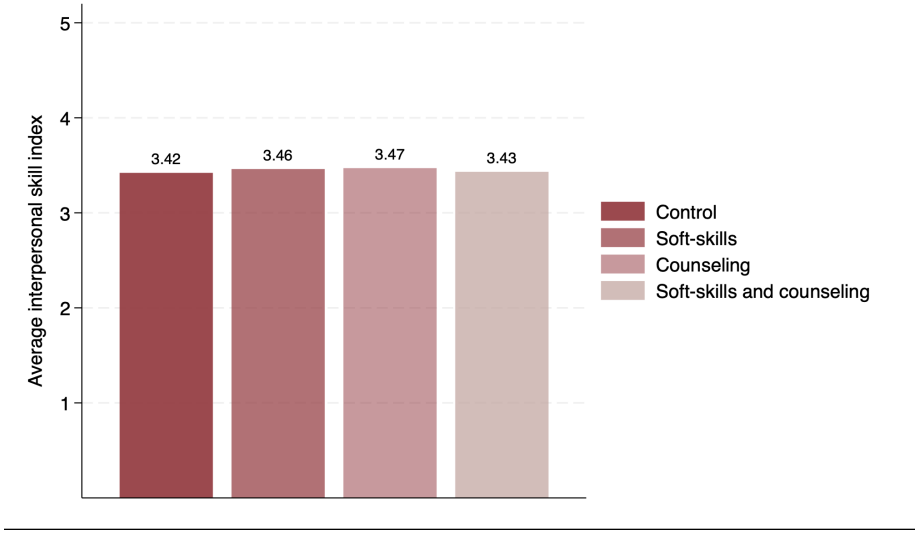
	(1) Control	(2) Soft skills	(3) Career counselling	(4) Soft skills + career counselling
% employed	85.1	86.4	86.8	85.6
% self-employed	8.29	7.55	8.81	8.66
% wage employed	73.9	75.4	73.3	74.6
% formal contract	58.4	57.8	58.1	57.8
% formal open-ended contract	13.9	12.5	**11.7**	**12.5**
Hours worked/week	41.08	41.97	40.89	40.8
Average monthly income (in million VND)	9.3	9.45	10.5	9.98
Number of benefits on the job (max = 6)	3.45	3.61	3.54	3.54

Note: values highlighted in blue are statistically significant and not reported are "working for household without wage" and "apprenticeship"

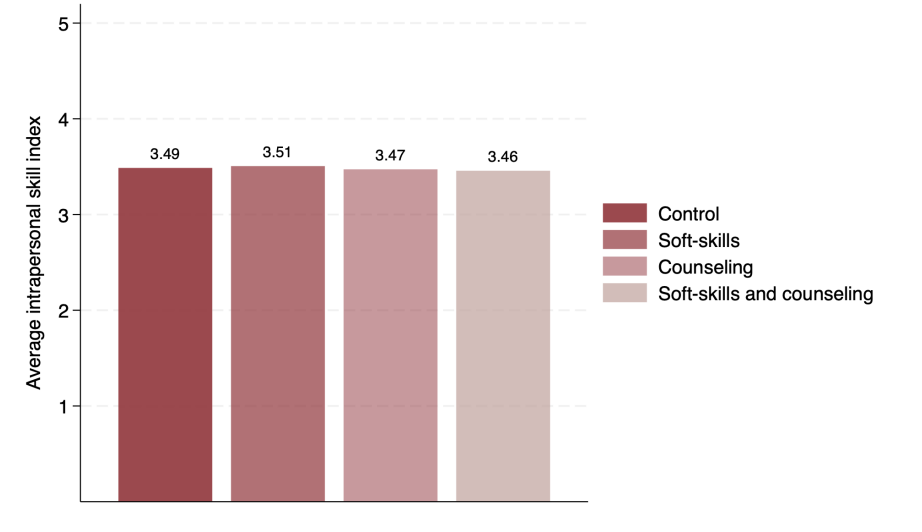
Differences have dissipated by endline 2: treated students caught up with control students in employment rates.

No medium-term effects on soft skills (EL2)

Interpersonal skills



Intrapersonal skills



- Interpersonal skills: listening, collaboration, influence, and expressiveness
- Intrapersonal skills: self-awareness, goal identification, perseverance, personal initiative, and self-control

Summary

- Muted results of interventions in Endline survey 1:
  - Students in counselling treatments appear to take longer to find a job
    - But those who do earn higher such that there is no difference between average income of treated and control groups.
  - Students in soft skills training and combined training are less likely to be self-employed
  - Students in all 3 treated groups report working fewer hours/week

- After 15-18 months: no significant differences between treated and control groups in terms of labour market outcomes

Reflection

- High attendance in interventions (also relative to other experimental studies), but muted effects
- Possible reasons:
  - Interventions were online instead of in-person: reduced possibilities for student interaction and building networks with each other (shown to be important for job search)
  - Duration of interventions: could have been longer and more spread out
  - Timing: perhaps administering interventions quite close to graduation did not allow enough time for students to translate learning into actions
  - Maybe there were short-term effects on soft skills, but we only measured them in EL2 by which time effects did not persist

Next steps

- Examine differences in job search behaviours and job satisfaction across treatments
  - By endline 2, treated students caught up with control students in employment rates – could be due to them spending more time trying to find a (better) job because they became more ambitious

- Understanding labour market conditions in Hanoi/Vietnam at time of graduation
  - Maybe interventions made students search a bit harder to get better jobs, but if economy became worse off in aftermath of COVID-19, they had to accept whatever was available

Three important questions for counsellors and soft skills trainers

- What do you think the interventions have changed?
- How do you think that change could have affected students' labour market outputs?
- What factors could have hindered that effect on labour market outputs?

Thank you!
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