



INVESTIGATING ESP LEARNING NEEDS FOR EMPLOYABILITY: INSIGHTS FROM ALUMNI OF NON-ENGLISH MAJORS IN VIETNAMⁱ

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Abstract:

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is increasingly conceptualised as a form of employability capital; however, its alignment with workplace communication demands remains insufficiently specified in the Vietnamese higher education context. This study investigates English-for-employability needs through a survey of 250 alumni of non-English majors within five years of graduation in Vietnam. Using a task-based needs analysis, the study examines perceived importance, self-reported preparedness, and importance-preparedness gaps across seven communication domains. Descriptive statistics, paired-samples t-tests, and repeated-measures ANOVA were employed to analyse domain-level variation. The findings indicate that communication needs are unevenly distributed. Recruitment-related tasks, particularly those associated with job applications and interviews, are rated as more important than other domains and exhibit comparatively larger gaps between importance and preparedness. In contrast, tasks involving client communication and cross-border interaction are rated lower in importance and show smaller gaps. Although preparedness varies across domains, consistent discrepancies between perceived importance and readiness are observed. These patterns suggest that alumni recognise key communication demands but do not report uniform preparedness across task types. The findings support the value of task-based approaches in ESP needs analysis and provide an empirical basis for aligning ESP provision more closely with recruitment and early-career communication contexts.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes (ESP); graduate employability; needs analysis; workplace communication; transition to employment

ⁱ KHẢO SÁT NHU CẦU TIẾNG ANH CHUYÊN NGÀNH PHỤC VỤ NĂNG LỰC ĐÁP ỨNG VIỆC LÀM: GÓC NHÌN TỪ CỰU SINH VIÊN KHÔNG CHUYÊN NGỮ TẠI VIỆT NAM

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Tóm tắt:

Tiếng Anh chuyên ngành ngày càng được xem như một dạng năng lực hỗ trợ khả năng đáp ứng việc làm; tuy nhiên, mức độ tương thích giữa chương trình đào tạo và yêu cầu giao tiếp thực tế tại nơi làm việc vẫn chưa được xác định rõ trong bối cảnh giáo dục đại học Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu này khảo sát nhu cầu sử dụng tiếng Anh phục vụ việc làm thông qua khảo sát 250 cựu sinh viên không chuyên ngữ trong vòng năm năm sau tốt nghiệp tại Việt Nam. Dựa trên cách tiếp cận phân tích nhu cầu theo nhiệm vụ giao tiếp, nghiên cứu xem xét mức độ quan trọng được cảm nhận, mức độ sẵn sàng tự đánh giá, và khoảng cách giữa tầm quan trọng và sự sẵn sàng trong bảy nhóm nhiệm vụ giao tiếp nghề nghiệp. Dữ liệu được phân tích bằng thống kê mô tả, paired-samples t-tests và repeated-measures ANOVA. Kết quả cho thấy nhu cầu giao tiếp phân bố không đồng đều giữa các lĩnh vực. Các nhiệm vụ liên quan đến tuyển dụng, đặc biệt là viết hồ sơ xin việc và trả lời phỏng vấn, được đánh giá có tầm quan trọng cao hơn và tồn tại khoảng cách lớn hơn giữa mức độ quan trọng và sự sẵn sàng. Ngược lại, các nhiệm vụ liên quan đến giao tiếp với khách hàng quốc tế được đánh giá thấp hơn và có khoảng cách nhỏ hơn. Những phát hiện này cho thấy cựu sinh viên nhận thức rõ yêu cầu giao tiếp nghề nghiệp nhưng chưa cảm thấy sẵn sàng đồng đều ở các loại nhiệm vụ khác nhau. Nghiên cứu góp phần cung cấp cơ sở thực nghiệm cho việc thiết kế chương trình ESP theo định hướng nhiệm vụ giao tiếp và gắn kết chặt chẽ hơn với bối cảnh tuyển dụng và giao tiếp nghề nghiệp giai đoạn đầu sự nghiệp.

Keywords: Tiếng Anh chuyên ngành; khả năng đáp ứng việc làm; phân tích nhu cầu; giao tiếp nghề nghiệp; chuyển tiếp vào thị trường lao động

1. Introduction

English is widely positioned in Vietnamese higher education as a resource for enhancing graduate employability. However, its contribution depends less on general language attainment than on graduates' ability to use English in recruitment processes and early-career workplace communication. Recent policy-oriented scholarship in Vietnam has reframed English education as a form of employability capital whose value derives from its usability in opportunity-generating contexts rather than from abstract proficiency levels (Tran, Nghia, & Ngo, 2024). Within this perspective, English becomes consequential only when it can be translated into observable communicative performance that supports access to employment (Nghia, Anh, & Kien, 2024). Although the expansion of English-medium instruction has increased exposure to English across disciplines, such exposure does not necessarily lead to the development of interactional competence required for professional communication (Hadingham & Zhang, 2026). This suggests that alignment with workplace communication demands remains a central issue.

International evidence indicates that employability-related English is typically realised through communicative tasks rather than through isolated linguistic knowledge. Employers tend to evaluate graduates in terms of clarity, appropriacy, and

responsiveness in workplace interaction, where difficulties often arise in routine exchanges rather than in specialised vocabulary use (Al Riyami, 2021). From the graduate perspective, transition research shows that early-career employees frequently develop communication competence through workplace experience rather than through prior instruction (Chan, 2021). In Southeast Asia, converging evidence from employers and graduates has led to calls for ESP provision to prioritise recruitment-related and early-career communication tasks, with attention to how language functions in specific labour market contexts (Ali et al., 2025). In this study, communicative tasks are defined as recurrent, goal-oriented language activities associated with recruitment and early-career interaction, including job application writing, interview performance, and routine workplace communication.

In Vietnam, concerns about ESP effectiveness are closely linked to issues of curricular alignment. Empirical work has identified discrepancies between university ESP provision and workplace communication practices, limiting the transferability of classroom learning (Nguyen, Kettle, & Doherty, 2023). Although ESP courses are recognised as relevant to employability, their impact is constrained when learner needs are not specified at the level of task demands (Chi & Vu, 2024). These constraints are further reflected in institutional and pedagogical conditions shaping ESP teaching (Dong, 2025; Tran & Phan, 2022). Despite these developments, there remains limited task-based, empirically prioritised evidence grounded in graduates' experience of workplace communication.

This study addresses this gap by conducting a survey-based needs analysis of alumni of non-English majors within five years of graduation in Vietnam. By focusing on individuals with direct exposure to recruitment and early-career communication contexts, the study examines how communication tasks are evaluated in terms of perceived importance, preparedness, and importance-preparedness gaps. The analysis employs descriptive statistics, paired-samples comparisons, and domain-level analysis to identify patterns across communication domains. In doing so, the study provides empirically grounded insights into how ESP provision may be aligned more closely with employability-related communication demands in the Vietnamese context (Tran et al., 2024; Nghia et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- What communication tasks do alumni of non-English majors perceive as most important for recruitment and early-career workplace communication?
- To what extent do gaps exist between the perceived importance of these communication tasks and alumni's self-reported preparedness to perform them?
- To what extent do perceived importance, preparedness, and importance-preparedness gaps differ significantly across communication domains?

2. Literature review

2.1. English as employability capital

Recent literature has shifted the focus of employability debates from English proficiency as an outcome to the conditions under which English becomes usable in labour market participation. Tran, Nghia, and Ngo (2024) conceptualise English education as an employability resource whose value depends on institutional positioning, curricular priorities, and graduates' capacity to mobilise language in opportunity-generating contexts. This position is further elaborated by Nghia, Anh, and Kien (2024), who argue that English functions as employability capital only when it is convertible into observable workplace performance rather than remaining a decontextualised credential. Beyond Vietnam, comparative work similarly treats language as a mediating resource shaped by structural constraints and labour market expectations rather than as an isolated individual attribute (Yallem & Dipitso, 2023). Taken together, these perspectives indicate that ESP design requires a task-oriented specification of the communicative activities through which English is enacted in professional settings.

However, the expansion of English-medium instruction complicates this relationship between exposure and employability. While EMI increases contact with English, its contribution to employability remains uneven and context-dependent, particularly in relation to interactional competence (Hadingham & Zhang, 2026). This observation reinforces the argument that exposure alone does not ensure readiness for workplace communication and that English education must be evaluated in terms of its capacity to support work-relevant performance (Tran et al., 2024). Empirical studies further suggest that graduates often develop professional communication skills through post-graduation adaptation rather than through prior instruction (Chan, 2021), while employers continue to prioritise clarity, responsiveness, and pragmatic appropriacy in everyday workplace interaction (Al Riyami, 2021).

Within the ESP teaching, these findings highlight a methodological implication: needs analysis must move beyond general perceptions of English ability to focus on specific communicative tasks, genres, and interactional routines. Although prior studies have examined alumni perspectives on ESP curricula (Nawir, Dwisusila, & Elsara, 2023) and identified challenges in ESP implementation in Vietnam (Dong, 2025; Tran & Phan, 2022), the literature remains limited in offering empirically prioritised, task-based accounts of employability needs grounded in graduates' workplace experience.

2.2. Employability-relevant English

International evidence consistently supports a task-based conceptualisation of employability-related English. Employer-focused studies indicate that communication is evaluated primarily in terms of clarity, appropriacy, and responsiveness in professional exchanges, with limitations becoming most visible in routine workplace interaction rather than in the absence of specialised vocabulary (Al Riyami, 2021). This does not diminish the role of lexis; rather, it repositions curricular priorities towards pragmatic

control, genre awareness, and interactional competence in both written and spoken communication. From the graduate perspective, transition research further shows that early-career employees often develop these competencies through workplace socialisation and adaptive strategies, suggesting that university provision may insufficiently specify the interactional demands of professional contexts (Chan, 2021). This transition lens is particularly relevant for ESP design because it foregrounds communication tasks that are consequential at recruitment and early-career stages, where performance is directly evaluated.

Regional evidence in Southeast Asia reinforces this orientation. Drawing on employer and graduate perspectives, Ali et al. (2025) argue for curriculum reform that positions recruitment discourse and workplace interaction as central rather than peripheral components of ESP. Similarly, Karim et al. (2023) demonstrate that performance in professional communication is shaped not only by individual proficiency but also by institutional conditions and opportunities to practise work-relevant genres. Collectively, these findings indicate that employability-oriented English requires a clear specification of task demands alongside attention to the learning environments that support effective performance.

2.3. ESP alignment with workplace practice and constraints

A growing body of research has raised concerns about the alignment between tertiary ESP provision and the communicative practices required in globalised workplaces. Adopting an alignment perspective, Nguyen, Kettle, and Doherty (2023) compare ESP programme delivery in Vietnam with actual language use in professional contexts, identifying discrepancies that limit the transferability of classroom learning. Their findings suggest that broad claims about “*meeting workplace needs*” are insufficient unless grounded in empirical evidence specifying which communicative practices are most prevalent and where existing instruction falls short. Similarly, Chi and Vu (2024) acknowledge the contribution of ESP courses to graduate employability while emphasising that their impact is constrained when curricula are not explicitly anchored in recruitment and workplace communication tasks. These accounts indicate that the core issue lies not in recognising the importance of English, but in the absence of task-prioritised evidence to inform feasible curriculum design.

Pedagogical constraints further complicate alignment. Research on teachers’ perceptions shows that ESP instruction is shaped by institutional conditions and resource limitations, which directly influence what can be implemented in practice (Tran & Phan, 2022). In parallel, Dong (2025) documents systemic challenges affecting ESP delivery in Vietnamese universities, reinforcing the need to prioritise a manageable set of high-impact tasks rather than broadening content coverage. From a learner perspective, Bui (2022) reports that both students and teachers value ESP instruction that connects classroom activities with meaningful communicative outcomes. Taken together, this evidence suggests that alignment problems are inseparable from instructional constraints,

underscoring the need for a task-focused and operationally feasible needs analysis that can directly inform syllabus design and assessment.

2.4. Needs analysis design and assessment in employability-oriented ESP

Recent literature underscores the value of grounding employability-oriented needs analysis in graduate experience. Alumni-based studies demonstrate that retrospective accounts can identify communicative demands that were not fully visible during university study, thereby strengthening the ecological validity of needs claims (Nawir, Dwisusila, & Elsara, 2023). This perspective aligns with transition research showing that workplace communication competence is often developed through post-graduation experience rather than pre-service training (Chan, 2021). Consequently, needs analysis should focus on identifying task salience and preparedness gaps rather than assuming relevance based on curricular intentions. A task-based approach that quantifies perceived importance and preparedness provides a practical foundation for linking needs analysis to curriculum design, particularly when priority tasks can be translated into observable performance outcomes.

Assessment-oriented ESP research further supports this alignment. Hsu, Su, Su, and Su (2026) demonstrate that performance-based assessment can be operationalised through collaboratively developed rubrics that are closely aligned with instructional objectives. Such approaches offer a feasible pathway for assessing workplace-relevant tasks, including interviews, meetings, and client interaction. At the same time, broader reviews indicate that performance-based learning and assessment remain underrepresented in ESP research, despite their relevance to workplace readiness (Setiawan, Hartono, Suwandi, & Fitriati, 2026). Importantly, instructional design must also account for contextual constraints. Studies highlight that learners' access to practice opportunities and institutional conditions can shape their ability to engage with employability tasks (Oblova & Gerasimova, 2024). Taken together, these findings suggest that effective ESP needs analysis should be task-focused, empirically grounded, and sensitive to the practical conditions under which teaching and learning occur.

2.5. Research gaps

Prior research points to three consistent patterns. First, English in Vietnam is increasingly evaluated in terms of its usability for employment rather than as an abstract proficiency outcome (Tran et al., 2024; Nghia et al., 2024). Second, both employer and graduate perspectives locate communication needs in concrete tasks, particularly those related to recruitment and early workplace interaction (Al Riyami, 2021; Chan, 2021; Ali et al., 2025). Third, alignment studies continue to show gaps between ESP provision and workplace practices, often shaped by institutional constraints (Nguyen, Kettle, & Doherty, 2023; Chi & Vu, 2024; Bui, 2022). However, existing work rarely provides a task-prioritised account of these needs based on graduates' experience. In particular, there is limited evidence on how importance and preparedness vary across specific communication tasks. Addressing

this gap is necessary for informing ESP design in a way that is both empirically grounded and practically feasible.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study employed a cross-sectional questionnaire survey informed by needs analysis principles to examine English-for-employability communication tasks among alumni of non-English majors. The design was guided by the premise that employability-related English is best understood through observable communicative tasks rather than abstract proficiency measures (Al Riyami, 2021; Chan, 2021). A task-based survey approach was therefore adopted to capture how graduates evaluate the importance of specific communication tasks and their preparedness to perform them in recruitment and early-career contexts. This design allows the identification of priority areas for ESP curriculum development based on empirically grounded gaps between perceived importance and readiness.

3.2. Research setting and participants

The study was conducted at a university in Southern Vietnam offering a range of business-related programmes. Participants comprised alumni who had graduated within the previous five years and were either employed or had recent work experience. This focus reflects evidence that graduates develop more differentiated understandings of workplace communication demands after entering employment (Chan, 2021).

A total of 250 valid responses were obtained through convenience sampling via alumni networks and institutional channels. Participants represented diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including Finance and Banking, Business Administration, Accounting, International Business, Business Law, Management Information Systems, and Data Science. Employment sectors varied accordingly, allowing the study to capture communication demands across heterogeneous workplace contexts (Ali et al., 2025). While convenience sampling limits generalisability, it is appropriate for exploratory needs analysis in institution-specific contexts.

3.3. Instrument

The survey instrument was developed to operationalise employability needs as task-based constructs. Section A collected demographic and employment information (gender, major, work experience, and employment sector). Section B measured 29 communication tasks grouped into seven domains: job application, interviews, workplace email, meetings, client communication, presentations, and professional documentation.

Each task was rated on two five-point Likert scales: importance (1 = Not important to 5 = Extremely important) and preparedness (1 = Not prepared to 5 = Highly prepared). This dual-rating structure enables direct calculation of unmet need through a gap score defined as: $Gap = Importance - Preparedness$.

Content validity was established through expert review by two ESP lecturers with experience in curriculum design, who evaluated item relevance and clarity. Minor revisions were made to eliminate redundancy and improve wording consistency. Internal consistency reliability was acceptable across domains, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.78 to 0.86.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through an anonymous online questionnaire distributed via alumni networks, with voluntary participation and informed consent obtained prior to completion.

Analysis was conducted in three stages aligned with the research questions.

First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and rank ordering) were computed at both item and domain levels to identify the most important communication tasks. Domain scores were calculated as the mean of items within each category.

Second, paired-samples t-tests were used to compare perceived importance and self-reported preparedness for each task and domain. Importance-preparedness gaps were calculated as $\text{Gap} = \text{Importance} - \text{Preparedness}$, with effect sizes reported using Cohen's *d*. Finally, repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to examine differences across communication domains for importance, preparedness, and gap scores. Where the assumption of sphericity was violated, Greenhouse-Geisser corrections were applied.

Results are interpreted with emphasis on effect sizes and consistent patterns rather than isolated significance levels.

4. Results

This section reports findings from a survey of 250 alumni of non-English majors within five years of graduation. The analysis addresses the research questions by first examining perceived task importance, followed by the identification of priority patterns across communication domains.

4.1. Perceived importance of communication tasks

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the perceived importance of the 29 surveyed communication practices.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

	M	SD
Job application package	4.04	0.60
T6. Write an effective CV tailored to a job	4.14	0.74
T7. Write a cover letter that matches job requirements	4.03	0.78
T8. Present skills and experience clearly in writing	4.08	0.75
T9. Complete online job application forms accurately	3.92	0.85
Job interviews	4.06	0.62
T10. Answer interview questions with relevant evidence	4.21	0.78

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T11. Handle follow-up questions (clarifying/justifying)	4.06	0.81
T12. Ask relevant and informed questions	3.96	0.84
T13. Introduce yourself confidently in interview situations	4.01	0.80
Workplace emails and messaging	4.01	0.65
T14. Write professional emails to request information	4.10	0.80
T15. Write follow-up emails or reminders with appropriate tone	4.00	0.83
T16. Explain a problem or delays and propose solutions	3.98	0.82
T17. Write concise work updates	3.95	0.84
Meetings and coordination	3.80	0.61
T18. Participate actively in meetings (turn-taking)	3.88	0.88
T19. Summarise decisions and action points clearly	3.92	0.85
T20. Negotiate timelines and responsibilities	3.82	0.89
T21. Request clarification when communication is unclear	3.75	0.91
T22. Clarify misunderstandings effectively	3.94	0.86
T23. Participate in online meetings (e.g., Zoom/Teams)	3.48	0.92
Client-facing and partner communication	3.64	0.68
T24. Handle customer complaints calmly	3.84	0.88
T25. Explain procedures/requirements clearly	3.86	0.85
T26. Manage expectations when requests cannot be met	3.88	0.89
T27. Communicate effectively with international clients	3.19	1.05
T28. Handle negotiation or consultation professionally	3.45	0.96
Presentations	3.82	0.70
T29. Deliver a short workplace presentation clearly	3.83	0.92
T30. Explain data, figures, or trends to a non-specialist	3.85	0.88
T31. Respond effectively to questions after a presentation	3.78	0.90
Professional documentation	3.88	0.66
T32. Document work progress and issues accurately	3.86	0.87
T33. Read and understand professional documents	3.92	0.85
T34. Write formal reports or professional documents	3.85	0.89

Overall, the results indicate a differentiated pattern of perceived importance across task domains. Communication tasks associated with recruitment and routine workplace writing received relatively higher ratings compared to those involving extended interaction or cross-boundary communication.

At the item level, the highest importance ratings were observed for tasks related to job application and interview performance. In particular, answering interview questions with relevant evidence ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.78$) and writing an effective CV tailored to a job ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.74$) were among the most highly rated tasks. Similarly, handling follow-up interview questions ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.81$) and writing professional emails to request information ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.80$) were also rated as important. These results suggest that alumni place considerable value on communication tasks that are directly linked to entry into employment and routine workplace functioning.

In contrast, lower importance ratings were observed for tasks involving more complex interactional demands. For example, communicating with international clients ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.05$) received the lowest rating among all items. Tasks such as participating in online meetings ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.92$) and handling negotiation or

consultation ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.96$) were also rated at a moderate level. These patterns indicate that not all communication tasks are perceived as equally relevant at the early-career stage, particularly those requiring sustained interaction or specialised communicative control.

To sum up, the findings point to a task hierarchy in which recruitment-related communication and routine written interaction are prioritised, while more complex or less frequently encountered tasks are assigned comparatively lower importance.

4.2. Importance–preparedness gaps

To evaluate the extent of unmet employability needs, paired-samples t-tests were conducted to compare participants’ perceived importance and self-reported preparedness for each communication task. The gap score ($M_{gap} = Importance - Preparedness$) alongside Cohen’s d provides a standardised measure of the deficit magnitude. Table 2 presents the inferential statistics across all items as follows.

Table 2: Paired-samples t-tests comparing task importance and preparedness

Task Domain and Specific Items	M_{Imp}	M_{Prep}	M_{Gap}	SD_{Gap}	$t(249)$	p	d
Job application package							
T6. Write an effective CV tailored to a job	4.14	3.01	1.13	0.82	21.79	<.001	1.37
T8. Present skills and experience clearly in writing	4.08	2.95	1.13	0.81	22.05	<.001	1.39
T7. Write a cover letter matching job requirements	4.03	2.91	1.12	0.84	21.08	<.001	1.33
T9. Complete online job application forms accurately	3.92	2.81	1.11	0.80	21.93	<.001	1.38
Job interviews							
T10. Answer interview questions with relevant evidence	4.21	2.98	1.23	0.85	22.88	<.001	1.44
T11. Handle follow-up questions (clarifying/justifying)	4.06	2.86	1.20	0.88	21.56	<.001	1.36
T13. Introduce yourself confidently in interviews	4.01	2.83	1.18	0.82	22.75	<.001	1.43
T12. Ask relevant and informed questions	3.96	2.85	1.11	0.80	21.93	<.001	1.38
Workplace email and messaging							
T14. Write professional emails to request information	4.10	2.98	1.12	0.80	22.13	<.001	1.40
T16. Explain a problem or delays and propose solutions	3.98	2.89	1.09	0.77	22.38	<.001	1.41
T15. Write follow-up emails or reminders	4.00	2.92	1.08	0.79	21.61	<.001	1.36
T17. Write concise work updates	3.95	2.88	1.07	0.75	22.56	<.001	1.42
Meetings and coordination							
T19. Summarise decisions and action points clearly	3.92	2.80	1.12	0.79	22.42	<.001	1.41
T22. Clarify misunderstandings effectively	3.94	2.88	1.06	0.78	21.48	<.001	1.35
T18. Participate actively in meetings (turn-taking)	3.88	2.82	1.06	0.76	22.05	<.001	1.39

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T20. Negotiate timelines and responsibilities	3.82	2.78	1.04	0.75	21.92	<.001	1.38
T21. Request clarification when communication is unclear	3.75	2.73	1.02	0.74	21.79	<.001	1.37
T23. Participate in online meetings (e.g., Zoom/Teams)	3.48	2.54	0.94	0.86	17.28	<.001	1.09
Client-facing and partner communication							
T24. Handle customer complaints calmly	3.84	2.76	1.08	0.81	21.08	<.001	1.33
T25. Explain procedures/requirements clearly	3.86	2.80	1.06	0.79	21.22	<.001	1.34
T26. Manage expectations when requests cannot be met	3.88	2.82	1.06	0.80	20.95	<.001	1.32
T28. Handle negotiation or consultation professionally	3.45	2.58	0.87	0.85	16.18	<.001	1.02
T27. Communicate effectively with international clients	3.19	2.45	0.74	0.95	12.31	<.001	0.77
Presentations							
T30. Explain data, figures, or trends to a non-specialist	3.85	2.72	1.13	0.90	19.85	<.001	1.25
T29. Deliver a short workplace presentation clearly	3.83	2.71	1.12	0.84	21.08	<.001	1.33
T31. Respond effectively to questions after a presentation	3.78	2.73	1.05	0.78	21.28	<.001	1.34
Professional documentation							
T32. Document work progress and issues accurately	3.86	2.80	1.06	0.79	21.22	<.001	1.34
T34. Write formal reports or professional documents	3.85	2.79	1.06	0.77	21.76	<.001	1.37
T33. Read and understand professional documents	3.92	2.90	1.02	0.82	19.66	<.001	1.24

The magnitude of these gaps varied across task types. Larger gaps were observed in tasks associated with recruitment and interactive communication. For instance, answering interview questions with relevant evidence (T10: $M_{\text{gap}} = 1.23$, $d = 1.44$) and handling follow-up questions (T11: $M_{\text{gap}} = 1.20$, $d = 1.36$) showed comparatively higher differences between importance and preparedness. Writing an effective CV (T6: $M_{\text{gap}} = 1.13$, $d = 1.37$) also displayed a notable gap. These results suggest that alumni perceive relatively lower readiness in tasks that require real-time response, strategic self-presentation, or interactional flexibility.

In contrast, smaller gaps were observed for tasks with lower perceived importance or more predictable linguistic demands. For example, communicating with international clients (T27: $M_{\text{gap}} = 0.74$, $d = 0.77$) showed the smallest difference, although both importance and preparedness levels were relatively modest. Similarly, tasks such as participating in online meetings (T23: $M_{\text{gap}} = 0.94$, $d = 1.09$) and handling negotiation (T28: $M_{\text{gap}} = 0.87$, $d = 1.02$) displayed comparatively narrower gaps.

Overall, the results indicate that perceived preparedness does not increase uniformly across task domains. Instead, larger discrepancies tend to appear in tasks requiring interactive and adaptive communication, whereas smaller discrepancies are

associated with tasks that are either less emphasised or more structurally constrained. These patterns provide a basis for identifying priority areas in ESP curriculum design, particularly in relation to task-specific communicative demands.

4.3. Differences across communication domains

To address the third research question, repeated-measures analysis of variance was conducted to examine whether perceived importance, preparedness, and importance-preparedness gaps differed significantly across communication domains. Prior to the main analysis, the assumption of sphericity was assessed using Mauchly's test (Table 3).

Table 3: Mauchly's test of sphericity

	Mauchly's W	χ^2	df	p-value
Importance	.62	158.34	20	< .001
Preparedness	.59	171.82	20	< .001
Gap	.64	149.27	20	< .001

The results of Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity was violated for all three dependent variables ($p < .001$). Therefore, Greenhouse-Geisser corrections were applied to adjust the degrees of freedom for subsequent analyses.

Afterwards, repeated-measures analysis of variance was conducted as can be seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Repeated-measures ANOVA results across communication domains

	df	F	p-value	Partial η^2
Importance	(4.92, 1224.10)	28.45	< .001	.10
Preparedness	(5.11, 1272.63)	31.27	< .001	.11
Gap	(5.03, 1253.42)	19.88	< .001	.07

Table 4 revealed statistically significant differences across communication domains for all three measures. Perceived importance varied significantly across domains, $F(4.92, 1224.10) = 28.45$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. Preparedness ratings also differed significantly, $F(5.11, 1272.63) = 31.27$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .11$. Similarly, the importance-preparedness gap showed a significant domain effect, $F(5.03, 1253.42) = 19.88$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$. These findings indicate that communication domains are perceived differently in terms of importance, preparedness, and the gap between them. The effect sizes suggest moderate variation across domains, supporting a domain-based differentiation of communication needs in ESP curriculum design.

Finally, Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons were conducted to identify specific differences between communication domains as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons across communication domains

	Importance (Mean Diff.)	p- value	Preparedness (Mean Diff.)	p- value	Gap (Mean Diff.)	p- value
Job application vs Client comm.	0.40	< .001	0.18	.021	0.22	.004
Interviews vs Client comm.	0.42	< .001	0.11	.048	0.31	< .001
Interviews vs Email	0.05	.412	-0.14	.032	0.19	.006
Email vs Meetings	0.21	.003	0.18	.018	0.03	.721
Meetings vs Presentations	-0.02	.801	-0.02	.845	0.00	.992
Documentation vs Client comm.	0.24	.002	0.21	.011	0.03	.684

The data indicate that the job application ($M = 4.04$) and interview domains ($M = 4.06$) were rated significantly higher in importance than client communication ($M = 3.64$), with mean differences ranging from 0.40 to 0.42 ($p < .001$). Differences between interviews and email-related tasks ($M = 4.01$) were not statistically significant ($p > .05$), suggesting comparable perceived relevance across these domains. Preparedness ratings showed smaller but statistically significant differences. Respondents reported lower preparedness for interview-related tasks ($M = 2.88$) compared to email communication ($M = 3.02$), with a mean difference of 0.14 ($p = .032$). Other pairwise contrasts were generally modest in magnitude.

For gap scores, the interview ($M = 1.18$) and job application domains ($M = 1.09$) exhibited significantly larger discrepancies than client communication ($M = 0.87$), with mean differences of up to 0.31 ($p < .01$). In contrast, differences among mid-level domains, including meetings ($M = 0.96$), presentations ($M = 0.96$), and documentation ($M = 0.90$), were not statistically significant ($p > .05$).

To sum up, these results indicate that domain-level variation is concentrated in recruitment-related communication tasks, while differences among other domains are comparatively limited.

5. Discussion

5.1. Employability-oriented English through task priorities

In addressing the first research question, the findings indicate that alumni do not evaluate employability-related English in abstract terms of proficiency but in relation to specific communicative tasks associated with recruitment and early-career participation. Tasks such as preparing job application materials and responding to interview questions were consistently rated as more important than tasks involving extended interaction with international stakeholders.

This pattern suggests that participants conceptualise English primarily as a resource for navigating immediate transition points into employment rather than for sustaining complex cross-border communication. Such a distribution is consistent with recent arguments that English in Vietnam derives its employability value from its usability in concrete opportunity structures rather than from general proficiency attainment (Tran, Nghia, & Ngo, 2024). From this perspective, English functions as employability capital only when it can be mobilised in tasks that directly influence access to employment (Nghia, Anh, & Kien, 2024).

Likewise, the relative deprioritisation of international communication tasks should be interpreted cautiously. Rather than indicating their irrelevance, it may reflect respondents' current positioning within early-career contexts where exposure to such tasks is uneven. Similar patterns have been observed in regional studies, where stakeholders emphasise recruitment and entry-level communication as primary priorities in ESP design (Ali et al., 2025). Overall, the findings highlight the importance of specifying employability needs at the level of task demands rather than relying on general assumptions about workplace communication.

5.2. Importance–preparedness gaps in communication tasks

With regard to the second research question, the comparison between perceived importance and self-reported preparedness reveals systematic gaps across multiple communication tasks. These gaps are particularly evident in tasks that require real-time interaction, such as responding to follow-up interview questions or managing misunderstandings in communication. In contrast, smaller gaps are observed in tasks related to written documentation and comprehension. This distribution suggests that respondents perceive themselves as relatively more prepared for structured and text-based tasks than for dynamic, interactional communication. However, these findings should be interpreted within the limits of self-reported data, which reflect perceived rather than objectively measured competence.

However, the observed pattern is consistent with employer-oriented research indicating that communication challenges in the workplace often arise in routine interaction rather than in the use of specialised vocabulary (Al Riyami, 2021). It also aligns with alignment studies in Vietnam that point to differences between classroom-based language activities and the communicative demands encountered in professional contexts (Nguyen, Kettle, & Doherty, 2023). Rather than indicating a generalised deficit, the results suggest that preparedness varies by task type, with interactional demands representing areas where respondents feel comparatively less confident. This differentiation provides a more precise basis for interpreting ESP learning needs without assuming uniform inadequacy across all domains.

5.3. Domain variation in employability-related communication needs

In relation to the third research question, the analysis of domain-level variation indicates that communication needs are not uniformly distributed across task categories. The

significant differences observed in the repeated-measures ANOVA suggest that alumni differentiate clearly between communication domains in terms of perceived importance, preparedness, and the magnitude of importance–preparedness gaps.

More specifically, recruitment-related domains, particularly job application and interview tasks, consistently show higher importance ratings and larger gaps compared to domains such as client communication. This pattern aligns with the broader argument that English in Vietnamese higher education is primarily valued for its immediate role in facilitating labour market entry rather than for sustained professional interaction (Tran, Nghia, & Ngo, 2024). From the perspective of employability capital, these findings support the view that language value depends on its convertibility into actionable opportunities at critical transition points (Nghia, Anh, & Kien, 2024).

At the same time, the relatively smaller differences among mid-level domains, including meetings, presentations, and documentation, suggest a more balanced perception of these tasks. Rather than indicating low relevance, this pattern may reflect a less differentiated evaluation of communication demands beyond the recruitment stage. Similar tendencies have been observed in regional studies, where graduates and employers converge on the importance of recruitment and early-career communication tasks as key entry barriers (Ali et al., 2025).

In short, these findings indicate that domain-level variation is concentrated in a limited set of high-stakes communication contexts. This differentiation provides a more precise basis for identifying priority areas in ESP curriculum design without assuming uniform demand across all communication domains.

5.4. Pedagogical and curricular implications

The domain-specific patterns observed in this study suggest several implications for ESP curriculum design.

First, the consistently higher importance assigned to recruitment-related tasks indicates that these communicative activities warrant greater attention within ESP provision. Tasks such as preparing application materials and responding to interview questions appear to function as key transition points into employment, and their prominence in the findings supports recent calls to align English education more closely with employability-related practices (Tran, Nghia, & Ngo, 2024; Nghia, Anh, & Kien, 2024).

Second, the presence of importance–preparedness gaps, particularly in interactional tasks, suggests that current provision may not fully support learners' perceived readiness for real-time communication. While the study does not directly examine classroom practices, this pattern is consistent with broader observations that workplace communication challenges often arise in routine interactional contexts (Al Riyami, 2021). It also aligns with research highlighting the need for stronger alignment between ESP instruction and workplace communication demands (Nguyen, Kettle, & Doherty, 2023).

In summary, these findings indicate that ESP curricula may benefit from incorporating more opportunities for practising task-based communication alongside existing forms of instruction. In this regard, recent discussions of performance-oriented ESP and assessment design provide useful reference points for developing more transparent and context-relevant learning activities (Setiawan, Hartono, Suwandi, & Fitriati, 2026; Hsu, Su, Su, & Su, 2026).

6. Conclusion

This study examined English-for-employability communication needs among alumni of non-English majors by analysing perceived task importance, self-reported preparedness, and importance-preparedness gaps across communication domains. The findings indicate that communication tasks are not evaluated uniformly. Recruitment-related tasks, particularly those associated with job applications and interviews, were consistently rated as more important than other domains, while also exhibiting comparatively larger gaps between perceived importance and preparedness.

These patterns suggest that alumni differentiate clearly between communication demands at different stages of early career development. Tasks linked to labour market entry appear to be prioritised, whereas other domains, including client communication and extended interaction, are perceived as less immediate. At the same time, the presence of systematic gaps across multiple domains indicates that perceived readiness does not fully align with task expectations.

The study is subject to several limitations. As the data are based on self-reported measures, the findings reflect perceived rather than objectively assessed competence. In addition, the cross-sectional design does not capture changes in communication needs over time. Future research may extend this work by incorporating performance-based measures or longitudinal designs to examine how communication competence develops in relation to workplace demands.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Appendix

Questionnaire: Investigating ESP learning needs for employability among alumni (0–5 years).

Section A. Demographic information

1. What is your gender?

- Male Female

2. Years of work experience:

- Less than 1 year 1–3 years 3–5 years

3. What is your major?

- Finance and Banking Business Administration
 Auditing/Accounting Business Law
 International Economics/Business Data Science
 Management Information Systems
 Other: _____

4. What is your current employment sector?

- Banking Finance/Fintech
 Audit/Accounting services Law
 Import–export/Logistics/Trading Office clerk
 MIS/ Data Science/IT Other: _____

5. What is your current job position level?

- Entry-level Mid-level Managerial Senior management

Section B. English-for-employability communication tasks

These are professional communication tasks commonly required in recruitment and early-career work. For each task, please rate: (1) how important it is for your employability and (2) how prepared you feel to perform it now.

Importance scale (1–5):

1 = Not important, 2 = Slightly important, 3 = Moderately important, 4 = Very important, 5 = Extremely important

Preparedness scale (1–5):

1 = Not prepared, 2 = Slightly prepared, 3 = Moderately prepared, 4 = Well prepared, 5 = Highly prepared

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Task descriptions	Importance	Preparedness
Job application package		
6. Write an effective CV tailored to a job	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
7. Write a cover letter that matches job requirements	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
8. Present your skills and experience clearly and persuasively in writing	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
9. Complete online job application forms accurately in English	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
Job interviews		
10. Answer interview questions with relevant evidence	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
11. Handle follow-up questions by clarifying and justifying responses	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
12. Ask relevant and informed questions at the end of an interview	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
13. Introduce yourself confidently in English in interview situations	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
Workplace emails and messaging		
14. Write professional emails to request information or documents	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
15. Write follow-up emails or reminders with appropriate tone	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
16. Explain a problem or delays and propose solutions in writing	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
17. Write concise work updates (what happened, what has been done, what is needed)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
Meetings and coordination		
18. Participate actively in meetings (turn-taking, expressing opinions)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
19. Summarise decisions and action points clearly	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
20. Negotiate timelines and responsibilities with colleagues/partners	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
21. Request clarification when communication is unclear	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
22. Clarify misunderstandings effectively	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
23. Participate in online meetings (e.g., Zoom/Teams) effectively	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
Client-facing and partner communication		
24. Handle customer complaints calmly and solution-focused	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
25. Explain procedures or requirements clearly to clients/partners	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
26. Manage expectations when requests cannot be met (saying no with reasons and alternatives)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
27. Communicate effectively with international clients	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
28. Handle negotiation or consultation conversations professionally	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
Presentations		
29. Deliver a short workplace presentation clearly	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5

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30. Explain data, figures, or trends to a non-specialist audience	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
31. Respond effectively to questions after a presentation	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
Professional documentation		
32. Document work progress and issues accurately in English (emails, brief reports/logs)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
33. Read and understand professional documents (reports, contracts, policies)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
34. Write formal reports or professional documents	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5