

Students' Perceptions of Job-Oriented Training Programs at The University of Toliara

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine students' perceptions of job-oriented training programs at the University of Toliara, with particular attention to their relevance to labor market needs, their contribution to skill development, their influence on career awareness, and the perceived effectiveness of institutional support. By focusing on students' viewpoints, the study seeks to provide insights into how learners experience job-oriented training and how it supports their preparation for professional life. A qualitative approach was adopted to capture in-depth perspectives and lived experiences of students. Data were collected through direct observation of training-related activities and semi-structured interviews. A total of 20 students enrolled in programs within the Department of Law, Economy, Management and Sociology (DEGS) participated in the interviews. This methodological approach allowed for a detailed exploration of perceptions, supported by observations of learning contexts and student engagement. The findings indicate that students generally perceive job-oriented training as a valuable component of their academic experience, particularly in enhancing practical skills, professional confidence, and understanding of workplace expectations. Students acknowledged the role of training in improving career awareness and helping them reflect on future professional pathways. At the same time, challenges were identified, including concerns about alignment with labor market realities, continuity of training activities, and institutional resources, which influenced perceptions of overall effectiveness. This study offers original insights by centering students' perceptions of job-oriented training at a public university in Madagascar. This setting remains underrepresented in the higher education literature. The findings offer practical implications for institutional improvement and provide a foundation for future studies on employability-oriented training in similar contexts.

Keywords: Perceptions, labor market, students, University of Toliara, autonomy

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions worldwide are increasingly expected to play a direct role in preparing graduates for the labor market (Khoa & Huynh, 2023). Universities are no longer viewed solely as centers of theoretical knowledge production but also as key actors in developing employability skills, career readiness, and professional competencies aligned with national and global economic needs (Vyas, 2024). This shift has been widely documented in higher education reform agendas, where job-oriented and employability-focused training has become a central priority (Cummins, 2016; Elliott & Paton, 2018; Cheng et al., 2022). The growing emphasis on employability reflects concerns about graduate unemployment, skills mismatches, and the demand for adaptable graduates capable of navigating complex, rapidly changing labor markets (De Vos et al., 2021).

Globally, universities have adopted diverse strategies to address these challenges, including curriculum reform, industry training, internships, career guidance services, and industry partnerships. Studies conducted in various national contexts highlight the importance of aligning academic programs with labor market expectations and employer needs (Yeravdekar & Tiwari, 2014; Ortega & Aguillo, 2009;

De los Ríos-Carmenado et al., 2021). Job-oriented training programs are often promoted as effective mechanisms for bridging the gap between academic learning and professional practice, offering students opportunities to acquire practical skills, gain workplace exposure, and develop career-related competencies (Hashim, 2023; Marques & Estima, 2024). These initiatives are increasingly regarded as indicators of institutional quality and relevance in both national and international higher education systems.

Students' perceptions represent a critical dimension in evaluating the effectiveness and relevance of job-oriented training initiatives. Perceptions influence motivation, engagement, satisfaction, and ultimately the extent to which students benefit from educational interventions. Previous studies have shown that students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness, training relevance, and institutional support significantly shape their academic experiences and career outcomes (Chisango et al., 2025; Khatri et al., 2024). Understanding how students perceive job-oriented training provides valuable insights into whether such programs meet learners' expectations, support career development, and enhance employability readiness. In higher education contexts, students are not passive recipients of training but active stakeholders whose perspectives can inform policy improvement and program design (Cheng et al., 2022; Hashim, 2023; Zogopoulos & Raptis, 2024).

Career development theories further emphasize the role of individual perceptions, social support, and contextual factors in shaping students' career trajectories. Career adaptability, self-efficacy, and decision-making competence are influenced by educational experiences and institutional support structures (Rottinghaus et al., 2009; Wang & Jiao, 2023). Studies have demonstrated that exposure to career-oriented learning environments contributes positively to students' confidence in managing career transitions and employment decisions (Xie et al., 2025; Diao & Yao, 2025). Job-oriented training programs, therefore, function not only as skill-development mechanisms but also as formative experiences that shape students' professional identities and aspirations.

In developing and emerging higher education systems, universities' role in promoting employability is particularly significant. Many institutions operate within contexts characterized by limited labor market absorption capacity, structural unemployment, and resource constraints. Higher education reforms in countries across Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe reveal persistent challenges related to curriculum relevance, institutional governance, and graduate employability (Abdiraiymova et al., 2013; Irakli, 2021; Dunlop & Bekkouche, 2024). Studies conducted in African universities have highlighted concerns regarding the adequacy of training in addressing community and labor market needs, emphasizing the importance of student-centered evaluations of training effectiveness (Cimpaye et al., 2025; Saruchera & Gie, 2025; Emynorane et al., 2025).

Madagascar's higher education system reflects many of these broader challenges. Universities face increasing pressure to modernize curricula, improve teaching quality, and strengthen links with the labor market. Institutional capacity constraints, limited industry collaboration, and mismatches between academic training and employment opportunities continue to affect graduate outcomes (Emynorane et al., 2025). The University of Toliara, as one of the country's major public universities, plays a crucial role in training graduates for regional and national development. Job-oriented training initiatives implemented by the university aim to enhance students' professional preparedness and responsiveness to labor market demands.

Examining students' perceptions of job-oriented training at the University of Toliara is essential for understanding how learners experience these initiatives. Perceptions provide insight into the perceived relevance, quality, and effectiveness of training programs, as well as students' confidence in their employability prospects. Prior studies conducted in different university contexts suggest that students' satisfaction with training programs is closely linked to perceived skill acquisition, teaching quality, and alignment with career goals (Hashim, 2023; Chisango et al., 2025; Rahman & Nasrin, 2024). Students' feedback also helps identify gaps between institutional intentions and actual learning experiences.

Higher education literature increasingly recognizes that employability development extends beyond technical skills to include soft skills, career management competencies, and psychosocial factors. Attachment, family support, and social relationships influence career aspirations and decision-making processes among university students (Bhatia et al., 2023; Xie et al., 2025). Job-oriented training programs that integrate career guidance, experiential learning, and mentorship can positively shape students' readiness to navigate complex employment environments (De Vos et al., 2021; Zogopoulos & Raptis, 2024). Evaluating such programs from students' perspectives allows institutions to assess whether training addresses both technical and developmental dimensions of employability.

Institutional aspirations toward quality enhancement and global competitiveness further underscore the importance of effective job-oriented training. Universities seeking to improve their standing and relevance increasingly adopt governance, quality management, and innovation strategies to produce employable graduates (Hassan et al., 2011; Ibidunni et al., 2023; Marques, 2025). World-class university discourse emphasizes teaching innovation, stakeholder engagement, and responsiveness to societal needs (De los Ríos-Carmenado et al., 2021; Avenali et al., 2024; Yeravdekar & Tiwari, 2014). Student perceptions serve as an important indicator of whether institutional strategies translate into meaningful learning outcomes at the program level.

This study focuses on students' perceptions of job-oriented training programs at the University of Toliara, to contribute empirical evidence to ongoing discussions on employability-oriented higher education in Madagascar. By centering students' voices, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how job-oriented training is perceived in terms of relevance, effectiveness, and contribution to career readiness. Such insights are valuable for institutional leaders, policymakers, and educators seeking to enhance the quality and impact of higher education training in contexts characterized by evolving labor market demands and development challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore students' perceptions of job-oriented training programs at the University of Toliara. Such an approach was well-suited to capturing students' views, interpretations, and lived experiences regarding the training they received. The study focused on understanding how learners assessed the practical value, relevance, and applicability of job-oriented activities in relation to their future professional pathways.

Data collection relied on observation and semi-structured interviews. Observations made it possible to examine training sessions, learning interactions, and student participation within academic settings linked to professional preparation. In parallel, interviews were conducted with 20 students drawn from the Faculty of Law, Economy, Management, and Sociology (DEGS). The interviews provided detailed narratives concerning students' experiences and evaluations of job-oriented training. The combination of these methods deepened the findings by allowing insights from direct observation to complement students' accounts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceived Relevance of Job-Oriented Training to Labor Market Needs

Students generally viewed job-oriented training as a meaningful component of their university experience, particularly for preparing for employment. Many participants emphasized that these training initiatives provided exposure to applied knowledge and professional practices that were not always addressed through conventional coursework. This perception reflects global trends in higher education that emphasize employability as a core institutional outcome (Cummins, 2016; Cheng et al., 2022). Students indicated that job-oriented training contributed to their understanding of workplace expectations, professional norms, and sector-specific requirements, which they considered essential for navigating post-graduation employment opportunities.

At the same time, students expressed varied opinions regarding the extent to which training content matched actual labor market realities. Several participants noted that certain training activities lacked sufficient alignment with local economic conditions and employment opportunities. Similar challenges have been identified in higher education systems where structural constraints limit curriculum adaptation and industry engagement (Cimpaye et al., 2025; Emynorane, 2019; Dunlop & Bekkouche, 2024). These perspectives suggest that relevance is not only determined by the presence of job-oriented training but also by its contextual grounding and responsiveness to evolving market demands.

Students' perceptions highlight the importance of continuous evaluation and adaptation of training programs. When training initiatives are perceived as relevant and practical, student engagement and motivation tend to increase. Previous studies emphasize that perceived relevance strongly influences satisfaction and learning outcomes in higher education (Rahman & Nasrin, 2024). The findings indicate that enhancing alignment between training content and labor market needs may strengthen the overall effectiveness of job-oriented education at the university level.

Skill Development and Professional Competency Enhancement

Participants consistently reported that job-oriented training supported the development of practical and transferable skills. Communication, teamwork, adaptability, and problem-solving were frequently mentioned as competencies strengthened through training activities. These skills are widely recognized as essential components of graduate employability in contemporary labor markets (Cheng et al., 2022; De Vos et al., 2021; Zogopoulos & Raptis, 2024). Students noted that experiential learning elements increased their confidence in handling professional responsibilities and interacting within organizational environments.

Differences in perceived skill development emerged depending on the structure and duration of training activities. Some students indicated that short or irregular sessions limited opportunities for sustained practice and feedback. Comparable findings have been reported in studies examining training effectiveness in higher education, where insufficient continuity reduces the long-term impact on competency development (Hashim, 2023; Marques & Estima, 2024; Saruchera & Gie, 2025). These perceptions suggest that consistent implementation and reinforcement are key factors in maximizing skill acquisition.

The development of professional competencies is closely linked to students' career adaptability and self-efficacy. Literature on career development highlights that structured learning experiences enhance individuals' readiness to manage career transitions and employment challenges (Rottinghaus et al., 2009; Wang & Jiao, 2023). Students' views indicate that job-oriented training contributes to this process, particularly when opportunities for practical application are sustained and well-supported. Strengthening these elements may further enhance students' preparedness for professional environments.

Influence of Job-Oriented Training on Career Awareness and Aspirations

Job-oriented training was widely perceived as influential in shaping students' awareness of career opportunities and professional pathways. Participants reported that training activities provided clearer insights into occupational roles, sector expectations, and employment possibilities related to their academic programs. These perceptions align with studies emphasizing the role of experiential learning in facilitating career exploration and informed decision-making (Alaydrus & Abd. (Hamid, 2019; Chen et al., 2020; De Vos et al., 2021). Students indicated that exposure to professional contexts helped them connect academic learning with real-world applications.

Several participants described changes in their career aspirations following participation in training initiatives. Exposure to workplace realities prompted some students to refine their goals, reassess expectations, or explore alternative career options. Such shifts reflect the dynamic nature of career development during the university years, where educational experiences significantly influence vocational

identity formation (Nice & Joseph, 2023; Giannantonio & Hurley-Hanson, 2006; O'Brien et al., 2000). Job-oriented training thus appears to function as a catalyst for self-reflection and career clarification.

Broader psychosocial factors, including self-efficacy and social support, also shape career awareness. Studies demonstrate that educational environments that promote career exploration positively affect students' confidence and decision-making (Wang & Jiao, 2023; Diao & Yao, 2025). Students' perceptions suggest that job-oriented training provides a foundation for these processes, particularly when combined with guidance and reflective opportunities. Enhancing these aspects may further support students' long-term career development.

Institutional Support and Perceived Effectiveness of Training Implementation

Students acknowledged institutional efforts to introduce job-oriented training as a positive step toward improving graduate employability. Many participants viewed these initiatives as evidence of the university's commitment to enhancing practical learning and professional preparation. Such perceptions align with literature emphasizing the role of institutional leadership, governance, and quality management in supporting employability-oriented education (Hassan et al., 2011; Ibidunni et al., 2023; Marques, 2025). Students generally valued opportunities linking academic knowledge with professional practice.

Concerns were raised regarding organizational and logistical challenges affecting training delivery. Participants mentioned limited resources, uneven implementation, and restricted access to professional environments. Similar issues have been documented in studies addressing higher education reform and institutional capacity constraints, particularly in developing contexts (Abdiraiymova et al., 2013; Irakli, 2021; Dunlop & Bekkouche, 2024). These challenges appear to influence students' overall perceptions of training effectiveness and consistency.

Students' feedback underscores the importance of institutional support mechanisms in shaping learning experiences. Quality assurance processes, clear coordination, and systematic evaluation are critical for sustaining effective job-oriented training (Pilonato & Monfardini, 2020). Incorporating student perspectives into program evaluation can help institutions identify areas for improvement and enhance the impact of training initiatives on graduate outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study examined students' perceptions of job-oriented training programs at the University of Toliara and highlighted their importance in enhancing employability, skill development, and career awareness. The findings show that students generally value job-oriented training as a meaningful complement to academic learning, particularly for strengthening practical competencies, professional confidence, and understanding of workplace expectations. At the same time, students' perceptions reveal challenges related to relevance, continuity, and institutional support, indicating that the impact of such training depends on its quality, organization, and alignment with labor market realities. Based on these insights, several practical solutions can be proposed. Universities should reinforce collaboration with employers, professional bodies, and local communities to ensure that training content reflects current economic and employment needs. Structured and continuous training activities should be prioritized to allow students to practice, refine, and consolidate professional skills over time. Adequate institutional support, including effective coordination, resource allocation, and monitoring mechanisms, is essential to enhance the consistency and effectiveness of job-oriented initiatives. Integrating career guidance, mentoring, and reflective components within training programs may further strengthen students' career adaptability and readiness for professional life. As a closing remark, future studies could extend this work by incorporating the perspectives of graduates, employers, and academic staff, and by adopting mixed-methods designs to assess long-term employment outcomes, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of job-oriented training within higher education contexts.

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