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EMPLOYABILITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

A Case Study of AIESEC Membership

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Supervisor: Russell Warhurst
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ABSTRACT OF
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Objectives

The main objectives of the research are (1) to analyze the factors that contribute to the development of employability and (2) to analyze how AIESEC membership contributes to the development of its members' employability.

Summary

This research focuses on exploring the experience of AIESEC members during their membership and their self-perceived employability. Interviews with 12 members (alumni and current members) from 4 countries were conducted. Eight themes of employability developments are discovered through Gioia methodology, and the potential relations between these themes and specific features of AIESEC membership program are illustrated through a table. Along with other findings, a new model, based on the conceptual framework, depicting employability development through extracurricular activities engagement is established.

Conclusions

Employability development from extracurricular activities is considered relevant and suitable for acquiring entry-level jobs. Eight employability developments through the engagement are project management, reflection and evaluation skills, solution-oriented mindset, growth mindset, data-driven decision making, team management skills, JD-specific skills and general communication. To enable the facilitation of these

developments, the following aspects of an organization play an important role: organizational culture, organization structure, membership experience management, and Talent Management function.

Keywords: Employability, Extracurricular Activities, Higher Education Institutions, AIESEC, Leadership, Organizational Culture, Membership Experience

Language: English

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following table describes the abbreviations used throughout the thesis. The page on which each abbreviation is defined and first used is also mentioned.

ABBREVIATION	MEANING	PAGE
ECAs	Extracurricular activities	2
HEIs	Higher education institutions	6
LCP	Local Committee Vice President	23
LCVP	Local Committee Vice President	23
MCP	Member Committee President	23
MCVP	Member Committee Vice President	23
ROTC	Reserve Officers' Training Corps	18
VUCA	Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity	1

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

In recent years, employability has become a crucial trend in the job market, largely due to the rise of VUCA. VUCA stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity, and describes the rapidly changing and unpredictable nature of the business world today. In this environment, employers are looking for individuals who possess not only technical skills, but also the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, think critically, and problem-solve. Job seekers are recognizing the need to develop a range of employability skills to remain competitive in the face of VUCA. Moreover, they have to deal with the individualization of increasing tuition fees; the responsibility to fund their own education adds up to the challenge they are already facing. As such, employability has become a critical consideration for both employers and job seekers, as they strive to navigate the challenges and uncertainties of the VUCA world.

1.2. Research Problem

As the job market becomes more competitive, young people seek hands-on experience through extracurricular activities (ECAs) to enhance their employability before entering the job market. Companies now seek cross-functional understanding and transferable skills, making early skill acquisition advantageous to job security.

However, university courses, even in supposedly vocational subjects such as business and management, have become more academic and research based and are therefore less able to prepare students for the real world of work despite their effort in equipping students with soft skills. Additionally, students may not realize how to utilize their extracurricular experience to enhance their employability due to a lack of awareness of the skills and knowledge developed. Organizations can address this by designing a roadmap for skill development and educating members, leading to well-informed expectations. A critical approach is needed to understand the underlying reasons for the issue.

As it is essential to identify the skills they want to develop, the choice of purposeful engagement is also a beneficial factor if students want to spend their time efficiently on what is important to their future career prospects. Therefore, the research problem in this thesis is about how students can purposefully engage in extracurricular activities to develop their employability.

1.3. Research Question

To what extent do members of AIESEC develop their employability through their membership?

1.4. Research Objectives

1. Critically examine the literature on employability, and potentially compare the perspectives of students and employers;
2. Critically examine the literature on extracurricular activities;
3. Critically examine the literature on the relationship between extracurricular activities and perceived employability;
4. Discover and analyze the engagement of AIESEC members;
5. Analyze the factors that contribute to the development of employability;
6. Analyze how AIESEC membership contributes to the development of its members' employability.

1.5. AIESEC

1.5.1. An Overview of AIESEC: History, Vision and Values, Organizational Structure

AIESEC (acronym of Association Internationale des Étudiants en Sciences Économiques et Commerciales) is a non-political, independent, not-for-profit organization. According to AIESEC International (2019), AIESEC was founded in 1948 in 7 countries in Europe by Jean Choplin (France), Bengt Sjöstrand (Sweden), and Dr. Albert Kaltenthaler (Germany). Currently, there are AIESEC branches present in 126 countries and territories. It is led and run by students and recent graduates of HEIs under the age of 30. AIESEC is in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and is recognized by UNESCO (www.aiesec.org).

The vision of the organization is to 'strive for peace and fulfillment of humankind's potential' through the empowerment of value-driven leaders (The AIESEC Way, 2021). Choosing leadership development as the main driver for operation, AIESEC defines six AIESEC values to enhance the leadership potential in individuals: Demonstrating integrity, Activating leadership, Acting sustainably, Enjoying participation, Living diversity, and Striving for excellence (www.aiesechub.squarespace.com). It is important to introduce these values because the empirical study in this thesis will be based on

interviews with AIESEC members and the AIESEC membership program also incorporates AIESEC values in its operational guidelines.

Regarding portfolio, the programs include three stages: Engagement with AIESEC, Experiential Leadership Development, and Life-Long Connection (Shukla et al., 2021). As the case study focuses on current members and alumni, the study would likely be able to explore the insights from the experience of all three stages.

1.5.2. AIESEC Membership Program

In the AIESEC portfolio, The AIESEC Member program is an educational program for young people that focuses on leadership development. It offers a personalized, relevant, and measurable experience for participants and connects them to a global network of youth and partner organizations (Shukla et al., 2021). An AIESEC member can be referred to as AIESECer. Most AIESECers are non-paid volunteers, except for those who work full-time for national, regional, and international management boards. Based on the Global Member Persona revised in 2021 (www.aiesechub.squarespace.com), this program is considered as one of its products having its value propositions, meaning that AIESEC members are also considered AIESEC's customers. To develop leadership potentials in its members, AIESEC has created a leadership development model which serves as a guideline for standardized membership experience.

Being an AIESEC member brings various networking and collaborating opportunities with alumni and partner companies, which creates an environment for members to acquire business insights. In addition, the operation (from organizational structure to working process) within AIESEC is standardized and yet challenging, which enhances their members' adaptability and resilience in uncertainty. These features of the program could be worth investigating to discern the elements of the ECAs' design that enhance employability.

Regarding membership experience, the Inner and outer journey, or leadership development model, is considered a primary guideline for all materials and team management practice. According to figure 3, the outer journey emphasizes creating a challenging environment for the members, while the inner journey focuses on reflection and the establishment of self, a personal identity. It is a closed, repeated cycle that is believed to happen if facilitated. That is when the role of the Talent Management function is needed, which is to ensure the facilitation from team leaders for their members.



Figure 3: Inner and outer journey (The AIESEC Way 2021 Refresh)

1.5.3. Employability as a Focus in AIESEC Programs

It is noticeable in AIESEC Bluebook (2021) that AIESEC has recently shifted its focus to employability topics, especially in the VUCA environment. Besides volunteer exchange programs, it has developed international internship programs, in both onsite and remote formats. The remote internships were later initiated in response to social distancing practices in most countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary purpose of these programs is to improve career prospects for their participants. Furthermore, in 2020, the organization also launched a pilot program called 'Heading for the Future' which aims to provide participants who seek to discover their career path with simulated working experience in four weeks.

Employability-focused programs have clear customer personas so they can attract the right target audience; for example, internships are aimed at students or graduates who wish to enrich their profile with paid work experience at international companies while the 'Heading for the Future' program can be more suitable for those who want to discover completely new profession. Catering to those specific needs, AIESEC programs are designed to equip their participants with hard currency (hands-on experience, practitioners' knowledge) and soft currency (communication skills, intercultural teamwork skills, leadership skills).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As the objective of the thesis is to explore the potential relationship between extracurricular activities (ECAs) and employability development, a literature review of the employability concept and the debate around this topic is needed. In addition, the discussion of ECAs' role in developing employability is included as this will contribute to building a conceptual framework used later in primary research. To ensure the validity and relevance of different elements put in the framework, the review mentions not only the most recent and discussed research but also aims to provide a critical discussion of those papers.

2.1. Introduction

The topic of employability has been in heated debate for the last three decades due to its complex, multidimensional meanings (Sin et al., 2016; Römgens et al., 2020). In addition to the difficulty to reach a generally accepted definition of employability, there is also an on-going 'blame game' between employers and higher education institutions (HEIs) about to what extent they should take responsibility for the employability skills development of students and graduates (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Succi & Canovi, 2020). In contrast, some authors believe that the responsibility of employability should be individualized, which suggests that students and graduates themselves are mainly responsible for their employment outcomes (Brooks & Everett, 2008; Tomlinson, 2012; Sin & Neave, 2016).

Moreover, the role of extracurricular activities concerning employability development has been studied recently; this adds to the current literature another perspective that can potentially bridge the gaps in the mentioned controversy within this topic (Abelha et al., 2020).

Regarding this literature review, the aim is to (i) provide and compare several views and theoretical debates on the topic of employability, (ii) explore different employability development methods, and (iii) explore ECAs types and the extent to which the engagement in ECAs is relevant to employability development. As this study takes the case study of an organization named AIESEC to investigate the such relationship, another objective is to (iv) introduce AIESEC and explain the reason it is chosen for this study.

2.2. The Concept of Employability

2.2.1. History of The Concept of Employability

The need for graduate employability has arisen due to factors such as the growth of globalization, heightened job uncertainty, the expansion of higher education, the transfer of responsibility of paying fees from the state to individuals, and the transition to an economy based on knowledge (Bauman, 2003; Sin & Neave, 2016). Employability has become a topic of discussion mostly in the UK and EU where policymakers aim to address unemployment issues, especially for disadvantaged communities. It is also a response to the new trend in which the relationship between employers and employees is perceived as a 'personal, psychological contract'. In the literature review of Forrier and Sels (2003) and McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), the authors identify stages in which the concept implies a different meaning considering the economic context at the time. However, McQuaid and Lindsay's (2005) work is likely to provide a more comprehensive summary of such evolution. Their summary is based on the work of Gazier (1998a, 1998b, 2001) who suggests that there are seven stages or seven operational versions of the employability

concept which are divided into three waves of evolution. Their summary is illustrated in the table below:

Operational Version	Wave	Time and Location	Explanation
Dichotomy employability	1 st	Beginning of the 20 th century (the US, the UK)	A focus on two extreme poles: Employable (the ability and willingness to work) and Unemployable (the inability to work).
Socio-medical employability	1 st	Before the 1950s (the US, the UK, and Germany)	An emphasis on the gap between the ability to work of the disadvantaged and the requirement of work.
Manpower policy employability	2 nd	In the 1960s (in the US)	The same emphasis is on the gap in socio-medical employability, but more focused on socially disadvantaged groups.
Flow employability	2 nd	In the 1960s (France)	A focus on the demand side and the accessibility of employment.
Labor market performance employability	3 rd	End of the 1970s (internationally)	An emphasis on the impact of policy interventions on labor market outcomes, measured by work performance.
Initiative employability	3 rd	The late 1980s (North America, Europe)	A focus on transferable skills development and job mobility.
Interactive employability	3 rd	End of the 1980s (in North America, internationally)	An emphasis on individual initiative and introduction of the importance of employers and labor demands in employability determination.

Table 1: A Summary of Historical Development of Employability Concept, based on McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005, p.200-201.

The evolution of the concept could be due to the reduction in the role of the state in the US and the UK, which led to the rise in the responsibility of individuals to adapt to the demands of the labor market. Throughout the development, the first and second waves were believed to be 'too static and one-sided' while the versions in the third wave were more likely used as the basic component in labor market policy and might have a limited role in human resources development (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005).

2.2.2. Definitions and Frameworks of Employability

A common critique is that the concept is not clearly defined and lacks precision in its meaning. In other words, according to Philpott (1999), employability can be seen as a 'buzzword', meaning that, oftentimes, the word is used without being properly understood. Due to the increasing use of the term employability, several authors have conducted empirical and secondary research to develop frameworks to characterize employability (Yorke & Knight, 2004; Helyer & Lee, 2014; Smith et al., 2016; Peeters et al., 2019).

Two of the most cited definitions of employability belong to Hillage and Pollard (1998) and Yorke and Knight (2004). Both of their definitions mention the ability of individuals, which includes skills, understanding, and personal attributes, to gain employment and become successful in their careers, similar to the definition by The Confederation of British Industry (1999). This aspect of the definitions can be reinforced by the competence-based approach as it encompasses the characteristics that help address the demands and requirements of employers (Suleman, 2018; Römgens et al., 2020).

Although McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) may agree with the idea of including the unemployed looking for a job and the employed looking for another job or promotion made by Hillage and Pollard (1998), it is argued in their research that the emphasis on individual attributes is rather 'narrow'. By proposing the problem of changing environment and several external factors such as family responsibilities, geographical difficulties, or attitudes from recruiters, they suggest that policymakers and employers consider a broader perspective when assessing one's employability. Such focus on the interaction

between individuals and the labor market can also be found in the definition provided by the Canadian Labor Force Development Board (1994) and Northern Ireland Executive (DHFETE, 2002).

One of the most well-known and frequently cited frameworks that consider personal attributes and knowledge as the primary approach is the USEM account (Yorke & Knight, 2002) with USEM being the acronym for understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs, and metacognition. This framework, based on the concept of capability, was built in response to the concerns of academics who believed employability should both respond to the needs of employers and commit to academic values. The USEM account aims to redress the imbalance in the previous frameworks and focuses on self-efficacy beliefs and self-theories. Despite its popularity, the model is critiqued by Dacre and Sewell (2007) that its strength can be viewed as its weakness because the components are not self-explanatory to students and their parents. Having successfully compared the leading conceptualization frameworks of employability, Römgens et al. (2020) propose a similar conclusion but in a more comprehensive and reader-friendly manner.

Previous research was mostly conducted to study personal attributes of employability. Communication skills and teamwork skills have proven to be the most important indicators of employability (Abelha et al., 2020). The findings can be found in the summaries by Tymon (2013) and Suleman (2018). They are mainly based on the data collected from businesses and higher education institutions (Kreber, 2006; Washer, 2007; Andrew & Higson, 2008; Archer & Davison, 2008; Abraham & Karns, 2009; Cumming, 2010). This is also the result of empirical research by Succi and Canovi (2020) which highlights the significant importance of communication skills, teamwork skills, and commitment to work out of their list of 20 attributes. Their study also suggests that work-life balance skills and leadership skills are ranked as low importance by employers for young graduates at the beginning of their careers. This provides an interesting point for further research, as leadership is often considered a goal for university students to enhance their employability (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013; Tran, 2017).

The definition to be employed in this study should aim to have a multidimensional approach as the relationship between employability development and ECAs is likely to involve multiple stakeholders (HEIs, employers, policymakers, students, and graduates). Therefore, it can be understood that employability investigated here is not only individualized but also considers external factors such as the labor market and personal circumstances.

2.3. Debate on Employability

2.3.1. Debate on Responsible Stakeholders for Employability Development: HEIs, Employers, or Individuals?

The debate on how much HEIs, employers, and individuals should take responsibility for employability development has been going on for over three decades. In this debate, while employers put the key role onto HEIs and criticize their lack of transferable skills and inability to perform well in the workplace (Hurell, 2016), a large amount of academics believe that it is a shared responsibility in that employers play an equal, or perhaps, more vital role in developing employability (Clarke, 2008; Santos, 2020). Indeed, according to (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005), a wider society outside HEIs including employers and policymakers should put effort into employability development considering its significant impact on the economy.

Several primary research papers (Sin & Amaral, 2017; Chhinzer & Russo, 2018; Olo et al., 2022) suggest a weak relationship between HEIs and employers despite the high expectation for collaboration; much of the criticism falls on HEIs. In Olo et al.'s (2022) findings, HEIs admit that such a relationship 'does not exist or that it exists only in an incipient and imperfect way'. This is an alarming signal because it is said that HEIs are too academic and theoretical (Sin & Amaral, 2017; Succi & Canovi, 2020). Indeed, in Cai's (2013) paper, the importance of educational output is undermined. Conversely, it is argued that investment in HEIs is positively related to favorable job returns (Elias & Purcell, 2004; Arthur & Sullivan, 2006; Little & Archer, 2010). Moreover, the effort HEIs

put into meeting the labor market needs should be recognized. There have been changes in curriculum design by incorporating the engagement of employers and experiential learning into their programs (Donald et al., 2018; Griffiths et al., 2021).

Regarding employers, the imbalance in responsibility allocation is highlighted by Cai's (2013) conclusion about limited research on how to change the belief of employers about their role. Their reluctance could be due to the high likelihood of employees switching to a better-paid job after their upskilling (Baruch, 2001). In contrast, Van Buren (2003) states that their involvement in employability development would result in a better image of being socially responsible. Indeed, the role of employers should be viewed as equal because they are more familiar with the basic rules of the workplace than academia (Succi & Canovi, 2020), thus providing more practical involvement in work to enhance soft skills (Tomlinson, 2012). An example of this is mostly in the UK, which will be discussed in another section.

Individuals' responsibility is also emphasized (Brooks & Everett, 2008; Sin & Neave, 2016), and Archer and Davison (2008) suggest that HEIs only have an assisting role by updating labor market practices and equipping necessary skills. As a substantial part of employability frameworks encompass personal attributes, it is reasonable to conclude that individuals should take responsibility for their employability development.

Solutions for employers and HEIs are proposed to resolve the 'blame game', many of which aim to enhance the cooperation between them (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; Clarke & Patrickson, 2008; Tomlinson, 2012; Chhinzer & Russo, 2018). Brown et al. (2021) add that HEIs and students should co-design the curriculum. Instead of responsibility avoidance, all of them should work together to achieve the desired outcomes.

2.3.2. Debate on The Main Role of Higher Education Institutions

There is an opposing view that suggests that the principal purpose of HEIs is to enable people to fulfill their potential and flourish as human beings and citizens even if this makes

a little economic contribution (Collini, 2012; Tymon, 2013, Sin et al., 2019). More studies about HEIs' role emphasize the importance of core professions, diverse societal interests, economic growth through technological innovation, and citizenship performance (Ng & Feldman, 2009; McCowan, 2015). Bowers-Brown and Harvey (2004) also disagree on the over-emphasis on vocation-oriented agenda which may threaten academic freedom (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). Although the employability agenda has been one of the most dominant goals in HEIs for the last ten years (Moore & Morton, 2017), it receives severe criticism from academics for its productivist mechanism. There has been a complaint about how such a radical change toward a career-focused approach has put pressure on academics and HEIs' staff (Frankham, 2017). According to Harvey (2001), some institutions even compromise on their educational agenda to achieve higher employment rates. Regarding this issue, Moore and Morton (2017) argue that HEIs should not allow other stakeholders to influence their pedagogical decisions.

In sum, it is suggested by both primary and secondary research that HEIs are an important stage before the transition to work. Therefore, it is reasonable to agree with McCowan's (2015) conclusion: Providing that the educational agenda is consistent with the goal of 'critical reflection' and 'moral action', HEIs should place their focus on employability development. However, it is not the only attribute and does not take precedence over other roles such as citizenship and academia.

2.4. Employability Development

2.4.1. Employability Development in HEIs

As mentioned earlier, HEIs are taking the initiative to incorporate different pedagogic adaptations in their curricula for employability development. Some of the most discussed strategies are teaching and assessment of attributes (Jackson, 2015; Oliver & Jorre de St Jorre, 2018; Hammer et al., 2021), experiential learning or work-integrated learning – WIL (McIlveen et al., 2011; Smith, 2012; Moore et al., 2015), mentoring (Okolie et al.,

2020; Jackson, & Bridgstock, 2021), award programs (Jackson & Bridgstock 2021), for- and not-for-credit projects and study tours (McHugh, 2017; Kay et al., 2018).

One of the most common measures is the work-integrated learning method which is known as sandwich courses in the UK. According to Heyler and Lee (2014), this form of an apprenticeship allows students to have work experience while they are pursuing their degree, acknowledging that learning also happens outside of the classrooms and the learning is the product of the students. Although there is still a lack of assessment framework for the impact of WIL (Jackson, 2015), it is generally believed to have a positive impact on employability development and labor market outcome by most empirical studies (Helyer & Lee, 2014; Billett, 2011).

Regarding teaching and assessments of graduates' employability, a study by Mason et al. (2009) suggests that this method has no significant effect on employability despite being favored by students (Jackson, 2015). However, WIL has received a concern about the equity of unpaid work, which highlights the potential inaccessibility to students from poorer backgrounds (Moore et al., 2015). Mentoring programs which focus on providing networking opportunities to less experienced learners (Ogbuanya & Chukwuedo, 2017) are found to be of less value to developing employability (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). It is also noted that award programs are more likely to help their participants with higher possibilities of networking due to their high profile and resourcing (ibid). This emphasized in their conclusion, is particularly true for students with low social and cultural capital.

There seems to be a wide range of learning activities provided by HEIs to enhance employability skills. It is emphasized by Goldfinch and Hughes (2007) that HEIs also need to promote reflection among students on their extracurricular activities, employment, and university-based learning experiences. One effective method for achieving this is through the utilization of portfolios or other reflective tools.

2.4.2. Employability Development Models

In the existing literature, there have been models attempting to conceptualize employability and visualize employability development. The two models discussed in this section, for the most part, have successfully included the relevant factors and stakeholders in employability literature despite some differences. The first model (figure 1), the 'Key to Employability' model (or CareerEDGE), was developed by Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007), and the second one (figure 2) is named 'A model of graduate employability development' by Maher and Graves (2007).

Regarding similarities, both models view employability development as a process instead of an educational product (Atkins, 1999; Harvey & Morey, 2002; Lees, 2002), in that the arrow goes through a stage called 'Reflection and Evaluation' before reaching employability. This addition not only substantiates the claim by Moon (2004) about the vital role of reflection in employability but also highlights the importance of the Personal Development Plan (PDP) because it is believed to have a strong relationship with employability (Higher Education Academy, n.d.). Moreover, the bottom tiers in the 'Key to Employability' model, which are work experience, career development learning, and generic skills, can also be found in the other model but in different names.

Noticeably, what makes the model by Maher and Graves (2007) significantly different from that of Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) is that it includes all stakeholders (HEIs, students, ECAs, and employers) discussed in the debate around employability but employers' intervention only starts at the recruitment stage. The mention of external factors potentially affecting employment decisions shows consideration of a broader approach to employability (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Furthermore, Dacre Pool and Sewell's (2007) model emphasizes self-efficacy that leads to employability as a result of self-confidence and self-esteem, which is not included in Maher and Graves' work.

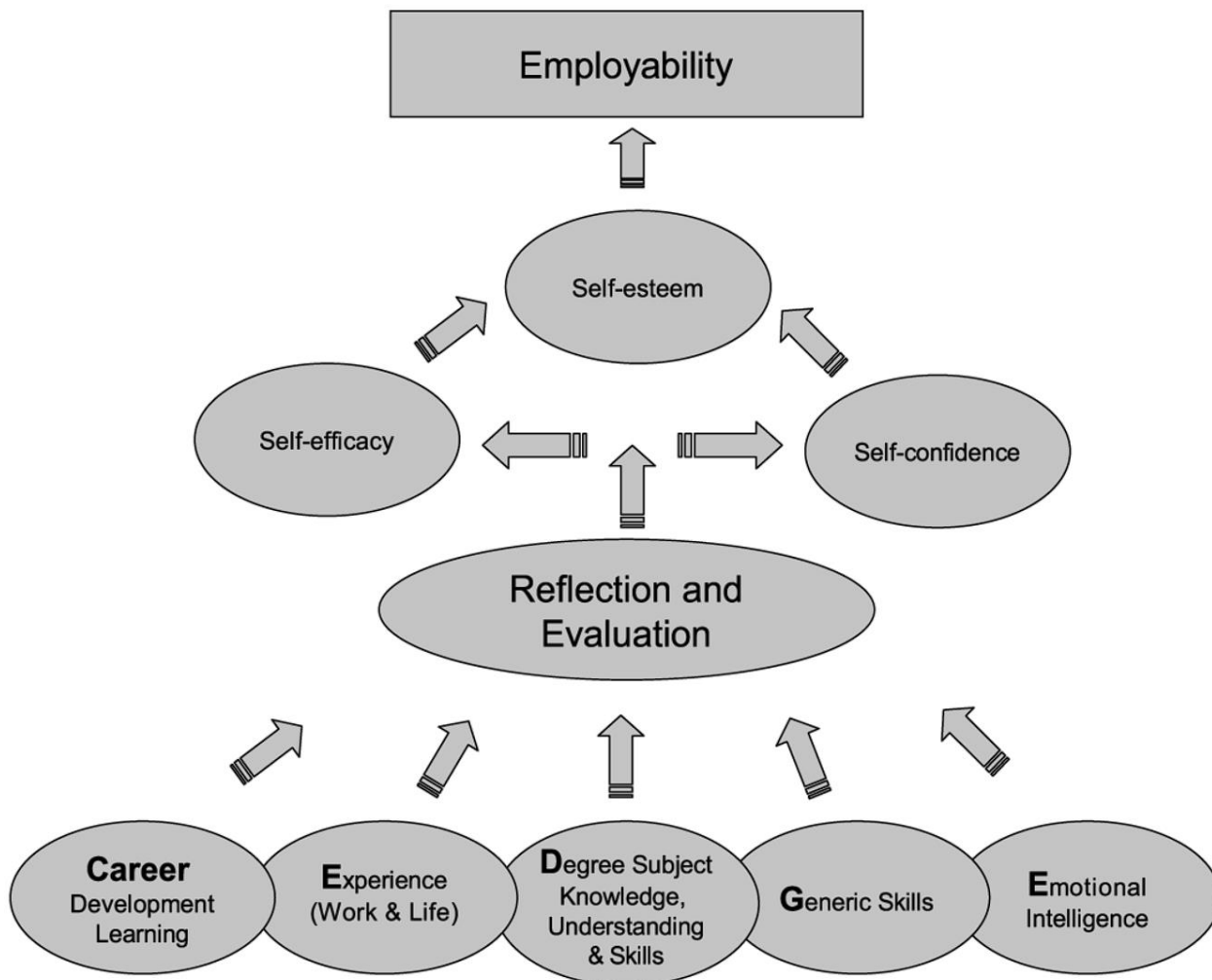


Figure 1: Key to Employability Model - CareerEDGE (Dacre & Sewell, 2007)

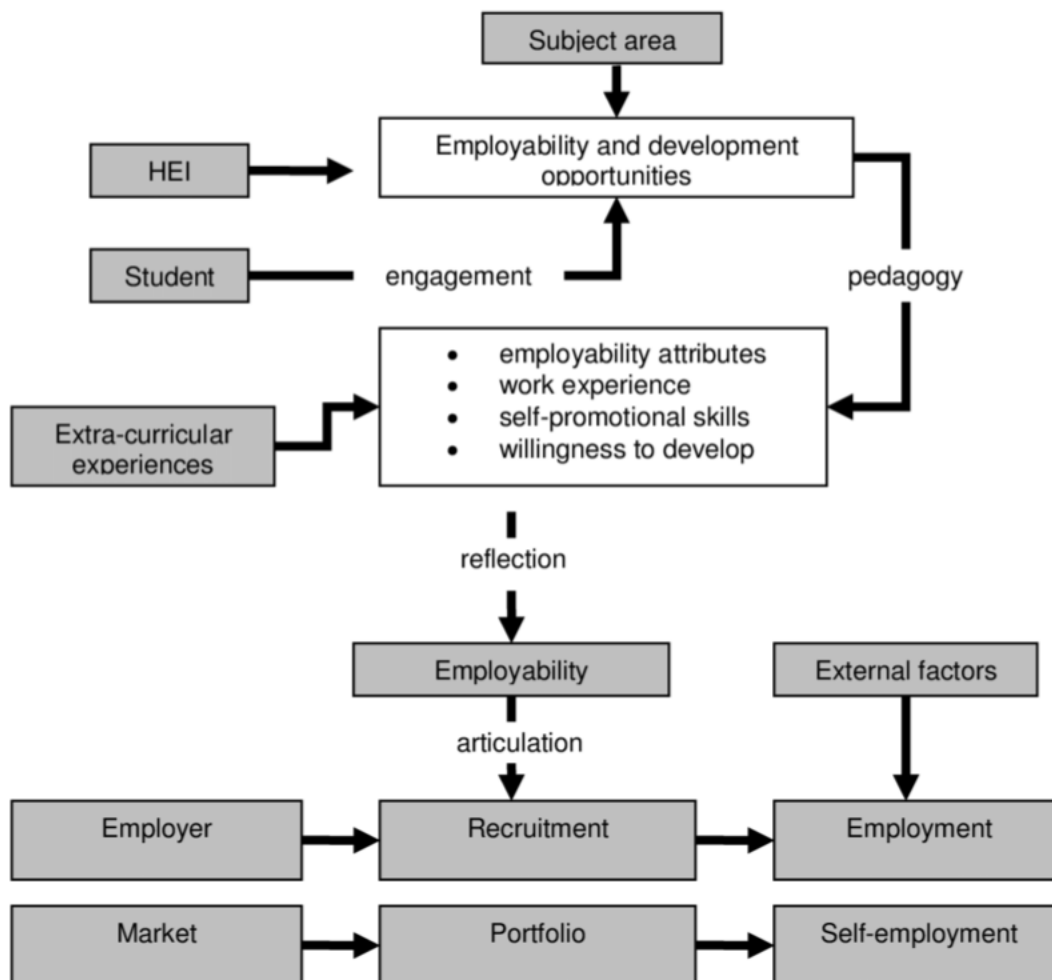


Figure 2: A Model of Graduate Employability Development (Maher & Graves, 2007)

Overall, the two models are comprehensive and reader-friendly to non-experts, which makes them valuable tools to approach the topic of employability development. One potential application of these models in the current research is to develop a conceptual framework later with the addition of other factors found throughout the literature review.

2.5. Extracurricular Activities

As suggested by the abovementioned frameworks, extracurricular activities are believed to play a role in providing the needed experience for skills development. This section specifically looks at the activities practiced by higher education students and a critical

discussion is provided regarding the potential role of ECA engagement in developing employability.

2.5.1. Definitions and Typology

A working definition for ECAs was proposed by Bartkus et al. (2012), in that ECAs are school-run activities that take place outside of regular class time, not being part of the curriculum, and not resulting in grades or academic credit. Participation in these activities is voluntary for students. However, the definition does not cover the activities that might not be organized by schools, such as sport clubs, ROTC, church, or scouting activities (Kerr and Colangelo, 1988; Marsh, 1992). Therefore, a working definition for ECAs should also involve activities that are not conducted by schools.

According to Brown et al. (2021), the typology of ECAs can be divided into two clusters based on the main purpose related to employability as depicted in table 2. While human capital includes skill development and work experience, social capital mainly refers to networking, and building an identity.

Cluster	ECAs
Social capital	Sport activities, student organizations, community work, and mentoring
Human capital	Working, further study, developing skills, volunteering, and gaining practical experience to improve qualifications and abilities

Table 2: Typology of ECAs, based on Brown et al. (2021)

2.5.2. The Role of Extracurricular Activities towards Employability

Participants in ECAs partake in such activities for both pleasures and to augment their self-assurance, interpersonal abilities, and proficiency in planning and organization (Thompson et al., 2013). Indeed, it is recognized by several authors have that engagement in ECAs and academic performance has a positive relation to employability

enhancement (Brown & Campion, 1994; Thoms et al., 1999; Chia, 2005; Cole et al., 2007; Hassanbeigi et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2011). This is supported by the empirical findings of Clark et al. (2015) and Pinto & Ramalheira (2017), and the role of ECAs is likely to be of higher importance than academic qualifications (Tomlinson, 2008). According to Roulin and Bangerter (2013b), students tend to include ECAs' experience (Rynes et al., 1997) and individualized narratives (Tomlinson, 2007) in the recruitment process in response to employers' search for ECAs' information from their résumé (Rubin et al., 2002; Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Roulin & Bangerter, 2013a). By doing that, students aim to inform employers about their 'soft currencies' beside the 'hard currencies' acquired from their degree (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; Roulin & Bangerter, 2013b). Such competition for positional advantage is particularly true for the case of business graduates whose degrees are believed to be generic and the graduation rate of business students is statistically higher than that of engineering, health, or education students (OECD, 2022). Therefore, there is an increasing need for graduates to distinguish themselves from their counterparts.

However, not all learners have a desire to become involved in extracurricular pursuits (Greenbank, 2015). Some of the reasons for their non-engagement could be attributed to potential distraction from the study, working part-time, lack of information about ECAs, caring responsibility, students' disbelief in the benefits of ECAs, and high competition from other curriculum-based activities (Greenbank, 2015; Harvey et al., 2017; Tran, 2017; Dickinson et al., 2020). Contrary to those inhibitors, the motivation found behind engagement in ECAs could be to compensate for their average academic performance (Thompson et al., 2013). In addition, according to Roulin and Bangerter (2013a), students engage primarily in extracurricular activities for intrinsic reasons, yet a certain number, especially students with leadership positions (Feldman Barr & McNeilly, 2002), may also be influenced by extrinsic motivations such as the desire to enhance their curriculum vitae. The motives for students' participation in ECAs are believed to be a mix of both internal and external motives and they will evolve as students approach closer to labor market entrance (Handy et al., 2010; Hustinx et al., 2010).

Some authors suggest that the impact of ECAs on employability is questionable (Kinash et al., 2016; Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021) and that expectations from students about such impact are believed to be unrealistic (Brown et al., 2021). Perhaps, students might not be sure about how their engagement may result in employability development. Regarding employers' perspective, they may also question too much involvement in ECAs because it likely leads to unprofessional commitment and high turnover rates, suggesting that such participation is not valuable for discerning personal characteristics (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013b). It is important to note that the ECAs do not guarantee an employment outcome, but rather participation in ECAs increases the chance of achieving it (Lent & Brown, 2013).

2.6. Conclusion

The literature review has summarized the development history and currently accepted definitions of employability. Although this topic is still believed to be a 'buzzword' by a large number of scholars, there has been a significant contribution to the understanding of its framework and how employability development can be seen as a process.

However, there is still a lack of empirical evidence between ECAs and employability (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2021). The same situation applies to the case of its frameworks. This is because most of them are theoretical frameworks that need to be verified and tested in different contexts (Wittekind, 2010; Cai, 2013; Sin et al., 2016). Moreover, although there are empirical studies about the role of ECAs play in employability development, a case study of an organization has not been conducted to explore more thoroughly the benefits and implications of those activities. Therefore, the case study of AIESEC has the potential contribution to a such gap in the existing literature.

2.7. Conceptual Framework

As the study's objectives are to explore and analyze employability development, the conceptual framework (figure 4) is an integration of two models by Dacre Pool and Sewell

(2007) and Maher and Graves (2007). In addition, the process also includes a broad approach to employability including personal circumstances and external factors (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Moreover, it should be noted that the author wishes to investigate the role of leadership (Roulin & Bangerter, 2013; Tran, 2017), the willingness to develop (Maher & Graves, 2007), and reflection (Moon, 2004) in employability enhancement.

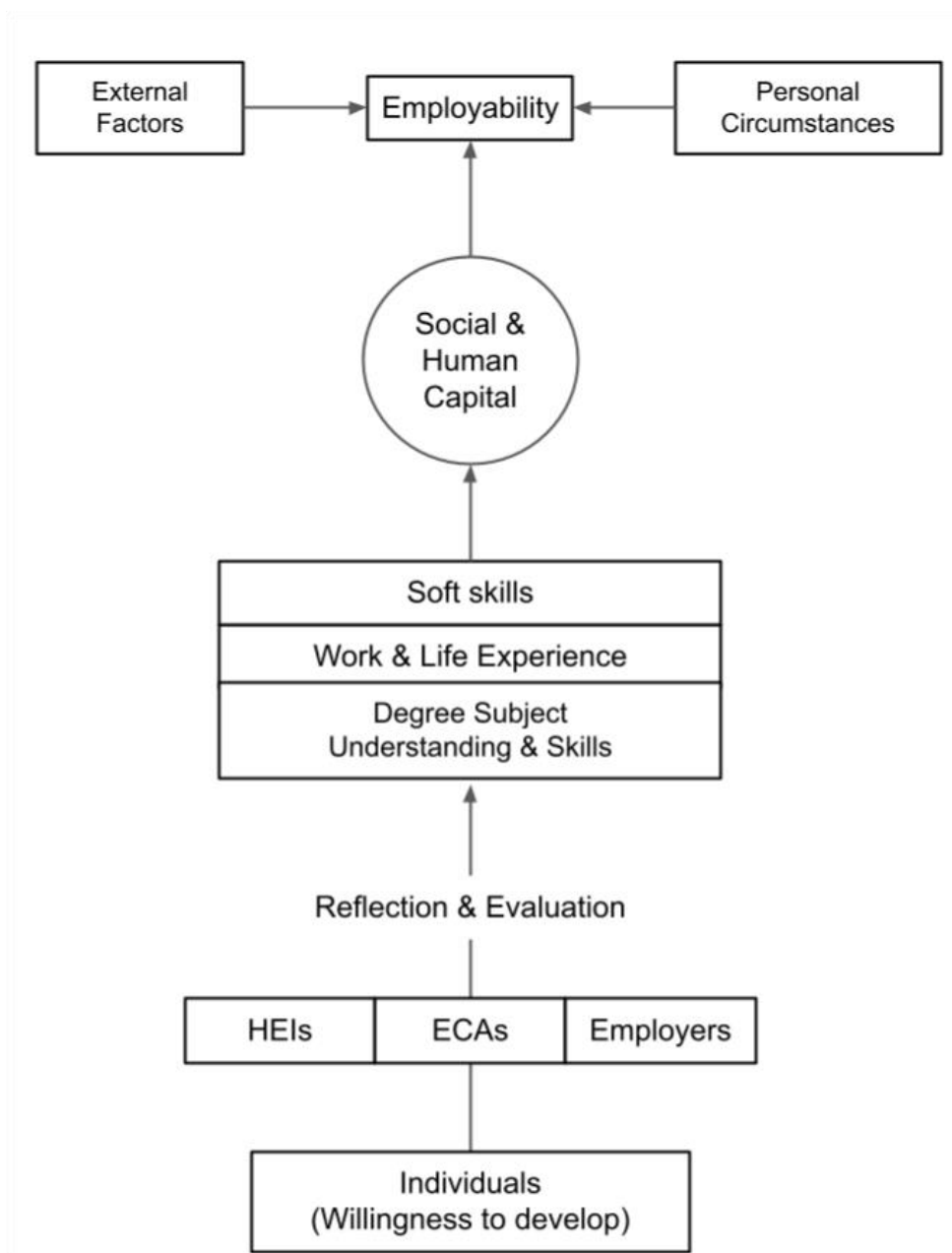


Figure 4: Conceptual Framework

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Methods and Data Collection Methods

The methodology for this research will utilize both quantitative and qualitative methods with an exploratory approach. The combination will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic, enabling new ideas to emerge. The quantitative data will provide statistical evidence to support the findings, while the qualitative data will provide a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants. The qualitative component which enables exploratory is particularly crucial because there is limited existing research in the influence of ECA on employability.

Data collection is conducted through in-depth interviews with a semi-structured set of questions to allow for in-depth exploration and to maintain a focus on the research topic. The language of the interviews is English and Vietnamese for the convenience of communication. The length of interviews ranges from 60 to 90 minutes. After the interviews, the transcripts in Vietnamese are translated into English for analysis.

3.2. Interview Participants

The main goal when establishing the sample is to find AIESEC members from different countries with different lengths of experience and the highest position in AIESEC. The objective is to have a sample with diverse profiles in AIESEC and the job market. Additionally, there are two criteria for choosing the interviewees. First, they must be or have been (for the case of alumni) an active member with at least 9 months of experience in AIESEC. This is because AIESEC members must go through 3 months of probation before becoming official members. Second, they must be a fresh undergraduate, or in

their third or fourth year of university since the study aims to investigate closely the stage of transition from school to the workplace.

Interviewee code	Nationality	Status - Highest position in AIESEC¹	Field of work
I1	Vietnam	Alumni - LCVP	Market Research, Consulting
I2	Vietnam	Alumni - LCVP	Branding, marketing, commercial
I3	Vietnam	Current member - Regional Manager	HR
I4	Indonesia	Alumni - Global support team	Policy analytics
I5	Vietnam	Alumni - Team member	Branding, marketing
I6	Australia	Alumni - MCVP	Urban design
I7	Hong Kong	Alumni - LCP	Marketing
I8	Vietnam	Alumni - Regional Manager	Event organizing
I9	Vietnam	Alumni - Team member	HR, logistics
I10	Vietnam	Alumni - LCP	HR, branding
I11	Vietnam	Alumni - Team leader	HR, branding
I12	Australia	Alumni - LCP	Neuroscience, Medical science, Engineering

Table 3: Interviewees Profiles

After contacting 15 potential interviewees, all of them accepted the invitation, but twelve meetings are successfully arranged because of mismatches in schedule and different

¹ Brief explanation of AIESEC titles:

LCVP: Local Committee Vice President - Vice President of Local Branch (University level)

LCP: Local Committee President - President of Local Branch (University level)

MCVP: Member Committee President – Vice President of National Entity (Country level)

Regional Manager: Manager of AIESEC in a Region (Asia Pacific, Americas, Europe,...)

time zones. Additionally, all interviewees were conducted online via Zoom or Microsoft Teams due to geographic distance.

Moreover, there are two aspects regarding gender distribution and the university's majors of the sample that need mentioning. Nine out of twelve of the participants are female which might lessen the representativeness of the research. In terms of university majors, there are only three participants with their bachelor's degrees that are not in business. They are International Relations, Architecture, and Neuroscience/Engineering.

3.3. Interview Design

The interview aims to explore new themes to answer the research question and investigate the limitations found in the literature review. Interview questions are mostly built based on the constructs and concepts identified in the literature review, except for the questions aiming to explore purely AIESEC experience. The main scopes of the interview consist of (1) factors that constitute employability, (2) self-perception of employability, and (3) engagement in the AIESEC membership program.

For the first scope, the objective is to identify the factors that the participants view as important to their employability. As identified in the literature review, soft skills, experience, and degree subject understanding and skills are among the crucial factors, one question is dedicated to exploring the order of importance of these factors. The role of HEIs is also investigated because of the ongoing debate on its role in developing employability, especially in the case of business schools. Therefore, the first category includes three following questions:

- What constitutes employability in your opinion?
- How would you rank the importance of the following three factors to one's employability: soft skills, experience, degree subject understanding, and skills?
- What do you think are the roles of HEIs in developing employability?

The second part of the interview mainly discusses how the interviewees would assess their employability. The important aspect of this part is focused on the elaboration of their answers. This could help disclose how they perceive where they are compared to the job market and whether their assessment is consistent with how they think employability should be comprised. Moreover, this would be a necessary anchor for the third scope where their engagement in AIESEC is closely investigated, and it also offers a means to theorize based on self-perceived employability data. For this scope, there is one question:

- To what extent do you perceive yourself as being employable? Would you give me some examples?

In the last section, the questions focus on exploring the emerging new ideas that come up from the engagement of the participants in AIESEC membership programs. The set of questions starts with asking why they signed up for AIESEC to understand the expectations and characteristics of AIESEC that were attractive to them. Next, questions related to their developments and their roles/tasks are raised to discern the potential relations between them. To support this analysis, a hypothetical question is included to see how the participants would react to a situation where they were promoted to a manager position. As for the literature view-related questions, the topic of human and social capital, reflection, and evaluation is mentioned.

- Why did you sign up for AIESEC?
- To what extent do you plan your AIESEC experience to strategically enhance your employability?
- In which way you have been involved in AIESEC and what skills that each way of being involved has cultivated?
- What activities or features in the AIESEC membership program do you think are relevant to employability development?
- To what extent do you think the reflection and evaluation contribute to developing soft skills or employability?
- Does involvement with AIESEC help you build self-confidence and create a sense of self as a future manager/leader?

- How would you rank the importance of social capital and human capital during your AIESEC experience and to your employability?

3.4. Data Analysis Methods

The interview data is analyzed in different ways depending on the way the question is structured and the purpose of the question.

To gather and demonstrate emerging themes and concepts, Gioia methodology is adopted to present different dimensions to which the themes and concepts belong. The Gioia method is a qualitative research approach that involves a systematic analysis of narrative data, such as interviews or written texts, to identify themes and patterns. It emphasizes the importance of immersion in the data, and involves iterative cycles of coding, categorizing, and synthesizing to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Figure 7 is an example illustration of this method.

For the quantitative data which illustrates the number of similar views among the participants, bar charts and tables are used to offer a variety of data visualization, enabling comprehensive data analysis. Tables can be used to serve several purposes such as showing frequency, providing a detailed explanation, and showing potential relations.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter will describe and analyze the findings that emerged through the responses to the interview questionnaire.

The analysis starts with how the participants understand the concept of employability, and which factors are believed to be most important to employability. Next, the analysis of self-perception of employability is conducted to understand the reasons behind their

assessment. Lastly, certain developments and potential relations to the features of the program are investigated to answer the research question ‘To what extent do members of AIESEC develop their employability through their membership?’.

4.1. Factors that Constitute Employability

Table 4 demonstrates the coding of the answers to the question ‘What constitutes employability in your opinion?’. Different factors are identified as listed in the table, followed by a set of example answers to better illustrate the ideas behind each factor. The number of participants with similar views is also included to show the frequency of each factor in the answers.

Factors	Example Answers	Number of participants with similar views
Soft skills	<i>“Mainly soft skills rather than hard skills; for example communications skills, professionalism, problem-solving, long-term thinking, stress management.” – I8</i>	9/12
Experience	<i>“It is the original experience that enables me to understand the operation within the job and it also proves that I have gained expertise in the field.” – I10</i>	8/12
Education	<i>“Education, because it kind of gives us the foundational knowledge into the career and it also helps develop certain skills such as teamwork, presentation skills, or handling your schedule.” – I1</i>	5/12
Attitude & Motivation	<i>“When someone has the motivation, they go look for a job, and it is my willingness to learn and humbleness that helps me get a job even though I’m not so specialized.” – I2</i>	4/12

Industry understanding	<i>"It's important to know which expertise is in high demand and how companies plan their resources for recruitment" – I1</i>	4/12
	<i>"We need to understand not only the industry but also the corporates (how they are performing in the competition)." – I8</i>	
Alignment between company's and personal values	<i>"If I apply for a job, it would be because I share the same values with the company, not just because I want to make money. This also makes it easier for me to be keener to fit the job." – I6</i>	2/12

Table 4: Summary of Factors that Constitute Employability

4.1.1. Analysis of Employability Factors

One thing to note about this analysis is that it takes the case of entry-level jobs instead of senior or management roles. This aspect was brought to the attention of the interviewer during the interview process as many participants started to separate their rankings according to the levels of the job. As the study focuses on the transition from school to the workplace, entry-level job assessment would be appropriate and relevant to the research.

Soft skills, once again, appear to be the most important factor in establishing one's employability according to the participants. The most mentioned soft skills include communication skills, teamwork, project management skills, and problem-solving skills. Moreover, the ability to reflect and evaluate regularly is crucial in developing personal attributes such as resilience, humbleness, or proactivity.

Experience which shows as the second most important factor to employability is believed to act as concrete proof of one's capability. Supporting the role of experience in enhancing employability, interviewee 2 claims:

I am not sure about the first 2 features (soft skills and degree subject understanding) because some say soft skills are what is most importantly learned at the end of an experience, but the experience is better proven on the CV to talk about someone's capability. For example, I would not believe one's words as much unless they show that they have done it on their CV.

Attitude and motivation or industry understanding are raised less by the participants. One possible explanation for this is that these factors are likely to become a focus later after they have gained sufficient soft skills, experience, and education. For example, individuals might spend time studying the industry and companies out of personal interest, then develop motivation to work there afterward.

Alignment between the company's and personal set of values can be viewed as an emerging concept raised by generation Z. That means individuals do not simply need work for economic benefits, but they also look for jobs that align with their beliefs and purpose in life. The answer of interviewee 6 in Table 3 indicates a sense of social responsibility when they went on to explain how they view their job as an urban designer and its contribution to society. However, this idea of value alignment does not seem to be shared among the interviewees as most of them have not had much work experience incorporates yet.

4.1.2. Analysis of the Role of University

Regarding education, less than half of the interviewees refer to this as a main factor contributing to their employability. Although there might be opinions against the university's role in developing employability for being 'too academic', several benefits were mentioned during the interviews, suggesting that universities do not offer only foundational knowledge. This might be the case because of the student community and competitive nature within the universities in question as well.

Figure 5 serves as a summary of the coding of responses to the question ‘What roles do you think HEIs have in developing employability?’. The number of participants with similar views is also included to show the frequency of each factor in the answers.

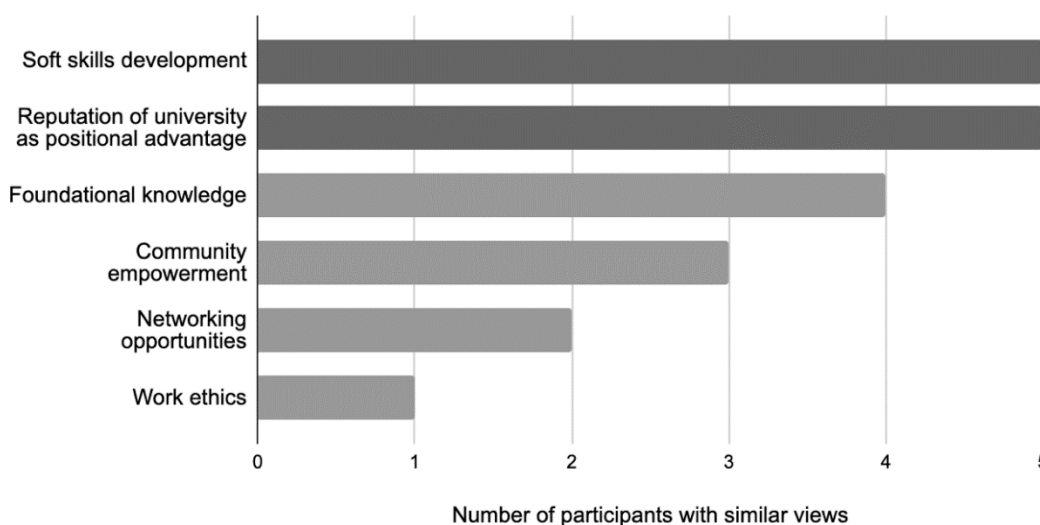


Figure 5: Summary of Roles of HEIs

According to figure 5, the two most appreciated benefits they acknowledge from the university are the soft skills development through teamwork assignments and the reputation of the university itself. This can be explained by the fact that employers tend to quickly skim through an applicant’s CV during the initial screening process. Therefore, it has an influence on students’ perception of what they should gain or appreciate the most from their university, rather than foundational knowledge.

Moreover, community empowerment and networking opportunities are the two factors that the participants view as an incentive to improve themselves and do better in other aspects of life, not just at school.

Interviewee 3 mentions:

It is mostly about the community. The environment is dynamic and full of talented people. There are a lot of clubs too. It pushes me to meet a lot of new people; it makes me try harder and improve myself constantly. It could be

competitive and filled with a lot of pressure at times, but in general, it has a more positive impact on me rather than negatives.

According to this interviewee, there could be both benefits and downsides to such a dynamic and competitive environment at the university. What makes it a rewarding experience is that an individual is likely to have the opportunity to get out of their comfort zone and explore their potential.

4.2. Self-perceived Employability

Table 5 demonstrates the answers to the question ‘To what extent do you perceive yourself as being employable? Would you give me some examples?’. The respondents are divided into four groups (Groups 1 to 4) based on the level of self-assessment, ranging from “Very confident” to “Not too confident” respectively. Following that, their reasonings are provided and a column on the right-hand side column provides a coding method to discern specific themes emerging from their answers.

Group – Interviewee code	Self-assessment	Reasons	Coding
Group 1 – I6, I8*	“I’m very confident.” “8.6-9/10”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They have had plenty of experience working in their field. - They are confident with their soft skills. - They feel like they are more suitable to work for NGOs or other countries rather than their home country due to different work cultures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employable from a specialist perspective - Soft skills as a positional advantage - Corporate culture as a determinant for job compatibility
Group 2 – I1, I2, I4, I5, I12	“I’m pretty employable.” “3.5/5” or “7.5/10”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They are confident with jobs that do not require technical skills or knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employable from a generalist perspective

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They are confident with their soft skills. - The reputation of AIESEC and their university is valuable on their CV. - They are confident with their knowledge and experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Soft skills as a positional advantage - Reputation of the university and AIESEC as a positional advantage - Employable from a specialist perspective
Group 3 – I7, I8*, I9, I10, I11	“My situation is a bit tricky” “3/5”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They moved to another country for work, and they find it challenging to land a job due to their preference towards local workers. - They are not confident with their technical skills or knowledge. - They prefer to look for jobs that match their management experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preference towards local workers - Employable from a generalist perspective - Preference toward a management position - Concern of being irrelevant to the job market due to long stay in AIESEC²
Group 4 – I3	“Not too confident” “50/50” “But I feel like I have the attributes that employers are looking for”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They have stayed in AIESEC for too long. - They are concerned about their level of industry understanding. - They are confident with their soft skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concern of lacking industry understanding - Concern of being irrelevant to the job market due to long stay in AIESEC - Soft skills as a positional advantage

Table 5: Summary of Self-perceived Employability

² This will be further explained in Section 4.2.2.

4.2.1. Analysis of Self-perception of Employability

Overall, most of the participants find themselves employable, differing in the extent to which they feel confident about their capabilities and employment prospects. According to the coding, several themes need to be analyzed further.

Soft skills as a positional advantage are mentioned the most when the participants went on to give examples of how they perceive their employability. In particular, they are confident that they can have the skills that employers look for, which can be translated into faster adaptation at work and less basic training.

Moreover, the reputation of the university was mentioned as an 'initial screening' element in recruitment. This means, the higher the ranking of the university, the more likely they will be chosen for the next round of recruitment.

According to I8, I4, and I7, the country in which they consider their employment can also affect their self-assessment. This is because of two main factors: occupational trends and corporate culture.

Regarding occupational trends, interviewee 4 states that:

It depends. Like in the Malaysian job market, people want to choose a startup (Tech startup), but my expertise is not for them.

Interviewee 7, who suggests a favor of employers towards local workers, gives their reasonings:

My situation is a bit tricky. I studied in Hong Kong and moved to Canada. So, because companies here in Canada treasure local workers, it is more about my field, I will need to know more technical skills which could be equipped with Google courses.

As for I8, their response was divided into two scenarios in which they rank their employability in Vietnam lower than in other countries. For their employability in Vietnam, it is believed that employers expect a certain year of experience at a certain age, whereas,

in other countries or non-profit organizations, such measurement of experience would not matter as much.

4.2.2. Comparison between Generalist Perspective and Specialist Perspective

The idea of using the concept of specialist or generalist to assess one's employability was brought up often in the responses. When referring to specialist jobs, interviewees tend to mention occupations such as engineering, design, finance, and accounting, while generalist jobs include marketing, sales, HR, and event organizing. The case of I6 (urban designer) could be an example of this, where they feel very confident when they have acquired the technical skills and knowledge in their profession. It is worth comparing the answers given by I6 and I3 as they express opposite opinions about their employability.

While both show high confidence in their level of soft skills, I6 is less confident in their employability because they are concerned about not being able to stay relevant to the job market and lacking business insights. I6 went on to explain that AIESEC provides a working environment similar to that of businesses, but it also has its own standards that particularly pays attention to membership experience, which differentiates the experience here than elsewhere. This makes AIESEC become a "utopia" for those who have stayed for a long time, thus leading to a rather high or unrealistic expectation for their work experience when they leave AIESEC.

However, it is important to note I6's conclusion who previously raised their concern of being irrelevant to the job market due to their long stay in AIESEC.

I will still consider staying in AIESEC if it contributes to my career path. The longer I stay, the more self-leadership and self-awareness I develop. Therefore, I don't feel peer pressure anymore as I know what I want to do with my experience.

Despite having lower confidence, I6 demonstrates a strong sense of self-awareness, and the ability to understand their goals and how they can achieve them. Therefore, they might

have a clear plan for their career path in a profession that is likely to be more of a 'generalist' than I3.

4.2.3. Analysis of Self-perceived Employability and AIESEC Profiles

When comparing their self-assessment against their status of employment, there seems to be no specific pattern as they are distributed equally between "full-time employment" and "job seeking". However, when combined with their highest position in AIESEC, most of the group 2 interviewees were LCVPs, LCPs, and Regional Managers. One case that stands out from this is the case of I5 who has the highest position as a team member. It is important to note that this person has already been working in their profession for more than 2 years.

Another interesting finding can be found in group 3 where interviewees often find their situation "tricky" as they are not confident either with their technical skills (LCP profile) or with their skills and knowledge in general. In the case of LCPs in this group, they acknowledge the importance of their management experience, and they also indicate the need to acquire more certificates through online courses.

The case of group 4 (I6) is also worth mentioning as they have the longest duration of membership in AIESEC, and they are still working full-time as Regional managers for AIESEC.

In sum, it is notable that except for the case of a specialist profile who is very confident with their employability in group 1, participants with long management experience (at the branch, national, and regional levels) are more likely to express higher confidence in their employability. The outliers here are often concerned about their business understanding and technical expertise.

4.3. AIESEC Engagement and Employability Development

4.3.1. Reasons for Joining AIESEC

Figure 6 serves as a summary of the coding of responses to the question ‘Why did you sign up for AIESEC?’. The number of participants with similar views is also included to show the frequency of each factor in the answers.

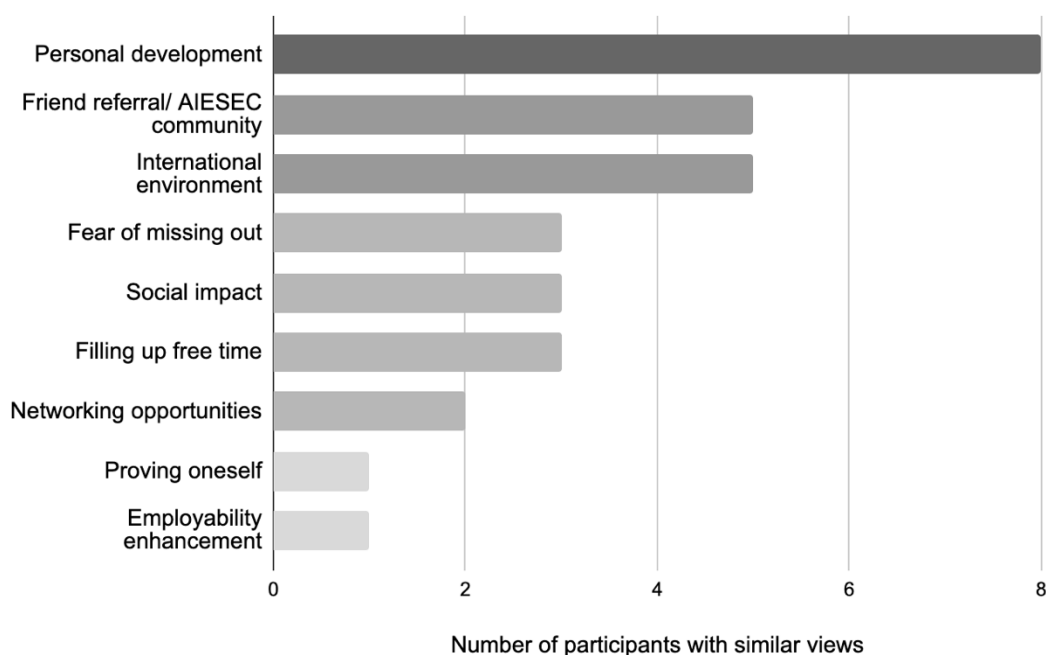


Figure 6: Summary of Reasons for Joining AIESEC

Overall, most participants mention personal development as the main reason to sign up for AIESEC. Personal development in this question was understood by the participants as the general development of skills, personal attributes, and experience. This can be referred to as the concept of human capital mentioned in the Literature Review where human capital and social capital are used to categorize different types of ECAs.

One answer from interviewee 1 can be exemplary of how one might find out about AIESEC and started to apply for it:

At first, I was introduced to AIESEC by my friends. At that time, around my first year of university, I did not want to feel left out, and it was like a compulsory

thing to do, to join some clubs. I also had some free time, and I knew that I wanted to develop myself, to prove myself. And friends, I admired them so much because I could see they were active and very productive people. I could see their growth and hear inspiring stories from them. That's why I decided to apply. I want to try. Why not?

It is common to come across keywords like 'Fear of missing out - FOMO', 'my admirable friends', and 'filling up my free time' in their answers. Although they may state many different reasons, the need to build up their human capital stands out the most from their answer.

Additionally, participants also chose AIESEC because the organization offered an international environment where its members can work with members from other countries and practice speaking English. This factor is particularly appealing to Asian students which make up most of the interview sample; they expect to enhance their English proficiency and become global citizens.

4.3.2. Employability Development as a Reason for Joining AIESEC

Besides networking opportunities for a future career, employability enhancement was only mentioned once in the answers which should be investigated further. Participants were asked another question which is 'Was employability development part of the reason why you applied?'; this question helped gather more insights into this matter.

Despite not stating these points in their previous answers, the interviewees (7 out of 12) seem to agree that employability development was part of the reason why they signed up for AIESEC. They went on to provide their reasons such as:

- The experience would give them an easier transition from school to work.
- They look up to and want to be like AIESEC alumni who work in large companies.
- They feared not having to put in their CV.

To explain this, it might be helpful to look at how the participants perceive employability factors and the main reason why they sign up for AIESEC. This includes soft skills

development, experience, and personal development. Therefore, when asked this question, they could immediately relate to the idea of developing certain skills and gaining experience. In other words, it could be explained that the participants believe these factors can help solve their abovementioned concerns regarding employment.

The remaining five participants did not think about employability until a certain stage of their university time when they started to think about their careers. However, employability then became the main reason for them to continue staying in AIESEC as they claimed they could still benefit from it, with the benefits being technical skills, network, and leadership experience.

4.3.3. Employability Development through AIESEC Membership

If soft skills and experience are believed to play important roles in employability by the participants, how does engagement in AIESEC help enhance these two aspects for its members? The purpose of this section aims to explore the answer to this question.

It is important to note that the participants of the interview only joined AIESEC as their main ECAs during university. Some joined other events and activities at school, but it was not significant in terms of time and commitment. Therefore, the analysis should significantly reflect the influence of AIESEC on its members' employability.

The analysis method used in this section is adapted from the Gioia methodology in which certain concepts, themes, and dimensions are pointed out through the interview answers. Figure 7 is a summary of the developments mentioned in the responses to the question 'What type of developments that support your employability do you think you have gained through your membership in AIESEC?'. The dimensions in this figure are coded A1 to A8 for further analysis.

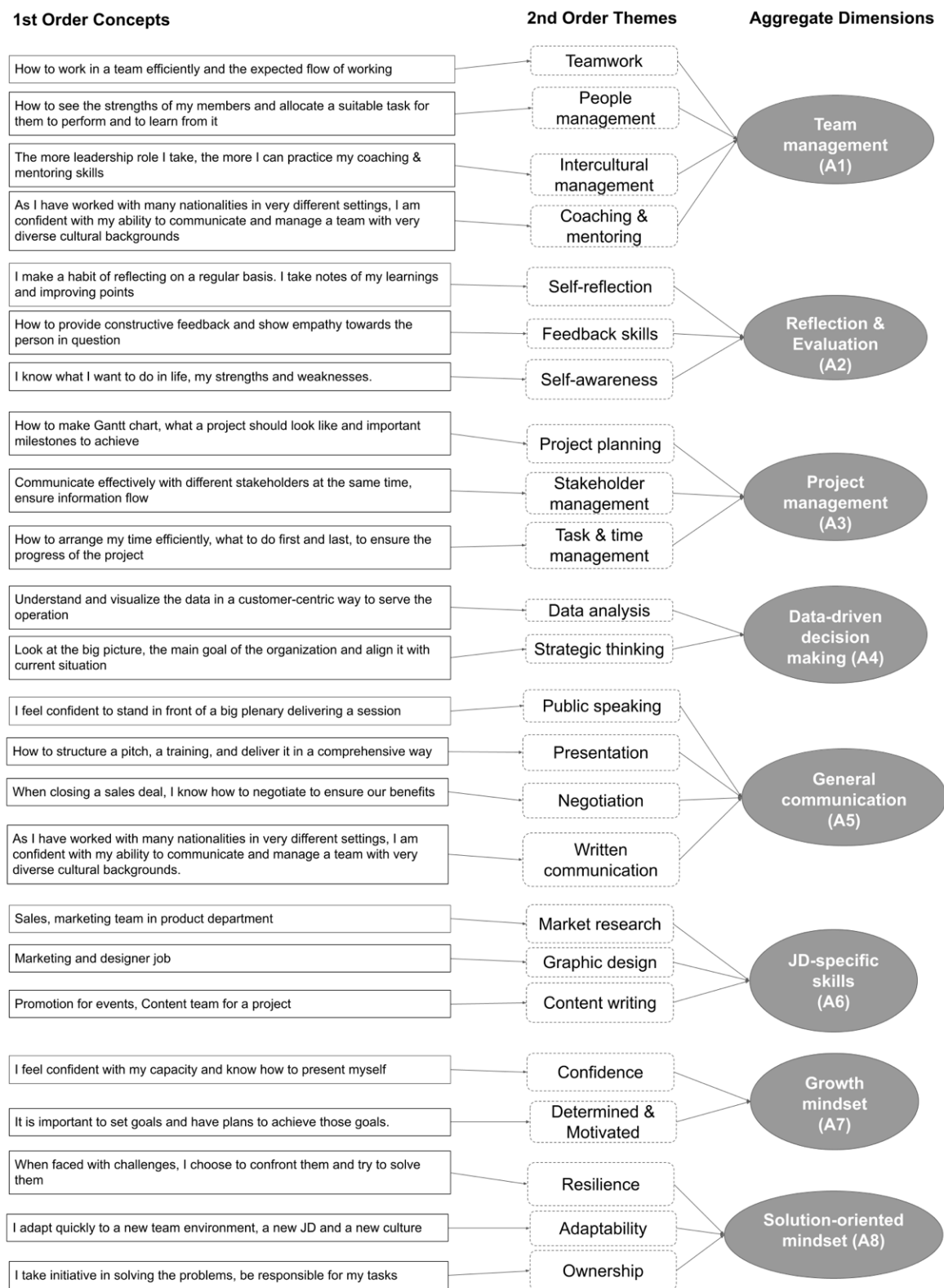


Figure 7: Employability Development through AIESEC Membership – Gioia Framework

Eight aggregate dimensions are identified through the Gioia analysis method. The dimensions of team management and general communication reflect the most developed soft skills that AIESEC members acknowledge. Reflection & evaluation and project management are believed to be acquired through specific AIESEC membership aspects which will be analyzed later. Moreover, data-driven decision-making is developed through most leadership positions in which their main job is to strategically achieve operational goals while JD-specific skills are often acquired through experiencing different roles in a project team. The last two dimensions are largely related to mindset development which corresponds to the image of AIESEC members (determined, motivated, and resilient) the participants had observed before they joined AIESEC.

4.3.4. Features of AIESEC Membership Program Relevant to Employability Development

Table 6 is a summary of the features or aspects of the AIESEC membership program, in response to the question 'What activities or features in the AIESEC membership program do you think are relevant to employability development?'. The left-hand side column contains the main themes within the membership program drawn from the concepts in the other column. The 'Themes' column is also coded into B1 to B5 for further analysis of the potential relationships between these themes and the developments identified in the previous section.

Themes	Keywords
Organizational culture (B1)	AIESEC values, Leadership, Ownership
Organizational structure (B2)	Standardized working process, Diverse and different tasks, Practical experience, Project-based team
Network (B3)	Alumni, Motivated and inspiring individuals, and Business partners on different scales
Membership experience management (B4)	A clear roadmap for development, Inner and outer journey, Reallocation, Training, and Team standards
Talent Management function (B5)	Membership survey, One-to-one meeting, Personal development plan, Monthly evaluation

Table 6: Summary of Most Mentioned Aspects of the AIESEC Membership Program

To better support the further analysis, the features and aspects of the AIESEC program will be explained with examples.

AIESEC values consist of six values which are believed to be the main characteristics AIESEC members have in common. The values are striving for excellence, demonstrating integrity, activating leadership, acting sustainably, enjoying participation, and living in diversity. These values are reminded and encouraged among the members so they would also integrate this into their everyday life. They represent the definition of leadership in AIESEC. One practical example of this would be the case of interviewee 10 when they describe “living diversity” as one of their values.

Moreover, interviewee 1 supported the positive impact of possessing these values:

Employers highly appreciate the values of AIESECers. That is one of the reasons why I stand out from the new employees as I tend to strive for excellence and demonstrate integrity at work.

Another commonly mentioned feature is how AIESEC managed to replicate the operation and working process of an actual business. The participants believe that the standardized process with different practical frameworks and tools helps them familiarize themselves with their jobs faster, which also leaves a good impression on the employers. Moreover,

since AIESEC usually operates based on project teams, it offers a practical opportunity for its members to try different roles in a project. This also responds effectively to the trend of the business world where projects are becoming a more popular operational practice.

4.3.5. Potential Relations between Employability Development and AIESEC Membership Program

Table 7 demonstrates the potential relations between the features of AIESEC's membership programs and the developments identified by the participants. The first column on the left contains the code of the program's feature (B1 – B5), while the first row contains the development codes (A1 – A8). The Total column and row show the total number of potential relations vertically and horizontally.

Factors	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	
B1	x	x					x	x	4
B2			x	x	x	x			4
B3	x						x	x	3
B4		x				x	x		4
B5	x	x	x		x		x	x	6
	3	3	2	1	2	2	4	2	Total

Table 7: Potential Relations between employability development and AIESEC Membership Program

Firstly, in the 'Total' column, the numbers reflect the extent to which certain features of the membership program contribute to different developments. The result shows 80% of the features of the program correspond with the development claimed by the participants by having the total count equal to or larger than 4.

The Talent Management function appears to have the most significant role, influencing 6 out of 8 developments. One of its main roles is to ensure the implementation of Team standards which team leaders must follow to facilitate the Inner and outer journey of their members. That means this function is responsible for checking the quality and providing timely solutions to people-related issues in the organization. Its significant impact on the members' development suggests that an organization not only needs a framework or system for membership experience but also a method to ensure quality implementation and effectiveness.

It is clearly shown from the table that the members appreciate the internal structure, organizational culture, and membership management aspects of AIESEC. One example of this could be the case of interviewee 2 who say they feel like their experience is carefully designed and well taken care of.

Compared to other aspects, the network factor does not seem to have as much contribution to these developments. This could be because most of the interviewees do not know how to utilize this resource effectively for their employment and it does not come up as frequently as the other factors which mostly relate to human capital. This can be explained by the fact that more than half of the participants consider social capital not as important to employability as human capital. The reasons could be that social capital is rather harder to control and it is human capital that enables them to manage the work.

Secondly, the last row shows the total number of developments gained through the membership programs. Growth mindset, team management, and reflection & evaluation are the top three dimensions of this analysis, while data-driven decision-making is not mentioned as frequently. This might be because AIESEC is more capable of providing its members with soft skills and mindset development, and data-driven decision-making requires a higher level of specialization and technical skills.

Moreover, when asked about how confident they would be if they were offered a management position in their workplace, 7 out of 12 answered that they would be

confident. The main reason for this is not only about the experience they have in team management, but it is also about their mindset of being solution-oriented and their confidence in their management capability. The answers were positive in a way that the participants believed they would find a solution to any possible conflicts, and a way to adapt to their new role. The participants also claimed that it is the AIESEC experience that enables them to reach such a level of self-confidence. This supports the potential close relations found in this analysis.

5. DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings from the previous section are discussed in an in-depth manner, with the consideration of other topics mentioned in the literature review. The case study of AIESEC is also discussed in detail to identify the underlying factors that make up the positive impact of the AIESEC membership program on its members' employability.

5.1. Comparison between Interview Data and Literature Review

5.1.1. Difference in Self-perceived Employability from Specialist and Generalist Perspective

Keywords such as 'generalist' and 'specialist' are frequently found in the answers of the participants coming from business schools. One of the reasons for this can be attributed to the high competition in the job market for business graduates because of the higher graduation rate. Another reason is that the skills and knowledge in some jobs (marketing, HR, administration, sales) are believed to be generic and easy to acquire when compared to other professions such as engineering, and architecture.

Although the literature review mentions this aspect of the practice (Brown & Hesketh, 2004; OECD, 2022; Roulin & Bangerter, 2013b), further explanation is successfully provided by the interview data. The participants described the effects this high tension in the industry has on their plans in university. Besides the positives of being motivated to excel in schoolwork and ECAs, peer pressure and fear of missing out are the typical problems these students have to face. Consequently, this gradually grows into a common mentality that business students have to find ways to polish their CVs, to compensate for their profile of a 'generalist'.

5.1.2. Role of HEIs

In the literature review, the debate on the role of HEIs mainly includes two issues. The first issue is about whether a university should take responsibility for developing employability, while the other raises the concern of HEIs being too academic and not efficient at developing employability for their students, especially business schools. However, the interview data provides findings that offer a new way to approach this debate.

To address the first issue, it can be said that the students do not place importance on the research capability of the school, but they appreciate the foundational knowledge and the inspiring community which empowers them to improve themselves and become better citizens. This reinforces the point made in the literature review; that is, as long as HEIs do not compromise on their educational agenda, employability should also be a focus in their curricula.

Regarding HEIs' effectiveness in developing employability, results show that soft skills development, the reputation of the university, foundational knowledge, networking opportunities, and community empowerment are what participants see as the roles of HEIs in their employability. Although less than half of the participants agree that HEI plays a significant role in developing their employability, the fact that they consider soft skills as

being the most important factor to their employability corresponds with soft skills development being what they have gained the most from university. This shows that HEIs can provide the necessary tools and opportunities to develop these in their curricula.

5.1.3. Factors that Constitute Employability

Soft skills, experience, and education are the most mentioned factors contributing to employability. When comparing this finding with the conceptual framework, the factors correspond accordingly with degree subject understanding and skills being referred to as education in the interviews. Soft skills are believed to be the most important factor while degree subject understanding and skills are ranked third for an entry-level job. As for the senior or management position, the participants give degree subject capacity a higher rank than soft skills due to the complexity of the issues those positions often face. Oftentimes, managers must possess a substantial level of expertise and industry understanding.

Another aspect worth discussing is the idea of value alignment, which could impact the attitude and motivation during the job-seeking process. As a result, it can be argued that although a candidate meets all requirements of capacity and practicalities of the job, they might not be employable because of the misalignment in the company's values and their values. Employers are concerned about the long-term commitment and productivity of their employees, especially when they invest in the training and onboarding of their new workers.

5.1.4. Role of Reflection and Evaluation

Reflection and evaluation as a stage in the employability development model are depicted in the conceptual framework. The addition is based on the work of Moon (2004), and Dacre Pool and Sewell (2207), which is also supported by Goldfinch and Hughes (2007).

The data interview shows that most of the participants believe reflection and evaluation contribute substantially to their soft skills development, hence their employability development. They have developed this into a habit in their work life and daily life. AIESEC, in this case, is said to introduce and facilitate the environment for its members to practice reflecting and evaluating in both one-to-one and team settings.

Self-awareness and leadership are considered the most developed aspects through effective evaluation and regular reflection. This, as a result, helps the participants become more confident and focused on their path instead of having peer pressure. The ability to recognize own strengths and weaknesses is also practical for one's employability development. For example, employers would be impressed by a candidate who is capable of not only showcasing their capacity but also understanding their shortcomings and having solutions to address them.

5.2. Role of ECAs based on the Case Study of AIESEC

5.2.1. Organizational Culture

In AIESEC, the organizational culture is built on its vision of developing leadership potential in the stakeholders going through its programs. In the case of this study, the program in question is the membership program. What stands out from the answers of the participants is the frequency and consistency in the way they describe the values they appreciate and still carry over to their life after AIESEC.

Leadership in AIESEC, as mentioned in the literature review, is characterized by six values. These values are believed to shape certain attitudes and actions among the interviewees despite slight differences in interpretation. For example, the participants acknowledge that they have adopted specific AIESEC leadership values when they

mention how they would want to deliver excellent quality of work or how they would think about the company's long-term sustainability before making decisions.

One possible explanation for such a consensus among the participants is how the organization communicates, integrates, and reminds the members of these values. They are demonstrated and passed down from generation to generation of AIESEC members. One exemplary practice of culture cultivation is LEAD space designed mainly for members to reflect and share their stories. The topics often include six values through which a key message is drawn to help solve the current member-related or organizational issue. Moreover, the fact that AIESEC holds annual conferences for its members (regionally and internationally) creates an opportunity to reinforce the organizational culture by showcasing the scale of impact of the organization.

5.2.2. Organizational Structure

As reported in the Analysis section, organizational structure mainly refers to the internal working process and hierarchical structure.

According to the alumni who are working in a corporate, they agree that AIESEC's working process is similar to that of their current workplace. That means, the members already had the opportunity to work in a corporate simulation with different tasks and roles. As a result, they get to know which role they are good at and how they can contribute to a big project team. They also acquire a sense of responsibility and seriousness toward their job.

Regarding hierarchical structure, AIESEC has a flat team structure (leader–members) with layers ranging from the local (city) level to the international (global) level. The higher the level, the larger the scale of management. The organization manages to offer the chance of high level of management for its members at such a young age. The ownership

and power to make a decision are other benefits of AIESEC's flat structure. This, in return, enables personal development through the challenges of the job.

5.2.3. Role of Talent Management Function & Membership Experience Management

According to the findings, AIESEC's membership experience management and its Talent Management function are the factors contributing the most to the development of AIESEC members. The two themes are combined and discussed in this section because there are some overlaps in the scopes of the themes.

One of the most mentioned features is the Inner and Outer Journey or AIESEC's Leadership Development Model. What makes this model a practical tool for personal development is that it illustrates clearly which steps an individual should go through, and how or who facilitates each steps. As this model is consistently implemented and integrated into AIESEC's membership delivery standards, it has become a part of how the members perceive their challenging tasks and influenced what they look for in an experience.

Some practices in AIESEC that represent this kind of facilitation are the reallocation cycle every six months to offer its members to apply for a new job, new function, or new role. This makes the members learn how to adapt quickly and perform the job well. They are equipped with the knowledge and necessary skills to perform the job through functional training at the beginning of the new cycle. For an inner journey, AIESEC employs the Personal Development Plan (PDP) as an official tool for a team leader to facilitate personal reflection and evaluation for members. This PDP is usually discussed during a monthly one-to-one meeting where solutions are defined through a coaching session.

Moreover, Talent Management supervises the implementation of team standards which are the responsibility of team leaders. This function works closely with team leaders every

week to intervene and provide timely solutions to any potential team conflicts. To measure its effectiveness, a membership survey is conducted monthly to analyze the HR situation. Therefore, consistency and creative innovation are believed to be important factors in the Talent Management function's success in AIESEC.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. Main Findings

This section aims to provide a concrete, comprehensive answer to the research question 'To what extent do members of AIESEC develop their employability through their membership?'. Moreover, regarding the research problem, it is hoped that the findings can give the students a clearer idea of what to expect or purposefully seek when joining any ECAs, especially as a long-term commitment to developing employability.

Figure 8 is a model summarizing the findings related mainly to ECAs and employability development. This model serves as a complementary explanation of the role of ECAs to the conceptual framework developed in the literature framework. Four elements of ECAs that are believed to lead to eight different elements of employability development are depicted.

Besides those additions, the model also indicates two different approaches to ECAs of generalists and specialists instead of individuals as in the conceptual framework. The 'willingness to develop' and 'reflection & evaluation' elements still remain in the new model; however, reflection and evaluation are perceived as the skills developed through ECAs rather than self-initiated. Next, soft skills and experience are believed to play a more important role in giving one their positional advantage than degree subject understanding and skills. As a result, employability developed through ECAs

engagement, according to the model, is the most useful and relevant for acquiring an entry-level job.

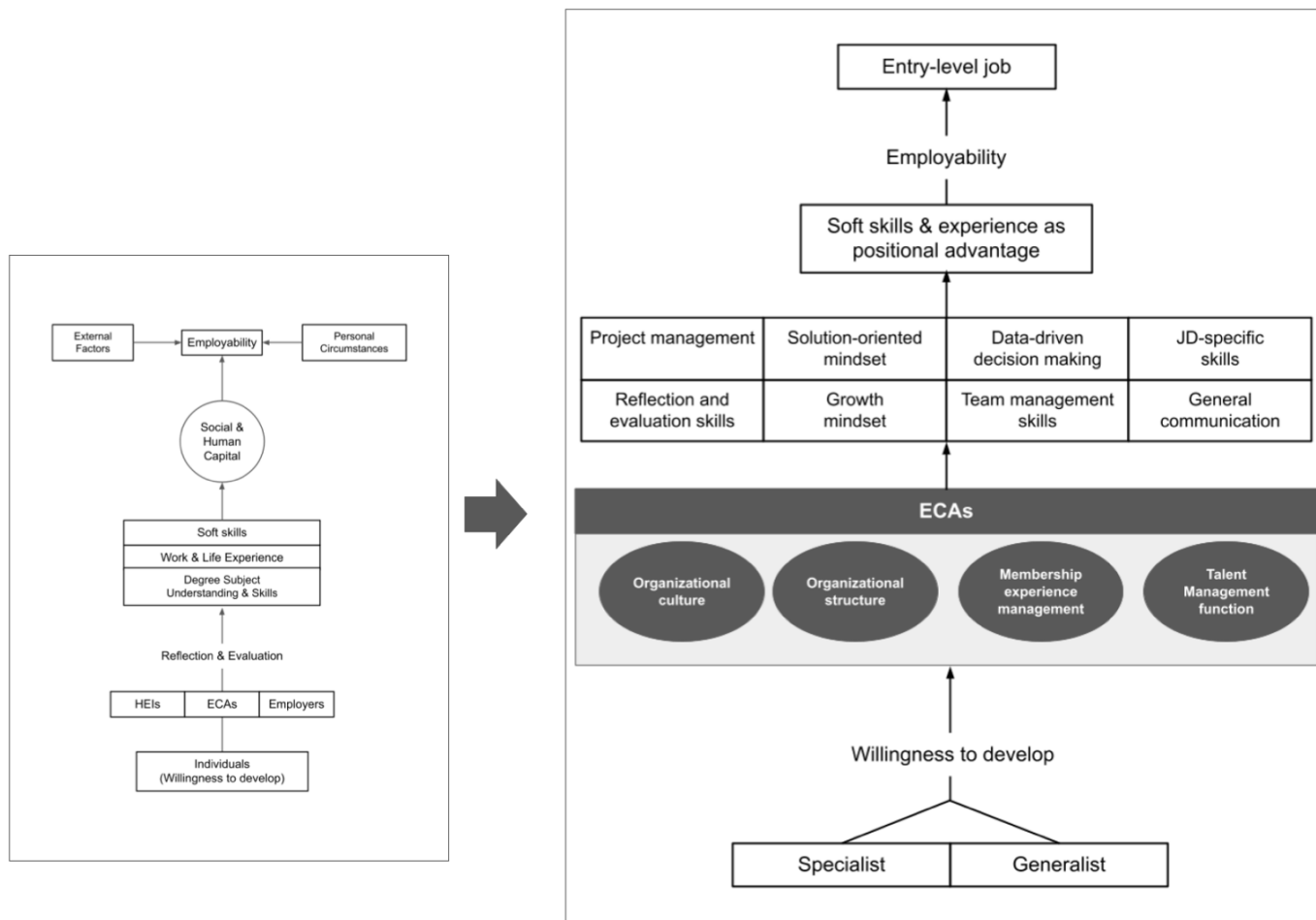


Figure 8: Model of Employability Development through Extracurricular Activities

6.2. Limitations

Regarding the interview sample, the issue of gender distribution as well as university background should be taken into consideration. Although the author managed to interview non-business students, it would benefit the analysis if there were participants from e.g., the School of Law, Arts, or Medicine. Different disciplines may increase the possibility of emerging new ideas.

It is also worth mentioning that more than half of the interviewees come from the same business school in Vietnam. This might have a significant impact on the generalizability of the findings about the roles of the university and points being made about the community/environment in the university by the participants.

Similarly, it is also important to note that while AIESEC has its presence in more than 100 countries and territories on six continents, the research can only reach members in Asia and Australia despite the effort to contact other entities in Europe such as Finland and the Czech Republic. The specific characteristics of each region in terms of culture, working conditions, and laws are likely to imply how AIESEC operations in other countries can be different from the countries in this study.

Lastly, due to time constraints, the study did not manage to explore all factors mentioned in the conceptual framework developed in the literature review. Instead, it goes in-depth into the discussion of AIESEC as a case study for ECAs and discovers the potential relations between certain developments with its membership programs claimed by the participants. This, as a result, provides a comprehensive and detailed answer to the research question.

6.3. Implications for International Business

The findings in this research provide a closer look into one of the international not-for-profit organizations that have a long history and are still active until now. The significance of the research can be found in the detailed findings about the organizational culture, structure, and membership experience management of AIESEC. This may serve as a good case practice for not only other similar organizations but also large-scale multinational companies to follow.

The HR department might be the most likely in a company to benefit directly from this study. For example, how AIESEC designs its Inner and outer journey along with active HR initiatives to ensure quality implementations are the key to its members' developments. Similarly, although there may be differences in the aims and resources dedicated to developing employees in multinationals, Learning & Development executives can adopt the idea behind such a model to integrate into the company's HR system.

6.4. Suggestions for Further Research

The research highlights some areas for quantitative research to test the relations in the model developed in this study. The elements in the model might have different weightings in terms of importance which should be statistically analyzed to provide accurate modifications to the model.

In addition, further research can continue this study but in other types of ECAs such as sports clubs, reward-winning competitions, and artistic clubs. This may allow for emerging ideas that provide insights into ECAs on a broader scale. It is recommended that future studies focus on the potential motivators of that ECA that lead to the development of employability. It is also important to be able to define whether such development is the result of one particular ECA or a mix of ECAs to avoid misinterpretation.

The study can be expanded in terms of sampling. Instead of focusing on the transition from school to work, further study can investigate the applicability of developments of ECAs on employability for a corporate management position. It is proposed by the findings that the view on factors contributing to employability would differ depending on the positions at work.

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